



How Come a Bell Starts the School Day?



In school years of yore, school days of yesterday, when school halls were miles long, and wild animals roamed the hallways, a girl named Gig was sent to the office.

Gig was having a fidgety day. With the temperature outside cold and the classroom heat turned up high, she found it impossible not to wiggle and jiggle, wriggle and squiggle in her chair.

“Gig, stay still!” her man-teacher scolded. “Don’t fiddle about. Don’t fidget.”

But still Gig bounced and flounced in her seat.

In those long ago school times, teachers carried tall, crooked rods called teaching staffs. The modern term staff, meaning people who work in schools, comes from these long, bent poles.

Now, as Gig continued to rock in her chair, the man-teacher pointed his staff at her. “Gig, go to the office,” he said. “You’ve been fidgeting too much today.”

Gig went pale. She looked toward the closed classroom door. Who knew what creatures could be lurking on the other side? If a student had left the playground door open that morning, any number of wild beasts could have wandered into the school. Yesterday, a fifth-grader had spotted a blue-lined lion by the Boys’ Room, and a first-grader spied a comma-covered leopard outside the lunchroom. Just that morning during PE class, Gig’s class had heard the toe-curling roar of a ferocious chalky bear.

“I’ll be good,” Gig pleaded to her teacher. “I’ll stay still. I’ll never fidget again in my life.” And to prove her point she sat up as rigid as a ruler.

The man-teacher checked the clock. “It’s noon, Gig, and the animals nap at this hour. A giant rhinocerosaurus or a three-holed noteboar won’t harm a student during naptime.”

“What about the humpbacked mathjackal that carried off the kindergartner last week?” asked Gig.

“That young lad should have known better than to pull the mathjackal’s tail,” said the man teacher, banging his pole on the floor. “Now off with you. You have plenty of time to get to the office before any creature wakes up. Beside the exercise will be good for your fidgetiness.”

Gig slid from her seat. Now she wasn’t fidgety. She was scared stiff. Her classmates watched in horror as she stepped toward the doorway. She opened it a crack and peeped into the hall.

“Hello? Hello?” she called out.

The teacher waved his staff. “Go!” he shouted, and the girl was out the door.

Alone, Gig stood in the long straight hallway. She peered down to the office, a small white dot over a mile away. Never in her years at school had she been in the hall without her teacher and class. The thought of meeting an eraser-bottom hippophant or a yellow-scaled pencil lizard, even during nap hour, was enough to keep any student from asking to get a drink of water or use the restroom while in class.

The hallway clock told Gig that it was a ten past twelve. “In fifty minutes the wild beasts will be on the prowl again,” she said. “Should I run to the office? No, the

noise could awaken the beasts. Should I tiptoe? No, the beasts would wake up before I get halfway there.”

Gig decided to slide her sneakers along the tiled floor, silently but quickly. She began her journey. Step, slide, step, slide.

Before reaching the next classroom, she stopped. Each classroom door was set a few feet back from the hallway. This left a dark space between the hall and classroom.

“Wild things like to doze in those dark nooks,” Gig told herself.

Noiselessly, she leaned forward. She peered around the corner toward the classroom door.

“Phew, the place is empty,” she whispered. “But there are many more classrooms to pass before I reach the office, and time is running out.”

Gig started again. Step, slide, step, slide. At each classroom entrance, she stopped and checked the dark area. Step, slide, step, slide. By the time she had past twelve classrooms, the gym, and the library she was exhausted.

“I need a drink,” she said. “I need some water.”

Across the hall and ahead several yards stood a drinking fountain. Without looking at the floor, she

hurried toward it. That was a mistake. After five steps, she tripped over something large, lumpy, and furry.

“Yaaaaaar!” went the thing, leaping to its four clawed feet.

“Yaaaaah!” yelled Gig, for she was staring into the yellow eyes of a scissor-toothed tiger, known as the fiercest animal to roam the hallway.

