

Genre Realistic Fiction

Essential Questions

How does your life change throughout the year? Do you look forward to a specific season? Why or why not?

A Year on Bowie Farm

*by Jen Russell
illustrated by Denny Bond*



Chapter 1: Winter

“Run out to the barn and get some eggs, would you?”

Elijah groaned, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, but he knew better than to argue with his mother. He pulled on his galoshes and a thick coat over his pajamas, and then he ducked out the door of the old farmhouse into the snow. Even though the Bowie Farm had a chicken coop, some of the hens preferred to nest in the barn. He heaved open the sliding wooden door, twice as tall as himself. The musty smell of hay poured out into the cold crispness of the December morning. Something else tumbled out, too: a wiggling, snuffling, yipping ball of canine fur.

“Mom!” he shouted, scooping up the puppy that was scrabbling about his ankles. “Mom!” Elijah ran back to the house, where his mother stood in the doorway, wrapped in a fleece robe and grinning.

“Can he sleep inside with me?” Elijah giggled as the pup wriggled out of his arms and plopped down into a snow drift, then hopped around in excited circles.

“Charlie’s a farm dog, son, not a house pet. He’ll sleep in the barn with the other animals, where he can keep an eye on them. That’s his job. We talked about this, remember?”

A worried frown crossed Elijah’s face. “But won’t he be cold?”

“Does he look cold to you?” The dog was romping blissfully through the snowy yard, panting with excitement.

Elijah laughed. “No.”

“Now how about those eggs, eh?”

Elijah ran back to the barn, whistling and calling as he went. “Charlie! C’mon boy, let’s go!” The dog tore after him in a poof of snowy fluff.

That morning, Charlie met his new barnyard family. Hester the barn cat scratched him solidly across his tender nose when he playfully nipped at the cat's heels, and one of the heifers nearly kicked him in the head.

Mr. Bowie clipped a retractable leash onto Charlie's collar and handed the other end to Elijah. "Until Charlie and the animals get used to each other, you'd better use this. It's your responsibility to train him. Are you ready for this?" Elijah nodded confidently as he took the leash.

"I can do it, Dad."

The farm lay quiet under the snow, but there was still much work to do. The morning passed quickly as Elijah did his chores. He fed the ducks and chickens and gathered more eggs, then helped clean out the poultry coops. Charlie dogged his every step.

"Stay!" Elijah commanded when the curious puppy got too close to the squawking birds. He gave the leash a gentle tug, and Charlie returned to his side. "Good boy!" He patted the dog's head proudly.

