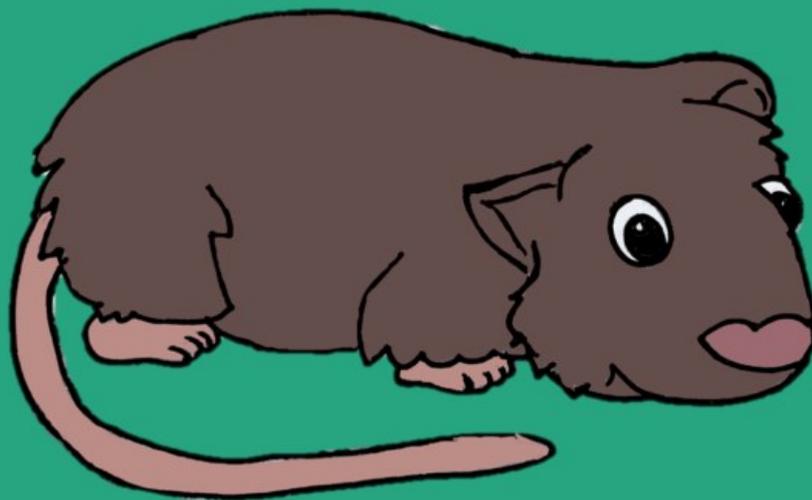


Vole's Big Flood

A THOUGHTBOX STORY



It was breakfast time and Vole was feeling particularly hungry this morning, having had a very long sleep. He stretched his little legs and wiggled out of his nest and down into the food-store burrow to enjoy a nice big pile of crispy seeds for his breakfast.

However, after just a few steps down into the burrow he heard a splish-splish sound and realised to his surprise that his feet were wet! He blinked a few times to adjust his eyes in the dark and saw that the floor was completely flooded with water.

He splashed his way over to the pile of seeds that he had just collected the day before, and discovered to his dismay that they were completely soaked. His food-store had flooded!

Flummoxed and frustrated, Vole wiggled his way back up out of the burrow and into the bright morning sunshine where there was not a rain cloud in sight. He looked around him, peering at the sky and then shaking his little head in confusion. As he looked up again, he saw his good friend Squirrel waving at him from a branch in a nearby tree.

“Morning Vole,” called Squirrel cheerily, scuttling swiftly down the branch to join Vole on the forest floor. “My goodness, you do look glum this morning - what on earth is the matter?” Squirrel asked, peering at his friend with concern.

“It’s my seeds,” said Vole mournfully, “they’re all wet! My food store has flooded again. This is the second time it has happened now this month. I still had one pile of seeds that were soggy from last week’s flood and now my two new piles are completely drenched. I don’t understand why this happened. It’s not supposed to be raining at this time of year- this is the dry season and it’s when I normally collect all of the seeds to put safely into my underground food-store ready for winter.”



“Why don’t you keep your seeds up in a tree like me?” said Squirrel helpfully. “I don’t ever have flooding problems as I carry my acorns high up in the treetops, well away from any puddles.” Squirrel looked up into the branches at the acorns he had just been munching on for his morning snack.

“I can’t do that Squirrel,” said Vole, “the tree is far too high up for me. Besides, I’m used to storing my food in the ground. I am a vole and voles don’t do things the same way as squirrels.”

At that moment, Beaver ambled over out of the trees. “Morning Squirrel, morning Vole, what are you up to this morning?” asked Beaver, smiling warmly at his two friends.

“We’re trying to help Vole solve his flooding problem,” said Squirrel, whisking his tail excitedly in the air.

“My food store has flooded again Beaver,” explained Vole glumly. “It keeps happening but I just don’t know why. This is the time that it doesn’t usually rain so it’s when I normally collect lots of seeds ready for winter.”

“Hmm,” said Beaver, thinking deeply for a moment. “Why don’t you build a dam around the hole to your food-store? That way you’d keep the water out whenever it rains!”

“I can’t do that Beaver,” said Vole sadly, “I don’t have big teeth like you and don’t know how to build dams. I am a vole and voles don’t do things the same way as beavers. Besides, I spoke to Dormouse about what happens when trees fall down and I don’t think we should be chopping down any more trees in this forest.”

