

The Backward Feast

 COLOR THE PICTURE



The sun was going down orange and pink over Sunny Square. Somebody had lit a little fire near the Wishing Tree, and the whole square smelled like woodsmoke and warm berries.

Mama Monkey stood on a stump and clapped her hands. "Everybody! Tonight is a Backward Feast!"

"What's a Backward Feast?" asked Mr. Monkey.

"All week we've been looking backward," said Mama Monkey, "at how things were a year ago. So tonight, we eat backward too. Dessert first!"

"DESSERT FIRST?" Mr. Monkey did three cartwheels in a row and landed in the basket of acorns.

Mama Monkey set out the desserts: a warm blackberry pie, a plate of honey cakes, and a bowl of baked apples from the old apple tree, all soft and sweet.

But some of the friends took the word "backward" very seriously.

Hazel came into Sunny Square walking backward. "This is a Backward Feast," she said, "so I'm being backward." She walked backward past the fire. She walked backward past the pie. She walked backward right into the Wishing Tree. *Bwong*. Every wish on the tree swung and clacked on its vine, and one bark card came loose and landed on Hazel's head.

"Oops! Are you okay?" asked Mr. Moose.

Hazel looked up at the card. It was her own. It said *SWAMP*. "Hee hee hee... *SNORT!*" she said. "I'm okay. My

wish found me."

Dottie tried to be backward too. She tried chasing her tail backward, around and around, which meant her tail was chasing her. "Ha! Ha! It's winning!" she barked.

Bruno came in next. He waved at everybody. "Goodnight!" he said. "Goodnight, goodnight!"

"Bruno," said Mr. Moose, "we're just starting."

"I know," said Bruno. "It's backward."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Moose.

Daddy Monkey stood up by the fire. "I have a Backward Feast joke," he said. "Do you know what 'dessert' is, spelled backward?"

Everybody waited.

"Stressed," said Daddy Monkey.

Nobody laughed. Mr. Monkey looked at Mr. Moose. Mr. Moose looked at Mr. Monkey. Nobody in the whole woods could spell yet. An owl hooted, once, far away. Daddy Monkey sat down, very pleased with himself.

Then they ate dessert. Mr. Monkey ate a honey cake in four bites. Bruno ate a slice of pie, then a baked apple, then held out his bowl for more pie.

"Bruno," said Mama Moose, "next is dinner."

"But it's backward," said Bruno. "So after dessert comes... dessert again."

"Haw haw haw!" he laughed at his own idea, and Mama Moose gave him one more little bite, just because.

When the plates were licked clean, Mama Monkey

called everybody close to the fire. “Now,” she said, “the best part. We’re going to say thank you. Out loud.”

“How?” asked Ricky.

“You say, ‘Thank you, somebody, for making my life better,’” said Mama Monkey. “Then you say one thing they did. And when you’re done, everybody else says, ‘I remember that.’”

“That’s a good rule,” said Ricky, and he wrote it down.

Mr. Monkey went first. He didn’t even need to think. He looked right at Mama Monkey. “Thank you, Mama, for making my life better. You caught me every time I fell off the high vines. A hundred and one times.”

“I remember that,” said everybody.

Mama Monkey put her hand on her heart.

Mr. Moose went next. “Thank you, Daddy, for making my life better. You stood in the cold brook every morning so I’d land on you.”

“I remember that,” said everybody. Daddy Moose didn’t say anything. He just looked at the fire, and his eyes were shiny.

Then Mr. Monkey went again. “Thank you, Ricky, for making my life better. You tied the swinging vine so it never slips.”

“I remember that,” said everybody.

This time, Ricky heard it. He heard it all the way. He didn’t write anything down. He just sat very still, with his ears turning pink at the tips.

Bruno went next. “Thank you, little tree,” he said, pointing toward the circle of stones in the dark, “for not getting squished.”

“I remember that,” said everybody, and Mr. Monkey had to cover his mouth so he wouldn’t giggle.

One by one, all around the fire, the friends said their thank-yous. Hazel thanked her mama for teaching her to run. Dottie thanked Sammy for throwing sticks. Shiloh thanked Tessie for telling him stories.

Then it was Benji’s turn.

Benji was sitting at the very edge of the firelight. His ears went flat against his back. He opened his mouth. Nothing came out. Everybody was looking at him, every eye in the whole woods, and the fire crackled loud, and he wished he could hop right back into his burrow.

“I pass,” he whispered.