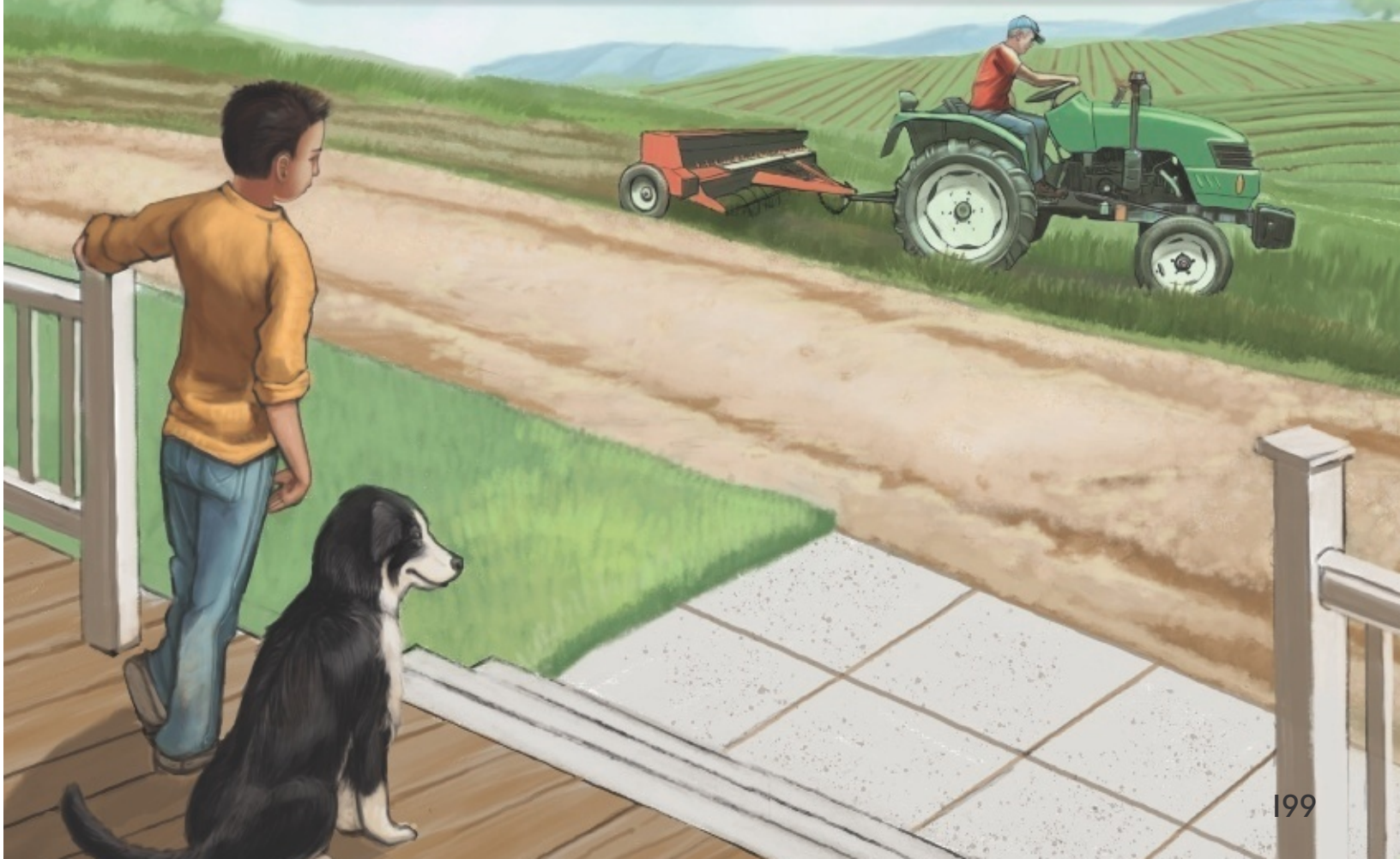


Chapter 2: Spring

A loud whistle pierced the air. “Charlie, come!” Elijah stood on the porch, gazing across the barnyard to the fields, where his father operated the tractor in wide stripes. The alfalfa they had planted last fall after the corn harvest was ready to reap. The nutrient-packed hay would help the cows produce more milk. Since Bowie Farm was a dairy farm, that was important.

The dog bounded across the barnyard and reared up on Elijah’s legs in excitement. Elijah rubbed him between the ears with a warm smile and murmured, “Good job, Charlie.” In a stronger voice, he commanded, “Lie down,” and the dog settled to the ground obediently, anxious to please. “Good boy! Now let’s go get the ducks.”

Elijah opened the door to the duck coop, and three honking mama ducks came waddling out, followed by a crowd of downy ducklings. Charlie gave a short bark and tried to lunge after the animals. At Elijah’s command of “Stop!” the dog pulled up short. “Good dog. Okay now, walk up!” Charlie calmly approached the flock, which was pecking through the thick grass for tasty bugs. He nudged them toward the pond with his nose and short, high barks. The ducks migrated toward the water, Charlie veering left and right to intercept wayward ducklings along the way.





“Come, Charlie. I’ve got things to do in the garden.” Elijah’s older sister Victoria was already there, turning over the compost pile with a pitchfork. She spread the rich, brown material over a plot of freshly-turned land. Soon, the whole family would spend their afternoons planting the seedlings that Victoria had been nurturing in the greenhouse for the last few weeks.

Elijah walked carefully through the rows of early lettuce, radishes, and cabbage, plucking out weeds by hand. Charlie sniffled at a budding head of cabbage along the edge of the garden. Elijah called out in a firm voice, “Leave it!” The dog backed away and sat on its haunches, wagging its tail.

A few weeks later, the veterinarian arrived early to check on the calves. It was 7:00 a.m., and the dairy operation was in full swing. Mr. Meredith poked his head into the milking parlor and shouted over the noise of the milking machines. “Sara?”