“You’re right,” said Beaver, thinking about the lesson he had learned from Dormouse about the consequences of chopping down lots of trees. The three friends stood quietly together, scratching their heads and thinking very hard about what to do.



Whilst they were thinking, Hedgehog rustled his way towards them through the leaves, huffing and puffing as he snuffled his snout along the ground searching for insects for his breakfast.

“Hello,” mumbled Hedgehog, his nose still stuck in a pile of leaves, “what are you all looking so thoughtful about this morning?”

“My food-store has flooded again Hedgehog,” explained Vole. “It keeps happening but I just don’t know why – this isn’t the usual time for rain. This should be the dry season and it’s when I normally collect lots of seeds and store them underground in my burrow ready for winter.”

“Why don’t you eat something different instead Vole,” suggested Hedgehog, lifting his head for a moment from the crisp pile of leaves. “I love munching on insects – they are all over the forest floor -even in the winter - and so you wouldn’t have to store them anywhere as you could find them all over the place.” And with that he stuck his snout back into the leaves to search for more grubs.

“Thanks for the suggestion Hedgehog, but I don’t eat insects. Eating them would make me feel quite poorly. I like to eat seeds because I am a vole - voles don’t do things the same way as hedgehogs.”

Vole wandered over to a little clearing in the trees and peered up high into the sky. “I wonder why it keeps flooding in the first place,” he muttered, “there really shouldn’t be any rain coming at this time of year. Do any of you know why my store keeps flooding when this is supposed to be the dry season?”

“It’s probably something to do with the weather,” chirped Squirrel.

“No, it’s definitely something to do with the climate,” said Hedgehog confidently.

“What is the difference between weather and climate?” asked Beaver, wrinkling his nose up in confusion.

“I’ve got no idea,” said Vole, “but I’d like to find out, especially if it can help me to understand why my food-store keeps flooding. I wonder who we could ask to help find out the difference...”



“What about Lizard?” suggested Hedgehog, “he’s been living around here for a very long time and knows an awful lot of things. He is very wise and I’m sure he would be happy to help us.”

And so the animals ambled through the forest out to a clearing on the far side of the grove where Lizard was peacefully basking in the morning sunshine on top of a very large rock.

“Morning Lizard,” squeaked Vole, peering up with his little eyes to the rock high above his head. “We’ve been thinking about some big ideas and wondered if you could help us with our questions...”

Lizard opened one of his eyes and peered down at the collection of friends at the bottom of the rock. He moved his body around so that he could keep the sun on his back whilst he talked to the group.

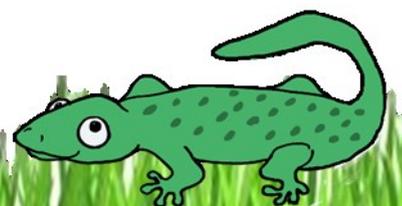
“Asking questions is a great way for us to learn,” said Lizard in a rather wise voice, “I’d be delighted to help you to think a little further. What are you puzzling over this morning?”

“We’d like to know what the difference is between the weather and the climate,” said Vole loudly, “and I’d also like to know why my burrow keeps flooding when it’s supposed to be the dry season right now.”

“What interesting questions!” said Lizard, opening both of his eyes and sitting up straight. “Why don’t you all come and join me on this rock and I’ll tell you all about it.”

The animals scampered, clambered, scuttled and wriggled their way up onto the rock and settled themselves in a circle around Lizard. After a long pause and a very deep breath, Lizard said loudly: “Climate is what you expect, weather is what you get.”

The animals all looked at Lizard feeling rather confused. “Erm, excuse me Lizard,” said Vole rather gently, “but I’m afraid we don’t know what you are talking about.”



“Let me try again,” said Lizard, giving a little cough, taking a deep breath and then proclaiming: “Climate is the pattern of the weather that we expect across a long period of time.”

“You mean like over a week?” chirruped Squirrel.

“No, not a week,” said Lizard.

“A month?” asked Hedgehog.