“That’s okay,” said Mama Monkey kindly. “You can always pass.”

But Mr. Monkey saw Benji’s face. Benji didn’t look like he wanted to pass. He looked like he had a thank-you inside him, and it was stuck. Mr. Monkey knew that feeling. It was like the warm, big feeling in his chest, only with no way out.

“Mr. Moose,” Mr. Monkey whispered. “Benji has one. I can tell.”

Mr. Moose thought it through. Benji wasn’t scared of saying thank you. He was scared of everybody looking at

him while he said it. So what if everybody wasn’t looking at him?

Then Mr. Moose remembered Benji’s wish on the Wishing Tree. The whisper wish: somebody to sit next to.

“Mr. Monkey,” said Mr. Moose softly. “Go sit next to him. Right next to him. And let him whisper it to you.”

Mr. Monkey got up, walked around the fire, and sat down beside Benji, so close their fur touched. Benji’s ears came up, just a little.

“You can whisper it,” said Mr. Monkey. “I’ll say it big.”

Benji leaned over and whispered into Mr. Monkey’s ear for a long time.

Mr. Monkey stood up. “Benji says: Thank you, Shiloh, for making my life better. Every time we sit on the Listening Log, you save me the spot in the middle. So I never have to sit on the end.”

Everybody looked at Shiloh. Shiloh looked at Benji.

“I remember that,” said everybody.

“I remember that too,” said Shiloh, very softly.

Benji’s ears turned pink, all the way to the tips. “Hee hee,” he said.

When everybody had a turn, Mama Monkey stood up again. “Now we get ready,” she said. “This weekend, it’s time to give some of these thank-yous away.”

Mr. Monkey looked at his basket. Five leaves, from three days of noticing. And he had an idea. He looked up at the Wishing Tree, at all the wishes hanging on their vines.

“What if,” he said slowly, “our thank-yous went on the tree too? Right next to the wishes?”

“Ooh,” said Mama Monkey.

Everybody looked at Ricky. Ricky looked at his list. He looked for a long time. “There’s no rule about thank-you leaves,” he said at last. Then he scribbled something. “But here’s a new one. Rule thirty-five. All Swap presents have to be WRAPPED.”

So the friends spent the rest of the evening getting ready. They picked the best, flattest leaves from all over Sunny Square. They mashed berries for paint, red ones and purple ones and blue ones. Mr. Moose sorted the leaves into piles. Bruno sat on the stack to keep them flat.

Then, at last, they ate dinner.

“What a day!” said Mr. Monkey, licking stew off his fingers. “We ate dessert first. Hazel walked backward into the Wishing Tree and her wish found her. Bruno said goodnight at the beginning. Daddy Monkey told a spelling joke and nobody could spell. And Benji said his thank-you, in my ear.”

Mr. Monkey whistled, and Mr. Moose hummed, and together they sang:

*We are better together,
Moose and Monkey forever.*

And the little fire in Sunny Square burned down to warm orange coals, with a stack of flat leaves beside it, waiting for tomorrow.

Let's Talk

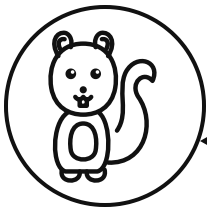
- 1 Benji had a thank-you stuck inside. How did Mr. Monkey help him say it?
- 2 Who helped you learn something new this year? Tonight, you can clap for them!

Your Turn

Benji said his thank-you out loud. Draw someone you want to thank out loud.

Thank you, _____ !

SAMMY'S JOKE



Why did the teddy bear say no to dessert?

Crack Sammy's code! Find each picture in the key and write its letter on the line.

It was already _____ !

