On our first day of fourth grade, our principal, Ms. Fitzpatrick, called everyone into the auditorium. She announced, “I’m so proud to have such a fine group of students. You are all an inspiration to me.” She dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

I looked at my best friend, Lola. We both raised our eyebrows. Maybe Ms. F had spent too much time in the sun over the summer.
“In fact,” said Ms. Fitzpatrick, “I’m so inspired that I’ve decided to go back to school myself!”

Was Ms. F going to leave Pleasantville Elementary School? Were we going to be principal-less?

We liked Ms. F a lot. For a principal, she was very cool. But still, a principal was a principal. And no principal was, well, no principal. Lola and I both grinned. Chaos in the halls!

Then we remembered the vice principal, Ms. Rusk. Ms. Rusk would not allow chaos in the halls.

“Don’t look so worried,” Ms. F said with a chuckle. “I’m not leaving Pleasantville Elementary. I’m going to take evening classes at the community college. And here’s the really exciting part. I’ll share what I learn with the whole school! Each month we’ll take on a new learning challenge together.”

Now we really looked worried.
The next Monday, when we got to school, there was a big yellow banner across the front door. It read: My Body Is a Pretzel! Month.

Ms. F had signed up for a yoga class at the community college. And just as she’d promised, she started sharing what she learned with the whole school.

Making our bodies into pretzels was a full-time project. Ms. F gave all the teachers early-morning yoga lessons, and then they taught us what they’d learned throughout the day. So while our math teacher was teaching us about fractions, he also taught us yoga poses.
By the end of September, we did look a lot more like pretzels. Some of us were permanently twisted. “Marvelous! Marvelous!” exclaimed Ms. F.

When October came, a big orange banner across the front of our school read: A Passion for Pumpkins! Month.

All month long, we had to study pumpkins. In history class, we studied the history of pumpkins. In English class, we wrote poems about pumpkins. These tended to be short, since there’s not much to rhyme with *pumpkins* or *orange*. And all month long, the cafeteria served pumpkin—every single day. The pumpkin pie was okay, but the pumpkin sandwiches were not.

By the end of October, we all felt plenty of passion toward pumpkins. Passionate hatred. Everyone but Ms. F, that is.

“We’ll have to add a pumpkin dish to the menu year-round!” she exclaimed. “The students will simply clamor for it!”
In November, a blue banner across the front door read: Any Kid Can Knit! Month.

This turned out to be untrue. I spent all month working on a scarf for my mom. It ended up looking like a blanket for my hamster. Lola knit a hat for her sister, Beth. It looked like a potholder. Lola gave it to Beth for her birthday. Their mom told Beth to wear it so she wouldn’t hurt Lola’s feelings.

Not to be mean or anything, but seeing Beth in that hat almost made the whole month of knitting worthwhile.

Then came December. A pink banner across the front door read: Now Frost This! Month.

Everyone had to learn how to decorate cakes. You needed a note from a doctor saying you were allergic to frosting to get out of it.
Each day, Ms. F strolled into classes—say, in the middle of gym—and taught a lucky group of students how to create sugar roses and write with icing.

At the end of the month, there was a cake-decorating contest, which no one wanted to win. The prize was an Advanced Frosting course at the community college.
In January, we studied ancient Greek. We learned words we were guaranteed never, ever to use in daily life. Also, we wore togas to school. Togas look really silly when you’re playing soccer.

In February we learned all about clog dancing. We learned, for one thing, that the sound of hundreds of kids walking down the hallways in clogging shoes is enough to cause a school-wide headache.
In March, we studied origami. That’s the Japanese art of folding paper into birds and frogs and stuff. Ms. F encouraged us to practice our origami skills all the time. We handed in a lot of funny-looking homework.

By the end of March, we were all very tired. And very worried about what would come next.
“I don’t think I can live through three more months of this!” I told Lola on our way home. “I don’t even want to think about what’s coming next,” Lola said. “Maybe we’ll do mime.” I put my hands over my face.
The next day, Ms. F called us together in the auditorium.

“Boys and girls,” said Ms. F. “As you know, today is the first of April. I’m sure you’re all eager to hear what learning adventure I’ve planned for this month.”

Everyone groaned.

“We have soared so far together this year. So it’s only natural that April will be…” She paused.

“Skydiving Month!”

Everyone gasped.

“April Fool’s!” said Ms. F.

Everyone sighed.

(At least Ms. F had a sense of humor.)

“That would be far too dangerous!” Ms. F said. “Instead, this month’s theme is ‘Root Vegetables Are Your Friends.’”

Everyone groaned again.

“But before we get started, I want to tell you all how much this past year has meant to me,” said Ms. F. “I’m so proud of us all!”
Ms. F began sniffling. She was all choked up. “At the end of the year, however, I will be leaving you all. I’m going back to college full time. Ms. Rusk will be taking over as principal. She informs me that the curriculum will return to normal.”
After the assembly, everyone seemed a little sad.

“You know, I think I’m going to miss clog dancing,” I said.

“And I didn’t really mind those pumpkin sandwiches,” said Lola.

“Returning to normal doesn’t sound so great after all,” I said. “I’m sure Ms. Rusk won’t let us fold our homework into animal shapes.”

“Well, we still have three more months of learning adventures!” Lola pointed out.

“True!” I said, brightening up. “I’ve always wanted to make friends with root vegetables.”

“Carrots are certainly likable!” Lola said.
We headed to the cafeteria to pick up our spades and seed packets.

“Maybe we could start an after-school mime class,” Lola said.

“Ms. F would be proud,” I said.
Responding

**TARGET SKILL**  **Story Structure**  The students in Ms. F’s school have an unusual problem. Copy the story map below and fill in the story events and the solution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. F, students</td>
<td>Pleasantville Elementary School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Problem**
Ms. F wants the school to do what she learns in her evening classes.

**Events**
?

**Solution**
?

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**Write About It**

**Text to Self**  What is the most surprising thing you have learned at school? Write a paragraph that describes what you learned. Use exact words and colorful details.
TARGET VOCABULARY

announced | proud

certainly | soared

dine | strolled

principal | worried

TARGET VOCABULARY

chaos | inspired

clamor | origami

curriculum | passion

guaranteed | 

TARGET SKILL  Story Structure  Name the setting, characters, and plot in a story.

TARGET STRATEGY  Summarize  Tell the important parts of the story in your own words.

GENRE  Humorous fiction  is a story that is written to entertain the reader.
Ms. F Goes Back to School

by Blaise Terrapin
illustrated by Apryl Stott