“No, not a month,” said Lizard, “the climate is the average weather in a particular place over a long, long time, normally over many years. The climate tells us what the weather is like at different points during the year in a particular place. By watching the weather for several years in one place, we can see what the climate might be like each year in that place and use this knowledge to help us know what conditions will be like at different times of the year.”

“Ah, so that’s why I collect my seeds now - because now is the dry season!” squeaked Vole excitedly. “That’s right,” nodded Lizard. “All of the different places around the world have different climates.

Some places have long dry seasons, some have long rainy seasons. Some places have very high temperatures and some low; some places have long hot periods and some places are very, very, very cold. Our friend Goose would be good to talk to if you want to learn more about different climates, as she gets to experience lots of different climates when she migrates to different places across the world each year.”

After his long speech, the animals were all quiet for a very long time whilst their brains whirled and swirled and whizzed and ticked, thinking about all of these big ideas. After quite a long time Hedgehog piped up:

“I think I now understand what the climate is, but what is the weather?”

“That’s much easier to understand,” said Lizard smiling widely. “The weather is things like the wind, the rain, the sun and the snow. It’s what we experience each day and each season as the days change. For example, what’s the weather right now Hedgehog?”



“It’s sunny and dry,” said Hedgehog, sticking his nose into the air and sniffing the warm morning breeze.

“What was the weather last night, Vole?”

“Well, even though I was sleeping, I know it was raining because all of my seeds got wet,” said Vole sadly, remembering again his big flood. “But my big question is why is it raining now when it is supposed to be the dry season?”

Lizard paused for a very long moment. “Hmm,” he said, “now that’s a very big question indeed. The truth is that climates can change over time and there are many reasons for this to happen.”

“So what can we do if it changes again?” said Vole, “how can I keep my food dry if it keeps raining in the dry season?” “I suggested storing his food up in the treetops,” said Squirrel.

“I suggested building a damn around his burrow to keep the water out,” said Beaver with a grin.

“And I suggested eating insects instead,” said Hedgehog proudly.

“Well these are all great ideas,” said Lizard smiling, “but they don’t work for Vole. How about you all think together about something that Vole can do in the future to protect his seeds in case this happens again.”

And with that Lizard gave a little nod of his head and scuttled swiftly off the rocks, darting across the ground back into the forest.

The animals slowly walked their way back home, each of them thinking hard about all that they had learned from Lizard, whilst also trying to think of ways to help Vole with his big flood problem. By the time they got back to the clearing they were buzzing with excitement as they had managed to come up with a plan!

As soon as they arrived, Beaver dashed off to the river bed and soon returned, dragging lots of reeds behind him. Pretty soon he was hard at work weaving them all into a very large net.



Whilst he was weaving, Hedgehog bustled off into the forest to collect a great pile of dried leaves and Squirrel scampered up a tree to clear some space on one of the lower branches.

Meanwhile, Vole was busy dashing back and forth from his burrow to the forest carrying his pile of rather soggy seeds. After a lot of hard work, their great idea was finally ready to try out...

Beaver had weaved together lots of reeds from the riverbank to make a net big enough to store all of Vole's seeds for the winter. Hedgehog had collected lots of leaves to put at the bottom of the net to create a blanket, so that Vole could pile all of his seeds on top of the leaves.

They then covered the seeds up with more leaves and Squirrel scampered up into the tree to hoist the net up into the branches, safely off the ground in case the rain came again.

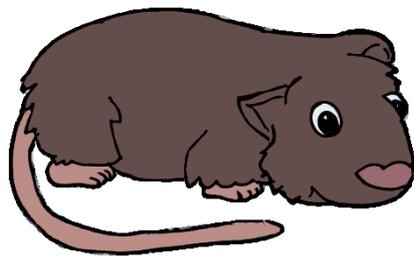
By working together, the animals had made Vole a seed-store which would keep his food dry - no matter what happened with the weather!

Whilst they stood together admiring their creation, Vole declared that today had been a good day after all. Not only had they all learned to ask questions and learned lots of new facts, they had also learned how important it is to work together to help each other deal with big problems.

To celebrate their hard work, the friends all brought some of their favourite food and sat down together to enjoy a very, very late breakfast!



THE END





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