Thick yellow fur rose on the tiger’s arched back. Its eyes narrowed. The beast opened its jaws, slashing the air with a pair of foot-long silver fangs.

“Yaaaaaar!” it went again.

“Yaaaaah!” Gig repeated, expecting the blades to slice her into scraps at any second.

“Yaaaaaar!”

“Yaaaaah!” went Gig.

“Stop! Stop!” said the tiger, and this so surprised Gig that she nearly fell over backward.

“Stop?” she uttered. “Stop what?”

The tiger lowered its furry head. “Stop scaring me.”

“Scaring you?” said Gig. “You’re a scissor-toothed tiger. You’re the one who’s doing the scaring.”

The tiger mewed like a kitten. “A scissor-toothed tiger wouldn’t hurt an eraser-crumb flea,” it said. “It’s you students who are scary. Every time you approach one of us animals you scream.”

“But I screamed because you growled at me,” said Gig.

“And I growled because you screamed at me. Have you ever stood in front of a mirror and seen yourself screaming? It’s a very scary thing.”

Gig thought for a moment. “Is this true with all the wild animals that wander the hall? The blue-lined lions and the comma-covered leopards? Do they growl because students startle them?”

The scissor-toothed tiger nodded, flailing its silver fangs. “It’s also true with the eraser-bottom hippopotamus and the yellow-scaled pencil lizard. Once a new glue gnu I knew was migrating south and spotted the open playground door. To save walking around the long school, it took a short cut through this hall. But a kindergarten saw the spiral-horned animal and screamed. Frightened, the new glue gnu turned around and began migrating northward instead.”

Gig thought some more. “What I need is a warning signal,” she said. “I need a way of warning animals that I’m walking down the hall. That way I won’t startle them and they won’t frighten me.”

Next to the drinking fountain was the small janitor’s room. Gig peered inside. Animal traps, nets, and cages hung on the walls.

“How senseless those animal traps now seem,” she said.

Her eyes fell upon a brass bell on the janitor’s workbench. She grabbed it by the wooden handle and waved it up and down. Ding-ring! Ding-ring!

“From here to the office I’ll ring this bell,” she said to the tiger. Ding-ring! Ding-ring! “That way all the beasts will know that fidgety Gig is coming.”

The scissor-toothed tiger yawned again. “And I can go back to sleep,” it said. “There’s still twenty minutes left in the nap hour.”

Waving the bell, Gig started down the hall once more. Ding-ring! Ding-ring! Her pace was faster.

“Here I come, giant rhinotherosaurus’s and three-holed notebooks,” she called out. Ding-ring! Ding-ring! “Don’t be startled mathjackle. It’s just me, Gig, on her way to the office for fidgeting too much.” Ding-ring! Ding-ring!

Gig passed many more classroom doorways. She spotted a red-snouted ink slurper in one and a thumbtack-o’-pine in another, but neither growled at her. A checkered cheating cheetah even looked up and smiled.

Ding-ring! Ding-ring! “The bell works well,” Gig said. “My arm is getting tired, but it beats being devoured.”

When Gig finally reached the office, the principal made her sit on a stool for the rest of the day. This gave her more time to think.

“I’ll be the first student at school tomorrow,” she said. “I’ll march up and down the long hall ringing my bell. That will warn any animal that the students are arriving shortly.”

Gig’s bell idea was helpful. From the morning she started ringing the bell, not another student startled a wild beast and not another wild beast startled a student.

One morning Gig thought of hanging a bigger bell above the school roof. After that, she simply pulled a rope and--Ding-ding! Ding-ding!-- the bell rang throughout the school and across the playground.

“Good thing you sent me to the office for fidgeting,” she told her man-teacher. “Now every morning the students will know when it’s safe to come inside.”

Even today, a bell rings at the start of the school day. No blue-lined lions or comma-covered leopards have been spotted in any hallway in any school for over a century, but bells still ring. Red-snouted ink slurpers and checkered cheating cheetahs might not enter schools anymore, but it’s best to be certain just in case.