Elijah’s mother emerged with a delighted smile. “Dean! How good to see you. Elijah,” she called. “Can you ask Jeffrey to take over here while Mr. Meredith and I go inspect the calves?”

“Sure, mom!” Elijah ran to find the hired man, then followed his mother into the calving barn.

Mr. Meredith checked the calves and administered vaccinations as Mrs. Bowie petted each one tenderly.

“Stay, Charlie!” Elijah whispered, making sure the curious pup would obey before entering the barn. He took a clipboard down from a peg on the wall and grabbed a pen.

“Are they all getting shots today, Mom?” he asked. She nodded, and he wrote the date in a column next to each calf’s number.

“C’mon in for breakfast, Dean,” his mother invited as the veterinarian finished with the last calf. “Farm-fresh eggs!” she joked.

“Don’t mind if I do,” he grinned, patting Charlie on the head on the way out of the barn.



Chapter 3: Summer

Elijah ran a bandana across his sweaty forehead and stuffed it back into his pocket. The July sun beat down onto the lush garden, where all manner of vegetables were ripening most deliciously. It had taken more than two hours to pick through the tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, green beans, and zucchini. Baskets of produce were heaped along the side of the garden. Jeffrey was in the orchard, picking peaches, cherries, and plums by the hundred, while Victoria tackled the strawberry patch and blueberry bushes. The whole family would spend several days processing this bounty for freezing and canning.

Charlie, after chasing a rabbit away from the strawberry patch, flopped down on the grass. He panted in the heat, and gave a low whine.

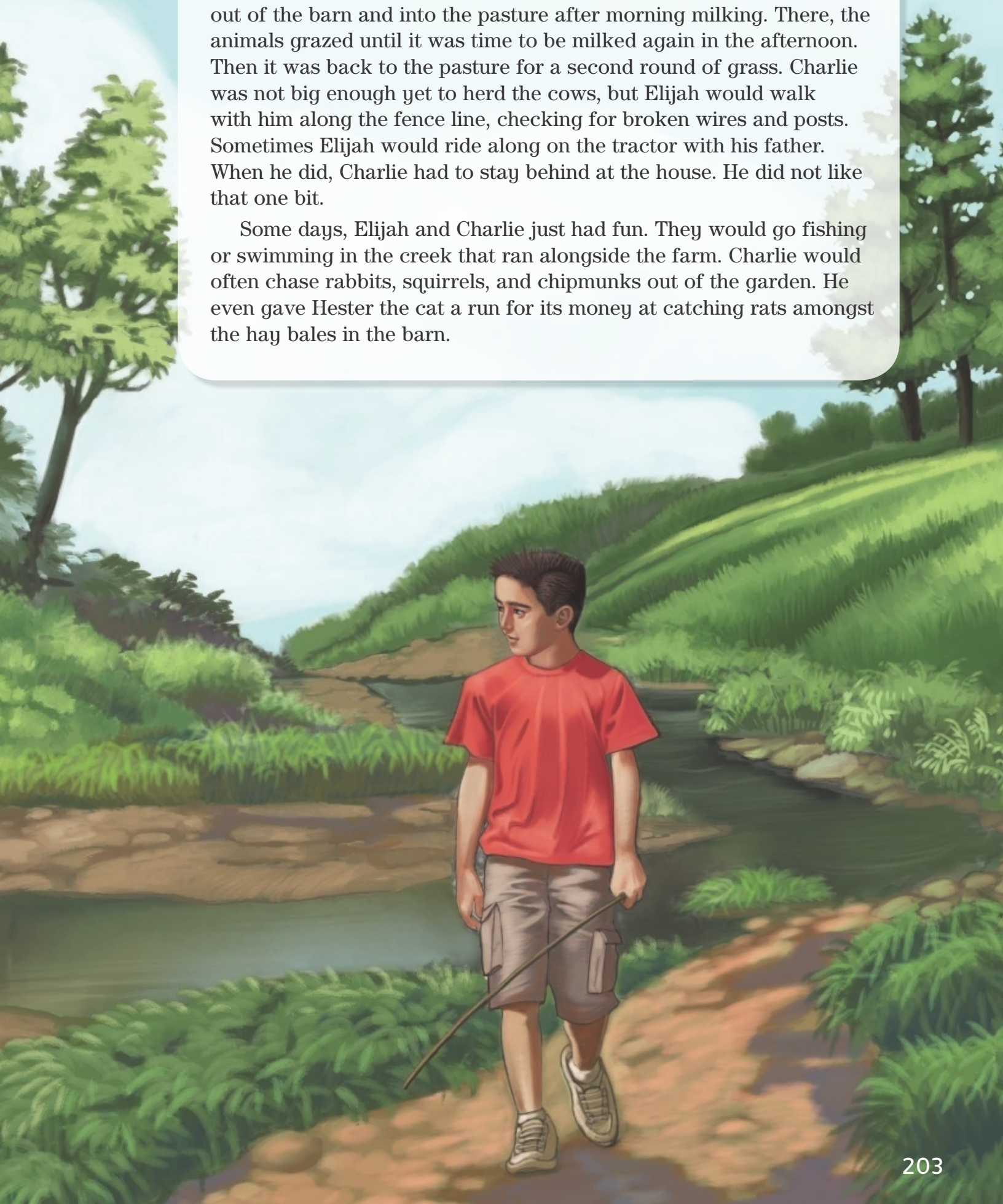
“I know, it’s hot, isn’t it, boy? Don’t worry, I’ve got an idea.”

