

Grandma Pitchford's Birthday

Theme: Grandma Pitchford is about to celebrate a very big birthday and Dan has no idea what he might give to her on such a special occasion. He need not have worried as his choice turns out to be perfect.

Setting: Street party

SEAL reference: Relationships

Dan was four years old. He thought he was very grown-up. He was allowed to join in with his older brothers and sisters *and* with all their friends now, but on days like these, when they were all at school, he felt really lonely. There was only his mum for company, and she was always washing, ironing, cleaning or just very busy. And Dad wasn't much use either. When he arrived home from work early, all he wanted to do was read his newspaper. It seemed as if no one had time for him at all – well no one except Grandma Pitchford that is. She always had time for everyone.

Grandma Pitchford lived at the top of the street. There were only three streets in the whole village. The houses were small, red-brick and terraced. They had been built for the miners, who had worked down the local mine.

To Dan, Grandma Pitchford was the fount of all wisdom. She knew the answers to all of his questions and she was never too busy to stop and chat to him.

Now Dan knew Grandma Pitchford was about to be 90! Her neighbours were planning a street party and they intended

to invite the whole village to come and celebrate on her special day. Dan was sure that everyone would want to come, because, one way or another, they had all needed her help through the year. Some came for her recipe for Winter soup, others for help remembering something from the past or about village history, still others to ask for a few flowers from her lovely garden. They had even asked her to look after the village once when practically everyone else went on a daytrip to the seaside.

Dan wanted to give her the perfect birthday present. But all the others seemed to have chosen the best ideas already. His sister Annie had chosen flowers. Jon and Robert had selected a picture frame. Mum was knitting a beautiful soft cardigan. The list went on and on. It seemed that anything he thought of someone else had already thought of it first!

While the house was quiet, Dan went up to the room he shared with his two brothers and he opened his special drawer. He reached his hand to the back and pulled out a small tin which contained his most treasured possessions. He opened it very carefully, in case

everything should spring out and be lost under the bed or the chest of drawers.

He had: one piece of rather old string (useful if his laces broke); a half-empty crisp packet (in case he was sent to his room, hungry); and his best ever, most treasured possession, his beautiful brown shiny conker. This was ready for the day in September when he started 'big school'. He knew that it would impress the other boys!

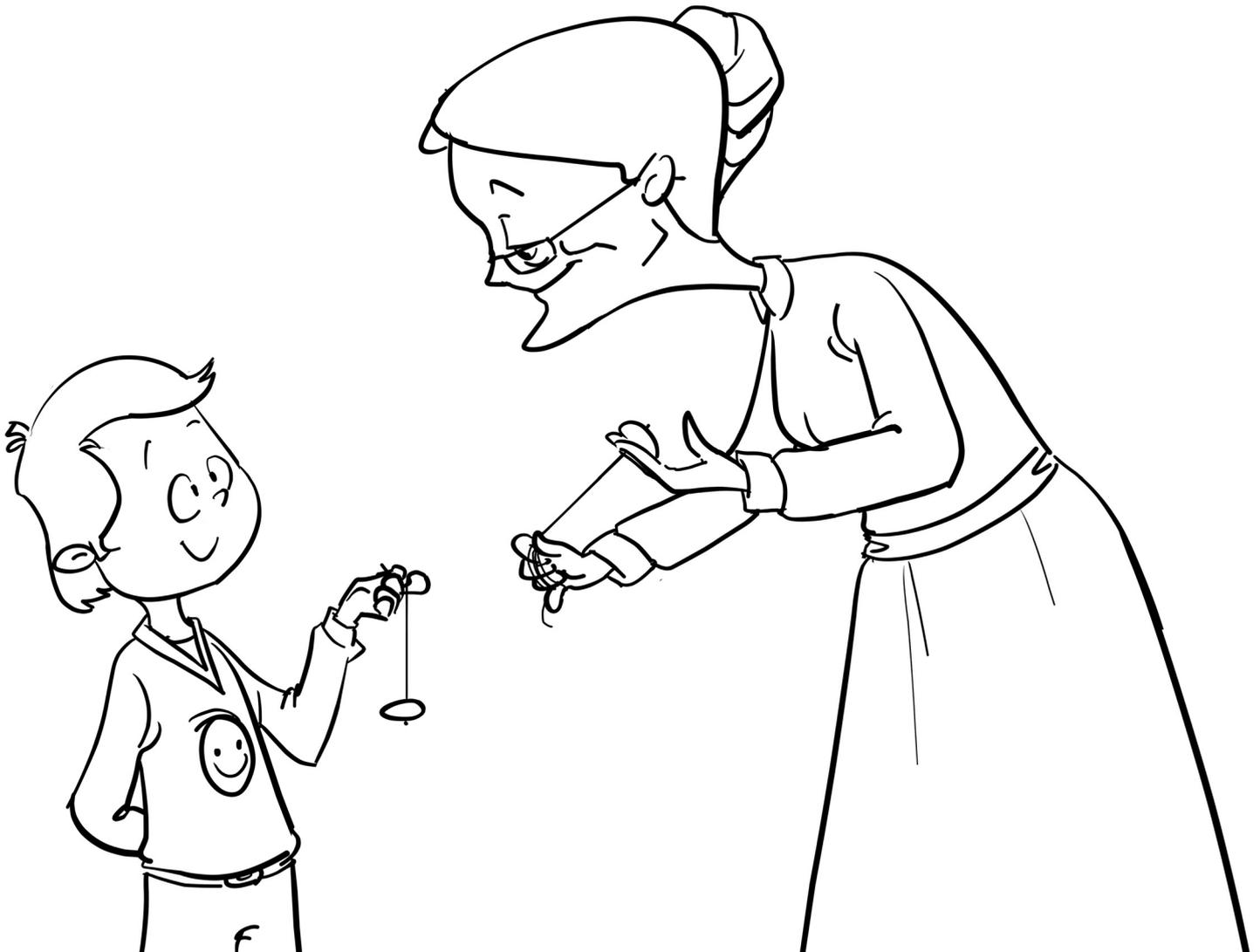
But he still hadn't any ideas on what he could give to Grandma Pitchford for her birthday.