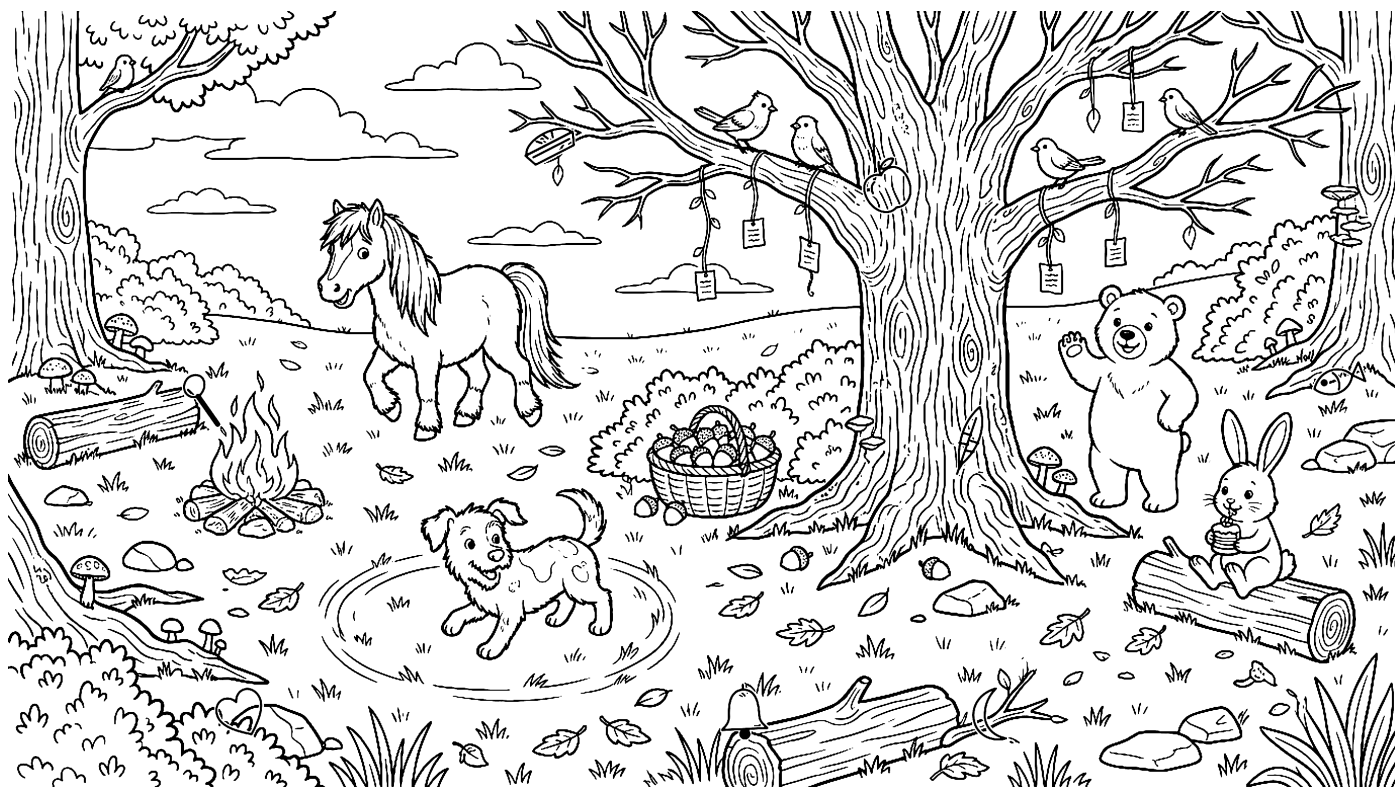


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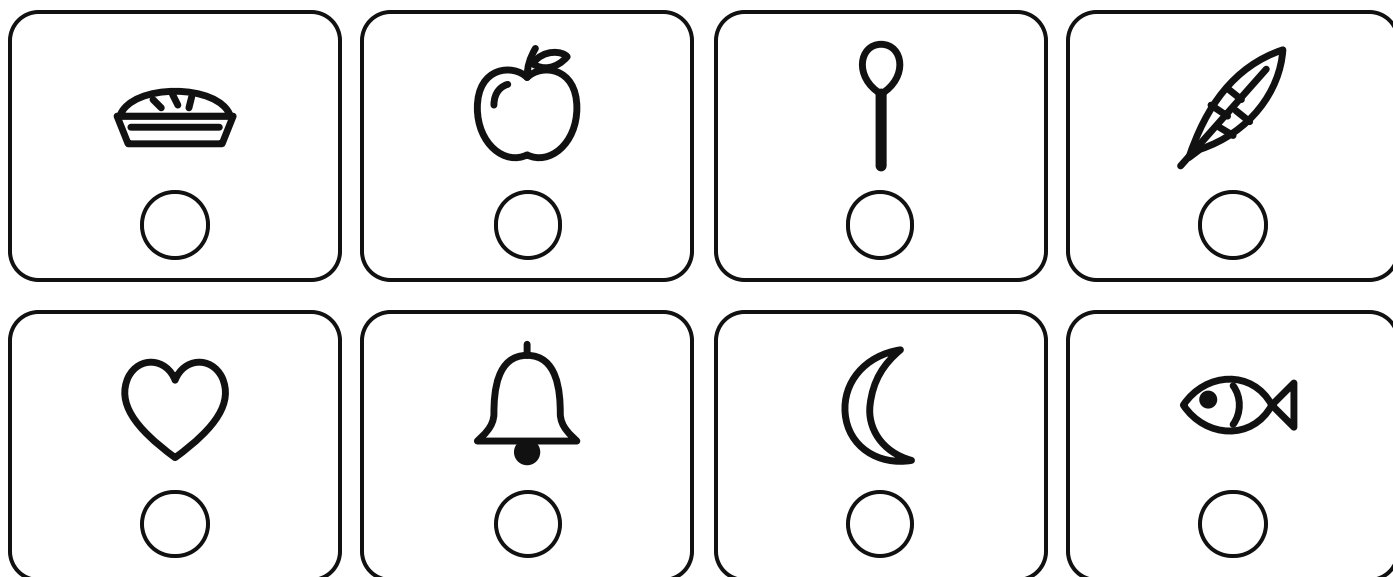