Elijah hefted a basket of produce onto his hip and carried it into the kitchen, reemerging moments later to strip off his shirt and fling it onto the porch. He pulled a garden hose into the middle of the yard and cranked the water spigot. Cool droplets of water sputtered forth from the sprinkler at the end of the hose, and Charlie yipped in surprise. Elijah guffawed, then leaped over the streams of water, flapping his arms like some wild creature. He gave a loud whoop, and soon, Victoria and Jeffrey were running through the spray, too, laughing as Charlie dragged the sprinkler from spot to spot with his mouth. Even the chickens and ducks got in on the action, sauntering calmly through the mist.



Each day was much the same. Victoria and Elijah herded the cows out of the barn and into the pasture after morning milking. There, the animals grazed until it was time to be milked again in the afternoon. Then it was back to the pasture for a second round of grass. Charlie was not big enough yet to herd the cows, but Elijah would walk with him along the fence line, checking for broken wires and posts. Sometimes Elijah would ride along on the tractor with his father. When he did, Charlie had to stay behind at the house. He did not like that one bit.

Some days, Elijah and Charlie just had fun. They would go fishing or swimming in the creek that ran alongside the farm. Charlie would often chase rabbits, squirrels, and chipmunks out of the garden. He even gave Hester the cat a run for its money at catching rats amongst the hay bales in the barn.



Chapter 4: Autumn

Autumn was a flurry of activity. The garden overflowed with vegetables. In the orchard, fruits began to drop from the trees, heavy with sweetness. First, it was pears in August, followed by apples in September. Victoria and Elijah opened up the small produce stand at the end of the driveway by the road, where bushels of ripe fruit awaited passersby. Charlie was always the first to know when a car stopped. The eager pup would sprint toward the house, barking to get Elijah's attention.

Just as in spring and summer, the cows were milked and driven to pasture twice a day. Victoria and Elijah would approach the cows from opposite sides, walking in zigzags to herd the animals together and move them along. Charlie would take Victoria's place by next summer when he was fully grown. But for now, Elijah kept him close by. When Elijah zagged left, he would shout "Come bye!" and when he zagged right, it was "Away!" Next year, Charlie would follow these commands, flanking right and left to drive the cows in the direction Elijah wanted them to go.



October was just as busy. Mr. Bowie and Jeffrey were occupied with the corn harvest. After that was the planting of alfalfa for the following spring's hay. Mr. Meredith came back to check on the pregnant cows and tend to any animals that showed signs of illness. It was also time to cull the herd, a difficult task for the Bowie family. They loved all their cows, but there was not enough land to keep every cow that was born. Bull calves, along with cows that no longer produced milk, were loaded into a stock trailer and taken to auction. Mr. Bowie and Jeffrey also chose one cow to butcher. They stocked the chest freezer with enough meat to feed the family all winter long.

