

The Lantern for Whoever Comes Next

 COLOR THE PICTURE



The last morning was soft and quiet, and a light snow was falling, the kind with flakes so big and slow you could catch one on your tongue if you tried. Mr. Monkey tried. He caught four. Mr. Moose tried too, and caught one on his nose instead, and went cross-eyed looking at it.

In Sunny Square, everybody gathered around the Listening Log with bark and paint and brushes.

"Today," said Mama Monkey, "everybody writes a love letter. To somebody who loved you this winter, even when it was hard. Tell them what they did. Tell them exactly."

So everybody wrote, or painted, or said the words out loud to a grown-up who wrote them down.

Bruno's letter was so big it took a whole piece of bark the size of a door. Ricky's letter to Percy was a list, of course: "Things I like about Percy. Number one: his bottle caps." It had forty-seven things on it. Dottie couldn't hold a brush, so she dipped her paws in the paint and walked across her letter, and that was the whole letter, a trail of paw prints.

"What does it say?" asked Hazel.

"It says I LOVE YOU!" said Dottie, wagging. "With my feet!"

"Ha! Ha!" she added.

Sammy painted hers in two seconds flat. It said "I LOVE YOU ALL" in big wobbly letters, and she stuck it on the Wishing Tree and was gone before anybody could read it. Benji painted his for Bruno: a big bear holding back the brambles, and a little bunny, safe behind him. Shiloh painted his for Granny Mabel, and it was just a tiny door with a big crowd of friends outside it, knocking.

Hazel tried to paint with her tail, and swished it, and splattered blue paint right across Mr. Moose's face.

Mr. Moose blinked. He had blue spots all over his nose.

"Oops! Are you okay?" said Hazel.

"I'm okay," said Mr. Moose. "I'm just spotty."

"Hee hee hee... *SNORT!*" went Hazel.

Tessie wrote one too, very slowly, all morning long, to Benji. It said, "Thank you... for walking with me... all the way up."

One letter was from everybody, to Daddy Monkey. It was tied around a brand-new vine, long and thick and green, that all the friends had braided together, one strand each. The letter said, "You gave your new vine away. So we made you one." Daddy Monkey grabbed it and swung right out over Sunny Square, smooth as anything, not one single bump. "Hoo-hoo-hoo!" he laughed, all the way across.

Mr. Moose wrote his letter to Mr. Monkey. Slowly, carefully, the way he did everything. And Mr. Monkey

wrote his letter to Mr. Moose, quickly, with his tongue sticking out the side of his mouth. Then they traded.

Mr. Monkey read his out loud. "Dear Mr. Monkey. You gave me the last honey cake, even though your tummy said no. You told me sorry when you called me a scaredy-moose. You stayed with Granny Mabel and missed the whole party. You are my best friend forever. Love, Mr. Moose."

Mr. Monkey's eyes went shiny.

Mr. Moose read his. "Dear Mr. Moose. You went out in the storm even though you didn't want to. You carried the whole woodpile on your head. You thought of the candle line. I love you the most of anybody. Except Mama. And Daddy. But almost the most. Love, Mr. Monkey."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Moose, with blue spots on his nose, and his eyes were shiny too.

That evening, there was one last supper in Sunny Square. And this time, Granny Mabel came.

She couldn't walk that far, so Mr. Moose and Mr. Monkey went and got her, in the harness, with the sled. She rode all the way through the brambles and across the snow, tucked inside the yellow hat, with only her face and her spectacles poking out, and every friend they passed waved. When the sled went over a bump, the hat rolled right off with Granny Mabel inside it, like a big yellow ball, *rolla-rolla-rolla*, until Mr. Monkey caught it.

"Eek-eek-eek! Again!" said Granny Mabel, from inside.

At the long table, Granny Mabel climbed up onto an upside-down teacup, so everybody could see her. Then she cleared her tiny throat.

"For a long, long time," said Granny Mabel, "I thought nobody knew I was there. And I told myself I didn't mind the dark. But that wasn't true. What I minded was being in the dark by myself." She looked around the table, at all of them. "Then one day, somebody knocked."

She held up her tiny cup. "To all of you," she said. "For knocking."