👁 Hidden Pictures

Find each hidden thing in the picture. Color it, then color its circle!



CAN YOU FIND THESE?



 Read With Me

DRAW THE STORY

Nod, Nod, Nap

A pot. A pan. A tin.



sat at the pot.



did nod.



did nod and nod.



did nap on the mat!

PICTURE WORDS



Bruno

For grown-ups: New words to learn by heart: the.



Color a star each time you read it.

♥ My Thank-You

Trace the dotted words. Write their name on the line, or draw a tiny face. Read it to them!

Thank you.
for making my life better.

♥ Tonight's Big Words

Tonight your family starts by saying these words together. A grown-up will tell you what they mean.

Grace comes in, gratitude sees it, and graciousness passes it on.



Grace

a gift you didn't earn



Gratitude

noticing the gift



Graciousness

passing it on

DRAW A GOOD GIFT SOMEONE GAVE YOU THAT YOU DIDN'T EARN.

★ Thankful Thursday

Tonight is a party night for your family. It has three parts:

1 Remember: Brag and Tag

2 Rejoice: Applause Night

3 Ready: Cut the Leaves

Remember: Brag and Tag

Brag means telling everyone something great about someone. Here is how to play:

1. Look at someone and say this to them:

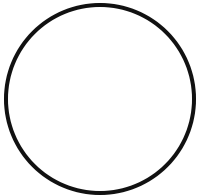
I noticed you made _____'s life better
by _____.
who they helped what they did

Like this: "I noticed you made Grandma's life better by raking her leaves."

2. Tag the next person. Now they brag about someone!

3. Keep going until everyone has been bragged about.

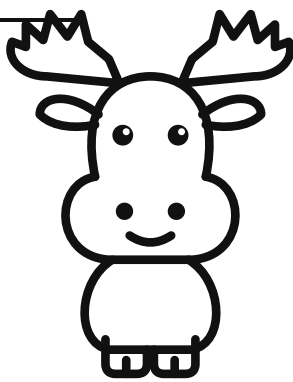
Who will you brag about?
Draw their face or write
their name.



WHAT DID THEY DO? DRAW IT.

this year

last year



EXTRA, IF YOUR FAMILY DOES IT

The Growth Line

Your family might mark how tall you are tonight, like Mr. Moose here!

This year I am _____ inches tall.

Last year I was _____ inches tall (if you know).

☆ Rejoice: Applause Night

Show everyone something you can do now that you couldn't do a year ago. Everyone claps for you! Then tell who taught you, and everyone claps for them too.

Circle your act, or think of your own. Then draw yourself doing it in the box.



read a word or a book



write my name



ride a bike



hop on one foot



tie my shoes



run fast



help cook



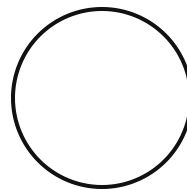
draw a picture



make a paper airplane

MY ACT

Who taught me? Draw their face or write their name.



✂ Ready: Cut the Leaves

This weekend, your family writes thank-you notes on paper leaves: a name on the front and a thank-you on the back. Some families add photos too. Then everyone hangs them on the Thanks Giving Tree on your wall. Tonight, help cut out the leaves. Draw leaf shapes on colored paper and cut along the lines with kid scissors. A grown-up can draw the lines for you and stay close by.

Color one leaf here for each leaf you cut!

