



Dara and the Most Important Question

By now, we know that the positive choices that the children at Priory make every day have helped a beautiful garden to grow in the school's grounds. We also know that this garden is home to animals that demonstrate the school's values. Animals like Dara the squirrel...and this is his story. It is called *Dara and the Most Important Question*.

Ever since Dara had been a young kit (which is the name for baby squirrels), he had been fascinated by the world around him. In fact, his first word had been "Why?" after his mother had asked him to go to sleep.

From that moment on, Dara asked a lot of questions and his mother, understanding the importance of curiosity, answered every one patiently.

But, as time went on, it was time for Dara to move away from his mother and to start his own adventure - 'a quest for knowledge' he called it.

He searched high and low, near and far for somewhere to start his life. Eventually, he found a wide oak tree in the garden of a magnificent school, which was called Priory. The children spent all day asking questions, gaining knowledge and learning. "This is the place for me!" Dara exclaimed.

Dara continued to ask questions but he realised that there were so many other ways to be curious too: travelling, experimenting, playing, trying new things and, his favourite way of all, reading!

Now, most squirrels like to squirrel away nuts and acorns for the winter hibernation. But not Dara! He squirrelled away books hoping that the pages would be enough to keep him warm in the colder months. Occasionally, the children would arrive at the library to discover that they couldn't find their reading book. Or, that the book they wanted to borrow most from their book corner had suddenly disappeared. Sometimes, the children even lost their own exercise books from their trays!

By the time that our story starts, Dara had so many books all organised in his home that his wide oak tree resembled a library. His friends - Kaspian, Nadine and Imara - often stopped by when they had a question that they needed answering. If Dara knew the answer, he would share it but, if he didn't, they would search through the books until they found the answer together.

One February evening, Kaspian arrived at Dara's oak. Kaspian had recently been taking every opportunity that presented itself and enjoyed joining the children in their lessons and clubs. This particular day had been jam-packed and Kaspian had a burning question that he needed the answer to.

*Come on in and open your mind,
There's no answer we can't find,
Question, read, travel or play,
Feed your curiosity every day.*

Kaspian joined in with the last line because this was always Dara's response when the other creatures had a question that they needed answering.

"What is it that you need to know, Young Kaspian?" Dara asked. The two animals were the same age but it made Dara feel wise to call the other creatures 'young'. They were used to it by now.

"Well, I was just wondering...What's the MOST important thing that you learn at school? I see the children learning new things every single day. But, what's the MOST important thing they need to learn?"

Dara was mystified. He had no idea how to answer Kaspian. Together they consulted the books that lined the inside of Dara's home. They flicked through encyclopaedias, dictionaries, teacher's notes, stories and children's work but there didn't seem to be an answer. Not a single book could provide the answer. What was the one most important thing that the children learnt at school? Kaspian was shocked and surprised to see Dara, who usually had all of the answers, looking so disappointed. "Come on," the otter announced, "Let's go and ask the children. They always help me when I don't know what to do."

The creatures took a deep breath and entered the building of education and happiness. They had a plan! They would write this very important question on the boards in every classroom and listen to the answers that the children gave, and this is exactly what they did. By 9 o'clock, the whole school was abuzz. The question had sparked debate in every classroom and, not only this, but it had spread throughout the entire school. The site staff and the office staff and the catering staff and even the head teacher had an opinion.

"It's geography," a Year 6 pupil assuredly announced in assembly.

"It's DT," A Year 4 girl told her friends on the playground, "that's how you learn to cook."

"But history teaches you about the past and science teaches you how to make a better future," A Year 4 boy explained wisely.

"The most important thing is to learn to read because then you can learn about everything else," a Year 3 child declared as he walked through the corridors. Dara thought back to his book-lined home and felt proud.

"It's maths," lots of Year 5 children seemed to think, "times tables, weighing and even how to pay your bills." Dara thought the children had a point. Although he was fairly sure the children weren't learning how to pay their bills at this age.

Some of the answers that the children gave weren't even subjects. Dara hadn't even considered the things that the children learned at school outside of their lessons.

"How to cross the road!"

"To be safe online!"

"To play nicely!"

"To be kind!"

"Penguins!" A Year 1 boy exclaimed. Dara was fairly sure that this couldn't be the answer. If the most important thing that children learned at school was about an animal then, surely, it would be a squirrel.

Dara sighed. He had hoped that the children would provide an answer but they seemed just as confused as he was. And then it hit him! The answer!

He looked around him at the activity that Kaspian's question had sparked: the thinking, the remembering, the sharing, the discussion, the debate, the agreeing and the disagreeing, the conversation, the celebration, the learning. That! That was the most important thing that the children learned at school: they learned to love learning, to never stop learning and all of that start by being curious.

With the answer in his mind and excitement in his heart, Dara ran back to the beautiful garden to tell his friends. It felt good to learn something new and it felt even better to share that learning with others.