"TO GRANNY MABEL!" shouted everybody, and held up their cups, and Bruno held his up so high that his cider splashed onto his own head.

"Haw haw haw!"

After supper, Mr. Moose sat by the fire, very quiet. Mr. Monkey sat down next to him.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Mr. Monkey.

"Granny Mabel was out there all that time," said Mr. Moose, "and nobody knew. What if somebody else is out there? Somebody we haven't found yet? Somebody who comes along next winter, or the winter after that?"

Mr. Monkey thought about that, and his heart squeezed. Somebody out there in the dark, by themselves, not knowing the way.

"Then they need a light," said Mr. Monkey. "Right at the start of the path. So they can find their way in."

Daddy Monkey helped them make a lantern. Ricky found one more jar in the river, because the river always gives Ricky jars, and Percy gave a shiny bottle cap for the top. Mr. Moose lit the candle inside it from the fifth candle by the fire. And Mr. Monkey wrote one more letter, with Mr. Moose telling him every word, slowly, and they rolled it up and tucked it inside the lantern, beside the candle.

They carried it out to the edge of the woods, to the very start of the path through the brambles, and hung it on a branch where anybody could see it.

They didn't put their names on it. They didn't need to. Whoever found it would know everything they needed to know.

"What a day!" said Mr. Monkey, walking home through the falling snow, holding Mr. Moose's tail. "We wrote love letters. Dottie wrote hers with her feet, and Hazel's tail made Mr. Moose spotty. Mr. Moose's letter made my eyes shiny. Granny Mabel came to supper in my hat, and she stood on a teacup and said thank you for knocking, and Bruno splashed cider on his head. And we left a lantern on the path, for whoever comes next."

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

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

Many, many winters later, on a snowy evening, a little group of young ones came running into Sunny Square. A little moose calf, and a little monkey, and a few others, all out of breath.

"Tessie! Tessie! Look what we found!" they shouted. "At the start of the bramble path! An old lantern! And there's a letter inside!"

Old Tessie was older than ever now. She sat by the Story Stone with her seeing glasses on her nose. She took the letter in her slow old feet, and unrolled it, and read it out loud, very slowly.

"To whoever comes next," read Tessie. "We don't know your name yet. We don't know what you look like. But we already love you. Follow the light. It will take you home."

The young ones looked at each other.

"That's US!" said the little monkey. "We're whoever came next!"

"Yes," said Tessie softly. "You are." She looked up at the sky, and the snow, and all the lights glowing in all the homes of Wonderful Woods, the way they had glowed every winter since.

"That was the winter," said Tessie, "the Overflow began."

And out at the edge of the woods, at the start of the bramble path, a little lantern hung on its branch in the falling snow, lit again by somebody who never left a name, the way somebody always did, waiting for whoever would come next.

Let's Talk

- 1 The friends left a lantern for somebody they didn't even know yet. Why?
- 2 It's Love Letter Day! Who will you write your love letter to?

Your Turn

Write or draw your love letter. A grown-up can help you write.

Dear _____ ,

Thank you for loving me this winter. You _____.

Love, _____

SAMMY'S JOKE



What is a snowman's favorite breakfast?

Unscramble the letters to finish the joke. The picture is a clue!

