

Magic Tomatoes

By Edward I. Maxwell



Luke's father is a farmer. To be more precise, his dad is a fruit-and-vegetable farmer. Instead of cows, pigs, sheep, and horses, Luke's house is surrounded by corn, squash, lettuce, and tomatoes.

Luke does not mind that there are no animals. In fact, he likes living on a fruit-and-vegetable farm much better. If you asked Luke, he would say that a fruit-and-vegetable farm is magical.

"What do you mean, magical?" Luke's friend Tom asked one day.

"Well, it's like this," said Luke. "My dad casts a spell, and soon enough the fruits and vegetables appear where there used to be bare dirt!"

Now, Luke knows that this is not really *magic*. But all the same, he feels it is pretty special that his dad is able to create something as grand as a corn field where there used to be nothing. Sometimes, Luke sets his alarm clock, so he can wake up before the sunrise, too. He eats cereal with his dad and asks him what spells he is going to cast.

"I'm planting tomatoes today, son," Luke's father explained. "Tomatoes ripen best in very hot summer heat, so I need to plant the seeds early in spring. That way there will be tall, healthy tomato vines once August arrives."

"How do you make sure the vines grow tall and healthy?" Luke asked.

“They grow strong when you give them care and attention and have a little bit of hope,” his father laughed.

“Can I help?” Luke begged.

“Of course!” exclaimed his father.

So on days Luke did not have school, he helped his father, and Luke learned more about his dad’s magical work.

Luke learned that a tomato plant indeed needs a lot of care. He spent one whole day in the early June sun, sinking wooden stakes into the ground by young tomato sprouts. After the tomato vines had grown a little taller, Luke tied them to the stakes so that they would not topple over and lose their special fruit.

“The tomatoes sure need a lot of attention!” Luke exclaimed one late afternoon. He had been double and triple tying the vines, because the weather forecaster had predicted wind and rain for that night. Luke’s father wanted to make sure his tomatoes did not get blown over in the storm.

“Most worthwhile things do require a lot of attention, Luke,” replied his father with a smile.

“What do you mean?” asked Luke.

“Well,” said his father, standing up straight and wiping the sweat from his forehead. “We should pay close attention to things that make our lives better.”

“That is why you pay attention to Mom?” asked Luke.

“Yes,” replied his father. “I pay close attention to you and Mom, because you both make my life better. You both make me very happy.”

The rest of Luke’s work that day went by a lot quicker. Taking care of the tomato plants, Luke imagined he was taking care of his mom and dad. With a little bit of family magic and a lot of attention, Luke was certain these would be the most beautiful tomatoes he had ever seen once August arrived.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What kind of farmer is Luke's dad?

- A) a dairy farmer
- B) a grain farmer
- C) a fruit-and-vegetable farmer
- D) a cow-and-chicken farmer

2. One effect in this story is that Luke learns about tomatoes and farming. What is the cause?

- A) Luke's house is surrounded by lettuce.
- B) Luke helps his father grow tomatoes.
- C) Luke explains what he means by "magical" to his friend Tom.
- D) Luke sometimes sets his alarm clock so that he can wake up before sunrise.

3. Luke's father pays a lot of attention to his son.

What evidence from the story supports this statement?

- A) Luke's father is a fruit-and-vegetable farmer.
- B) Luke's father says that most worthwhile things require a lot of attention.
- C) Luke's father pays a lot of attention to Luke's mother.
- D) Luke's father listens to his son's questions and answers them.

4. What is Luke's opinion of the work his father does?

- A) Luke thinks his father's work is special and interesting.
- B) Luke thinks his father's work is a waste of time and money.
- C) Luke thinks his father's work is strange and confusing.
- D) Luke thinks his father's work is evil and dangerous.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A) the benefits of exercise
- B) the effects of being lazy
- C) giving care and attention to worthwhile things
- D) making friends with people who are different from you

6. Read the following sentences: "Luke's father is a farmer. **To be more precise**, his dad is a fruit-and-vegetable farmer."

Why does the author start the second sentence with the words, "**To be more precise**"?

- A) to make readers look up a word
- B) to make sure readers are paying attention
- C) to create a clear picture in readers' minds
- D) to let readers know that more detail is coming

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Luke asks about his father's work on the farm; _____ he starts helping his father with work on the farm.

- A) before
- B) then
- C) for example
- D) on the contrary

8. If you asked Luke, how would he describe a fruit-and-vegetable farm?

9. Why is Luke certain that the tomato plants he is working with will become "the most beautiful tomatoes he had ever seen" once August arrives?

10. Based on the story, is farming magical? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 850

1. **C** *a fruit-and-vegetable farmer*
2. **B** *Luke helps his father grow tomatoes.*
3. **D** *Luke's father listens to his son's questions and answers them.*
4. **A** *Luke thinks his father's work is special and interesting.*
5. **C** *giving care and attention to worthwhile things*
6. **D** *to let readers know that more detail is coming*
7. **B** *then*
8. **Suggested answer:** *Luke would describe a fruit-and-vegetable farm as magical.*
9. **Suggested answer:** *Luke is certain that "a little bit of family magic and a lot of attention" will result in the most beautiful tomatoes he has ever seen once August arrives.*
10. **Suggested answer:** *Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the passage. Students may respond that farming is not really magical. Farmers do not cast spells to make their plants grow; they plant seeds and care for them. On the other hand, students may respond that farming does require a certain kind of magic. This magic is the "family magic" Luke refers to, a special kind of attention given to what a person cares a lot about.*