The pumpkin patch was populated with hundreds of bright orange globes. Every day, cars turned down the farmhouse lane at the "Pick Your Own Pumpkin" sign. Elijah and Charlie tended to the customers. The leaves on the trees around the farm changed from green to gold and orange and fiery red, and then finally to brown.



Chapter 5: Winter

Snow nipped at the heels of Bowie Farm, and there were new challenges for the family to face. As temperatures dipped, wild game became scarce, and predators grew bold around the farm. Many nights, Elijah awakened to Charlie sounding the alarm from the yard. Two chickens fell victim to nighttime hunters, one a fox and the other a raccoon. Mr. Bowie reinforced the chicken coop with sheets of metal screening and installed motion detector alarms around the outbuildings. No more chickens disappeared.

The cows were causing problems, too. One morning, a heifer wandered into the orchard. It chewed the bark off several tree trunks before it was discovered. A week later, a calf went missing in the pasture. Charlie found it stuck in a bank of snow, bawling unhappily. Elijah and his mother rescued the animal, and spent the afternoon caring for it in the barn. They dried the calf with hair dryers, wrapped it in an electric blanket, and nursed it with a bottle. Luckily, there was no frostbite, and the calf recovered quickly.





Everyone stayed busy as the winter winds blew. Jeffrey and Mr. Bowie pruned the orchard, culling dead tree branches and cutting back overgrowth. Mrs. Bowie spent several days working through the end-of-year paperwork. She also ordered seeds for next year's garden. Victoria cared for the spinach, lettuce, and herbs that would grow throughout the winter in the greenhouse.

The cows were let out to pasture most days unless the weather was truly bitter. Elijah and Victoria set out extra grain and hay. The extra feed would help the cows produce more body heat against the cold. Some of the cows were still milked twice a day, but others were not. The pregnant cows went "on vacation" from milking for two months before giving birth. The chickens and ducks still required daily care, too. And as usual, every morning, Elijah's mother sent him out to gather fresh eggs.



Sunday dinner was always a sit-down meal for the Bowies. It was the one time of the week that everyone was in the same place at the same time. There was always a lot to talk about, from the week gone by to upcoming plans.

“So I’ve been thinking . . .” Elijah said to no one in particular as he spooned green beans onto his plate.

His father raised one eyebrow and passed the platter of roast chicken to Victoria. “Oh? What have you been thinking about?”

“Charlie. He’s been a lot of help this year, hasn’t he? Next year, he’ll be able to do even more. He’s going to be one busy dog.”

Mr. Bowie smiled slowly and shook his head in amusement. “I know what you’re getting at, Elijah. Do you really think we need another dog?”

“Do we have to need another dog to get another dog? I mean, isn’t it enough just to want another dog?”

His mother laughed. “He has a point, Tom.”

“If one dog is good, two dogs are better!” Victoria chimed in with a grin.

“Well . . .” the father drawled, “I guess I know when I’m outnumbered.”

A week later, Mr. Bowie pulled the pick-up truck to a halt in the barnyard. The door swung open, and three very wound-up creatures burst out: Elijah, Charlie, and Wilma, the newest addition to the family. Charlie spun in circles in the snow, yipping excitedly and nipping at the puppy's heels. The two took off across the yard, Charlie leading the way. Elijah and his father laughed, their breath forming little clouds in the air.

The dogs came streaking back, nearly bowling Elijah over as they pawed his legs and tried to lick his hands.

"That'll do!" His voice was firm, and right away, Charlie backed off and sat down on his haunches. Wilma, suddenly missing her companion, turned her head in confusion, then loped to the older dog's side and sat down in the same position.

Mr. Bowie grinned, laying a hand on Elijah's shoulder and giving it a squeeze. "Looks like Charlie already has a head start on training this one."

Their laughter drifted on the chilled morning air across the rolling hills of the valley.



Essential Questions

How do you feel about the different seasons? Do you enjoy some months, but dislike others?