e s l k f a

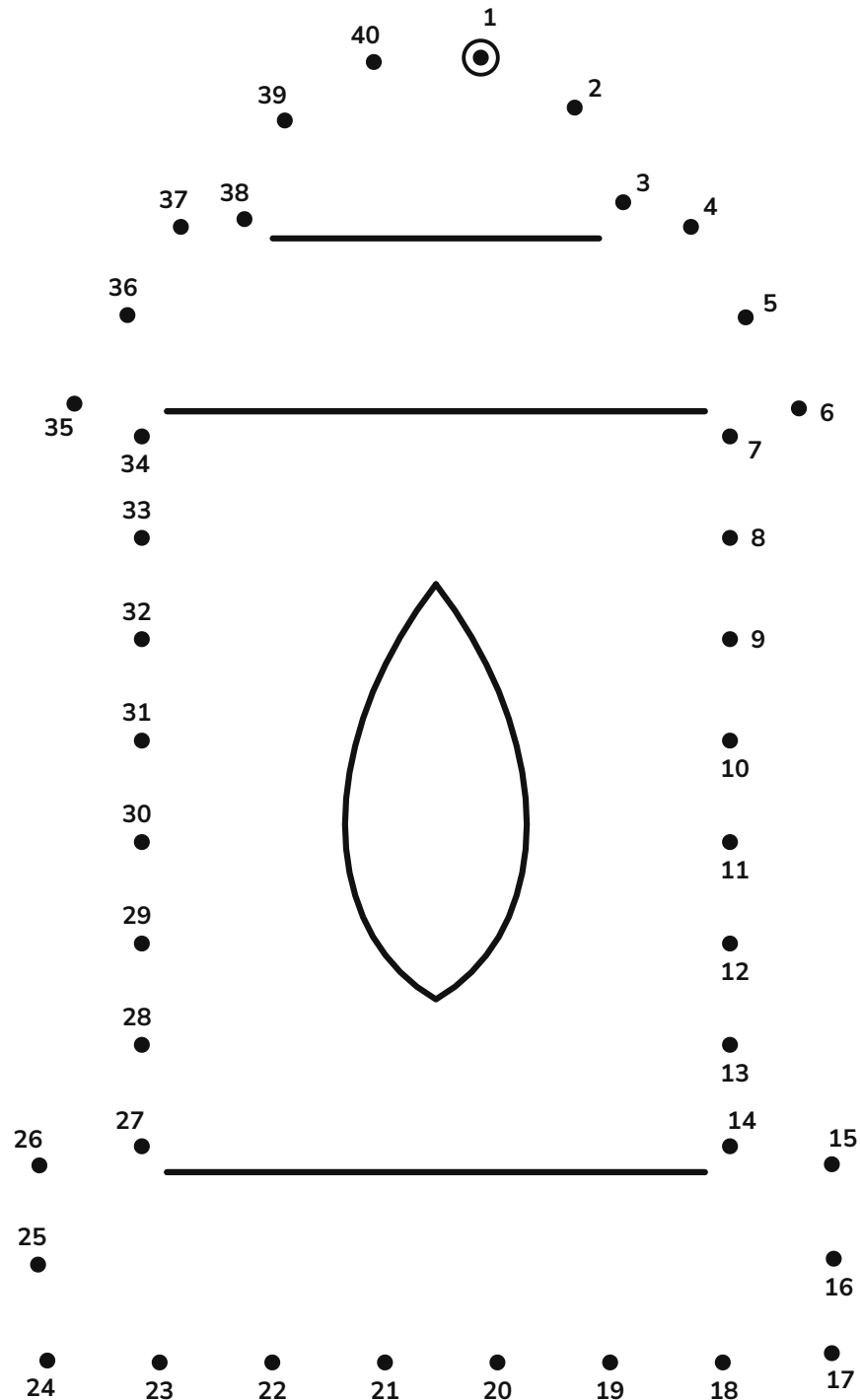
CLUE



Frosted _____ !

Connect the Dots

Connect the dots to find the lantern for whoever comes next. Start at 1 (the circled dot) and count up to 40. Then join the last dot back to 1, and color it!



 Read With Me

DRAW THE STORY

A Lamp for the Next Pal

The pals make notes to pals.

 makes a note with no pen!

 and  trade notes. They smile.

Then  and  make a last lamp.

They hang it next to the path.

In the lamp is a note: “We hope you see this lamp.

Then you can get home.”

PICTURE WORDS



Dottie



Mr. Moose



Mr. Monkey



Color a star each time you read it.

My Gift

Trace the dark word. Then trace or write the light words. Write a name on the first line and the reason on the second. Then say it to them!

I love you.

because

☆ Movie Bingo: The Grinch

Watch it with a grown-up. Color a square the first time you see each thing. Three in a row is Bingo!

 a big heart	 a dog	 a sled
 snow	 Free!	 a tree
 a gift	 a bell	 a mountain

For grown-ups: The Grinch (2018) is rated PG for brief rude humor. Watch the last part, from Christmas morning to the Whos' dinner. The 1966 cartoon, How the Grinch Stole Christmas!, is a gentle 26-minute choice for little ones.



WEEK DONE!

Turn back to this week's map. Color any stones you missed.



Ladybugs I found in this week's storybook pictures: _____