Name: _____ Date: _____

Looking After Cocoa and Nibs

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 636 words

Maya had a big job to do, because two guinea pigs were coming to live with her. Grandpa Lou would help her. A grown-up had talked it over. They picked two from a rescue. "Why two?" Maya asked. "Guinea pigs get lonely when they are alone," said Grandpa, "so they are happiest in a pair." Maya named them Cocoa and Nibs.

First came the home. It needed a big floor with room to run, and room to stand up tall on their back legs. The floor had to be solid, because a floor with holes can hurt little feet. "Now we add a place to hide," said Grandpa Lou. "Guinea pigs get scared easily. They need a safe spot to go."

Next came the hay. Grandpa Lou lifted a big, soft pile and said, "A guinea pig should eat a pile of hay as big as itself every day." Maya laughed. Cocoa and Nibs were small, so their piles were small too. Hay is good for their tummies, and it also wears down their teeth, which never stop growing.

Then Maya made a salad. She rinsed some parsley. She cut a slice of cucumber and a piece of bell pepper. "These have vitamin C," said Grandpa. "Guinea pigs need it, and fresh vegetables are a good way to give it." Maya did not choose the foods by herself. Grandpa had a list of foods that are safe, and foods that are not.

Water came next. "Guinea pigs need fresh water all the time," said Grandpa Lou, "and we check it twice a day." So Maya made a rule for herself. She would look in the morning, and she would look again at night. She drew a picture of a water drop on a card and stuck it to the fridge with a magnet.

Cocoa and Nibs had to get used to Maya. She sat on the floor, low and quiet. Grandpa said, "Many animals that hunt guinea pigs are birds, so a hand coming from above can scare them." Maya waited at their level. She let them come to her. After a while, Pip walked up and sniffed her sleeve.

When Cocoa felt calm, Grandpa showed Maya how to hold her. One hand goes under her bottom, and the other goes around her chest. Maya sat very still and held Cocoa close. She could feel how warm she was. Maya kept her voice soft. "Never shout," Grandpa said, "because it makes them nervous."

A few days later, Pip did something odd. He jumped straight up in the air, and then he did it again! Maya looked at Grandpa, and he smiled. "That is called popcorning," he said. "It is a playful hop, and young guinea pigs do it when they have enough room to play." Maya clapped her hands very softly.

After each visit, Maya washed her hands with soap and water. "We always wash after touching pets, their food, and their home," said Grandpa. Cleaning was a job for Maya and Grandpa together. Every day they scooped out the dirty spots. Once a week they cleaned the whole home, and Grandpa did the heavy part.

One morning, Pip did not come out for his food. He stayed in his hide and was very quiet. Maya did not poke him. She ran to find Grandpa instead. "You did the right thing," he said. "When a guinea pig stops eating, we call the vet right away, because a vet is the person who knows what to do."

Now Maya has a plan she can say with her eyes closed: hay, salad, water, and a soft hello. When the fridge door opens, Cocoa and Nibs squeak and squeak. Maya smiles and listens. Ask a grown-up to look at Peabody Pets with you. You will find it at pet.peabody.kids.

Questions

1. Why did Maya get two guinea pigs?

A. Two cost less than one
B. Guinea pigs get lonely alone
C. Grandpa wanted a pair

2. What does hay help wear down?

A. Their claws
B. Their fur
C. Their teeth

3. Why did Maya come close to the floor from the front?

A. A hand from above can scare them
B. She was tired
C. The floor was warm

4. In this book, what does a hide mean?

A. A kind of salad
B. A soft brush
C. A cozy shelter

5. What should Maya do when Pip stops eating?

A. Find a grown-up and call the vet
B. Wait a week
C. Give him her own snack

Words to know

hay: dried grass
vitamin: healthy nutrient
popcorning: happy hopping
vet: animal doctor
hide: cozy shelter

Answer key: Looking After Cocoa and Nibs

1. B. Guinea pigs get lonely alone
2. C. Their teeth
3. A. A hand from above can scare them
4. C. A cozy shelter
5. A. Find a grown-up and call the vet