

The Village School by Noel Streatfield

A Miss Snelston was head of the village school and from the first the children liked her. It was not easy with only one pupil-teacher to assist her to teach children of all ages in two rooms, but somehow she managed.

Most of the pupils other than the orphans were the children of farm labourers, red-cheeked and solidly built on a diet largely composed of vegetables, eggs, milk and bread, for at that time farm labourers' wages were very low so meat was a rarity. All the children, urged on by their parents, had one aim which was to pass the labour exam as early as possible so that the girls could go into service and the boys get work on the farms. Miss Snelston, of course, knew this was their ambition and she accepted it. "After all," she would say to her pupil-teacher, Polly Jenkin, "they may as well leave when they are twelve for you and I know, however long we keep them here, very few would learn any more, and of course it's hard for the parents to find the school money". School money was twopence a week, which in those days was paid as school fees.

It was Miss Snelston's hope each time there was a new batch of orphans that a really intelligent child would turn up. That was how she had found Polly Jenkin. She had taught her since she came to the orphanage at the age of four and had discovered in her a real fondness for learning, so the moment she had passed her labour exam she had applied to the governors for her. She arranged that Polly was to receive two-and-sixpence a month and would live in her cottage, in return for which she would help with the housework.

The school morning started with prayers and a hymn, then, leaving Polly to get the school work started, Miss Snelston called Margaret, Peter and Horatio into her little office and gave them their slates.

"These are your very own," she explained. "You must look after them very carefully for on them you do your sums and sometimes dictation. My aim is to see four sums right on every slate." She smiled at the three children, hiding from them her deep pity for well she knew how hard their lives would be.



Name:	Class:	Date:
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1 Why did the farm labourers’ children not eat much meat?

2b

 1 mark

2 Look at the second paragraph, beginning “*Most of the pupils ...*”.
Find and copy one word that tells you that the parents encouraged their children to pass the labour exams as soon as possible.

2a

 1 mark

3 What could the children do when they passed their labour exam?

2d

 1 mark

4 Choose which of the following facts are **true** and which are **false**.

	T	F
Polly Jenkins was Miss Snelston’s daughter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Miss Snelston had taught Polly since she was four	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polly applied to the school governors to be a teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polly lived with Miss Snelston	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2b

 2 marks

5 In the final paragraph, what impression do the words “*hiding from them her deep pity*” give about Miss Snelston?
 Choose **one**.

- She is not honest with the children.
- She likes the children.
- She feels sorry for the children.
- She wants the children to work hard.

2g

 1 mark

6 How is this school different from yours?
 Give **two** ways, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

2d

 3 marks