

How Samantha closes the school, giving the children a day's holiday

At Holcombe Public School every child was looking forward to the long break. In fact the children were ready for the holidays right now and this is why they were asking the teachers if they could watch DVD movies. The children even offered to bring them in. Mrs Robinson, Sophie's teacher, wasn't tricked for one second. Once children start watching movies they don't want to do any work, or anything, and besides this they get bored very quickly with movies, even though they think it will be fun. So it was work as usual. Mr Bean, the school principal, had reminded the teachers to 'keep them working', and it was good advice.

On very hot days—and every day was hot at this time of year—the children drank lots and lots of water. This was a good idea except for one thing: going to the toilet. Mrs Robinson was getting sick of children putting up their hand, especially in the afternoon. So she decided to try an old teacher trick on the next child to ask. It was Frederick.

"Please can I go to the toilet?" asked Frederick, putting on the usual soft pleading voice which fools no-one.

"Of course you can," replied Mrs Robinson. And Frederick, delighted there had been no fuss, got up and walked towards the door.

"But you *may* not. Now go back to your seat," ordered Mrs Robinson. The class then had a quick lesson on 'can' and 'may'.

"You see children," explained Mrs Robinson, "'*can go to the toilet*' means that your body works properly. If it didn't then we would have to call the doctor." Mrs Robinson knew she had lost half the class already, but as this lesson was almost a punishment for the class, she continued. "Frederick was really asking if he was allowed to go to the toilet. He used the wrong word." Then Mrs Robinson pounded the class with more examples.

But Frederick wasn't listening, and neither was anyone else at the end. He really did want to go, and Mrs Robinson knew that. So she said, "All right, Frederick. You *may* now go to the toilet." Mrs Robinson had other 'funny' toilet tricks, but she would wait for the right time to have these jokes. Teachers can't have them too often. But one thing is for sure—there's nothing less funny than a teacher trying to be funny about toilets. Children just don't expect it.

Now after all this you might think that fewer children might be needing to go to the toilet. But Samantha wanted to go, needed to go, and did go. This turned out to be no ordinary trip to the toilet.

On the way Samantha—you remember her eagle eyes from the Canberra excursion—spotted something unusual. A large patch of soggy ground on a hot day. It was close to the water tank which supplied the toilets. Samantha put two and two together and immediately she knew she had to play the 'ding-ding-dong' song, which country children know, but city children don't.

She walked up to the water tank and started tapping: 'ding, ding, ding, ding, dong'. She checked: 'ding, ding, ding, dong'. Yes it was a 'dong' all right and that meant that the water was extremely low, right at the bottom. The tank had sprung a leak and nearly all the water had run out.

Surely children wouldn't be interested in this. But Samantha, our heroine in this story, knew what it meant. It meant that the toilets couldn't be flushed and as there was no water the children couldn't wash their hands either. You see Holcombe Public

School was in the process of being put on town water. The last part of the school to be done was the toilets building. So the water tank was still needed.

Samantha, without waiting to get permission, immediately scooted herself across to the principal, Mr Bean. "I need to see Mr Bean straightaway," Samantha gasped to the office lady, who wasn't impressed. They rarely are, and they can cause teachers a lot of trouble too. Now it was Samantha who had to suffer.

"Well, sit there and I will see if he is available," the office lady spoke in that horrible tone that suggested it would be the middle of next week before she got up from her chair. Some office ladies like to think they are in charge of the school. But finally she did get up, and so Mr Bean called Samantha in.

Unlike the office lady it took Mr Bean just 10 seconds to understand it was important and another ten seconds to start work on a plan. "Excellent, clever girl, wonderful," smiled Mr Bean. "Now back to your class, and leave things to me."

Samantha wondered what Mr Bean would do. She didn't think he would be any good at fixing things. She had never seen him with tools in his hands. But even at that moment Mr Bean was intending to use the most important tool of all for this job—the telephone in his office.

First the office lady was sent to make a sign that said 'toilet closed' and to lock the door. At the same time the school captain and vice-captain rushed to each class—there weren't many—with a note which told teachers to explain the situation to their classes, and that children could use the toilets in the administration block. That's right, children could even use Mr Bean's toilet!

Now back to that telephone. What was Mr Bean doing? He was pressing buttons on the phone and talking to lots of people. He wanted to fix the water problem. He wanted men to come and run a pipe from the administration building to the toilets, and he wanted the tank fixed.

The children didn't know this was happening—they were in their classrooms. Mr Bean was getting angrier and angrier, and playing with his pencil, and as children know, that's not allowed. He wasn't just playing with it—he was banging it onto the desk. Tut, tut.

You see nobody could come and fix the water that day because it was already after lunchtime. The men could though come the next day, tomorrow. But this would mean no toilets for part of the day. And what if there was another problem?

So guess what happened? Mr Bean decided that the next day the school would be closed. Quickly he wrote a letter to the parents, the office lady printed it, and he sent copies to each class.

But that's not all. That afternoon all the children had to pack up ten minutes early, leave their classrooms, and sit at the front of the school near the bus area. Mr Bean wanted to speak to everyone.

"Today children, as your teachers have explained, there has been a problem with the toilets. As it can only be fixed tomorrow I have had to close the school for one day. This means you will not come to school tomorrow but will return on Thursday, the next day." Of course there were no questions, just a sea of smiles.

"And," added Mr Bean, "for this we must thank Samantha for

spotting the trouble with the water tank. Well done, Samantha.” Some of the children started clapping.

But one group of people was not happy at all—the parents. They had to arrange for their children to be looked after, and do it almost right away. But the children didn’t care. While waiting for the bus they chattered excitedly about what they were going to do. It was still boiling hot in the bus waiting area but tomorrow, for some children, there would be swimming.

As soon as Sophie and Samantha met their mother at the gate they blabbed it all out, talking over the top of each other: “Mr Bean said we don’t have to go to school tomorrow. It’s a holiday!” They expected their mother to be pleased but instead she was carefully reading the letter the teachers had sent home.

That night it was arranged for the children to stay with Melissa’s mother as she didn’t have to work at the hospital that day. Indeed Melissa’s mother telephoned Sophie’s mother and offered to take the children. At Holcombe Public School parents, teachers and children all help each other—and that’s the way it should be.

Well the tank was fixed and everything returned to normal, as normal as it can be just before the Christmas holidays. Many of the children were unusually quiet in the playground though. They were walking around carefully searching for anything, anything at all, which was broken, or which looked like it might be broken and so lead to another day off school. Some of the smaller children even followed Samantha about, hoping to share in any new discoveries.

We must leave Sophie, Samantha and their friends now as they are just about to go on their Christmas holidays, the most exciting time for children. Perhaps we will meet them again after the holidays when they start a new year, with a new class, and a new teacher. And hopefully the children will act a little more grown-up. But whether they do or whether they don’t there will certainly be adventures.