Months

*by Christina Rossetti
illustrated by Ron Mazellan*

January cold desolate;
February all dripping wet;
March wind ranges;
April changes;
Birds sing in tune
 To flowers of May,
And sunny June
 Brings longest day;
In scorched July
The storm-clouds fly
Lightning-torn;
August bears corn,
September fruit;
In rough October
Earth must disrobe her;
Stars fall and shoot
In keen November;
And night is long
And cold is strong
In bleak December.

A painting of a winter scene. A small bird with dark and light feathers is perched on a dark, snow-laden tree branch. The background is a soft, pinkish-purple sky. In the foreground, there are snow-covered ground and some bare, thin branches with small white flowers or buds. The overall style is soft and painterly.

HOPE

*by Oliver Herford
illustrated by Ron Mazellan*

I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December,
A magical thing,
And sweet to remember:
“We are nearer to spring
Than we were in September.”
I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December.

You will answer the comprehension questions on these pages as a class.

Text Connections

1. Why do you think the family decides to get Charlie?
2. Why does Elijah think they should get another dog at the end of "A Year on Bowie Farm"? Describe two reasons he gives.
3. What is the effect of the repeated lines in "Hope"?
4. How do both "Months" and "A Year on Bowie Farm" use the passage of time?
5. What do you think is the most challenging part of running Bowie Farm? Why?
6. Describe a benefit of family members collaborating on a family farm like the one in "A Year on Bowie Farm."

Did You Know?

A single cow on a dairy farm typically produces between six and seven gallons of milk each day.



Write

Choose a season and write a series of descriptive images related to that season. Do not mention the season's name. Organize the images into a free-verse poem.

Look Closer

Keys to Comprehension

1. Describe a theme of "Hope," based on how the speaker reflects on a bird's song in the middle of a dark winter.
2. Compare and contrast Charlie's first interaction with farm animals in "A Year on Bowie Farm" with his interactions in the following fall and winter.

Writer's Craft

3. In the beginning of Chapter 5, how does the author use personification when describing the weather? What is the effect of this description?
4. How do the series of chapters fit together to provide the structure for "A Year on Bowie Farm"?

Concept Development

5. Analyze how the illustrations help show the tone of the poems "Months" and "Hope."
6. How do both "A Year on Bowie Farm" and "Chinook!" show the importance of years of experience when dealing with nature?



Read this Social Studies Connection. You will answer the questions as a class.

Text Feature

A **time line** is a graph that lists time events in sequential order.

Cattle in North America

It may seem as though cattle have always been a part of farming in North America, but six hundred years ago there were no cows on the continent. When Spanish people first began arriving in what is now Mexico, the native people of the Aztec Empire raised only a few animals as food. The other animals they ate were ones that they hunted.

Settlers that came with Christopher Columbus to the Antilles Islands in 1493 brought a few long-horned Iberian cattle. These cattle moved with later settlers onto the mainland. Some of these cattle became wild. For hundreds of years, wild longhorn cattle roamed in parts of the Americas, surviving on their own in the wilderness.

By introducing longhorn cattle, the Spanish brought huge changes to the native landscape. Grazing cattle disrupted lush native plant growth. This, in turn, affected native animals. It is hard to know what the ecosystems looked like before cattle, as they have been in the Americas for so long.

In the 1700s and 1800s, longhorn cattle were an important product in the United States. People used their hides to make boots and shoes. They also used tallow, made from beef fat, in candles and soaps. Free-ranging longhorns, driven by cowboys, were seen across the Western landscape.

In the late 1800s, however, things began to change. These types of cattle did not do well in the north, where it was too cold. Other cattle breeds matured more quickly. People's tastes in beef changed. Fences began to divide the rolling open ranges of the American West. Then a disease called "cattle fever" broke out across the country. The longhorns were immune to it, but the fever killed other breeds of cows. Many longhorn cattle were killed or quarantined.

By the 1920s, few longhorns were left in the United States. Most American farmers raised other breeds of cattle within fenced areas.



A time line of important events in the history of North American longhorn cattle

1. How did the first cattle in North America represent a global connection?
2. What were some consequences of European longhorn cattle coming to North America?
3. Based on your own perspective, what is one problem we face today that comes from global connectedness? How do you think we should handle it?



Go Digital

Research some different dog breeds used by farmers in the United States. Which breeds are the best at herding cattle, and how do they do this job?