Very soon the day of the party arrived and Dan felt quite ill, because he was so sad. He still hadn't thought of anything.

He went up to his bedroom to hide away, but his brothers were sent to find him and everyone was cross because he was making them late.

Dan was given ten minutes to get washed, dressed and come downstairs or they would go without him.

Dan looked out of the window. The Street looked like a coronation for a Queen (or King). The whole place was decorated with flags and bunting. There were tables and chairs all the way down the centre of Co-op Street. They were covered in fluttering cloths, with jam-jars full of flowers spaced along the length of them, and there were piles of food heaped high on oval plates – all for Grandma Pitchford.



He could see the very lady in question, sitting at the top of the table, looking splendid in all her best clothes and her favourite hat to keep the sun off her head.

He knew he couldn't miss the party.

Everyone trooped along to the top of the table and gave Grandma Pitchford their gifts: flowers, cakes, a brooch, handkerchieves, lavender water, boiled sweets and even a pair of slippers. All very useful for a lady who was 90 years old today!

Eventually it was Dan's turn. He just knew that everyone would laugh at his present. The only thought that kept him going was that Grandma Pitchford would understand. He walked towards her with all eyes following him. As the youngest there, a few ladies felt it necessary to say, 'Ahh!' as he walked past. That made it even worse.

When he came to Grandma Pitchford's side, she gave him one of her fabulous smiles. Dan reached into his pocket and took out a small ball, that looked remarkably like an old screwed-up crisp packet. He gave it to Grandma Pitchford. He couldn't say anything, because his mouth was dry with fear.

Grandma Pitchford slowly unravelled the ball as if it were something very precious.

Her eyes lit up with joy when she realized what was in the bag! Everyone began calling and laughing. 'What is it?' 'Hold it up for us all to see!' and 'Oh! Dan!'

Very slowly, Grandma Pitchford stood up and held her hand straight for silence. From her other hand, she let fall a beautiful shiny brown conker on the end of a long piece of string. Then in her loving, gentle voice, she called out to all

those present, 'I challenge anyone here to come and beat my conker – once we have eaten all this lovely food, of course.'

Once everyone had had their fill of food and pop, Grandma Pitchford set about cracking all the conkers in the village. At last she came to Simon Smith's. He squared up to Grandma with his already impressive conker – an 18er. He felt invincible against a little old lady!

But he didn't take account of Grandma's glasses, which magnified everything – so much so that she could see the tiniest little twitch of Simon's string and she was therefore ready the moment he pounced.

Immediately Grandma swung her conker and brought it down with amazing force. The birthday lady of 90 shattered Simon's super winning conker in one fell swoop!

Everyone cheered and laughed. They called out to Grandma Pitchford, saying she was the Conker Queen of Co-op Street! Even Simon Smith shook her hand!

The day after, when Daniel visited her again, Grandma Pitchford told him it was the best birthday present she had ever been given. Oh yes! She had liked all her gifts, but no one else had given her anything that was nearly so much fun or that had been so very precious to themselves. She knew it had been given with so much love.

Follow-up questions

- Why did Dan want to give Grandma Pitchford a really special present?
- Was his choice of present a good one? Why?