

Shawn the Speedy Snail

By Michael Stahl



Shawn was a snail unlike any other snail in the ditch. All of the snails that Shawn knew were slow. They were slow to get food, slow to get water, slow to get anywhere. The snails of Shawn's ditch were so slow because they each had huge shells on their backs that they had to carry around. The shells were heavy, but they had to be because the shells were the snails' homes! Certainly, Shawn had a shell on his back too, just like all the others. He even named it "Shawn's Place." He was funny like that, and the snails enjoyed his sense of humor. What made Shawn so fast was that he was stronger than everyone else. Having his home on his back didn't bother him like it did the others in Shawn's ditch. The others would complain and sigh, so depressed that they had such a weight to carry on their shoulders and backs. Because Shawn was the strongest, and could carry his home with ease, he was also the fastest, making Shawn the speediest snail around.

From the time Shawn was a baby snail, he could beat any of the snails he knew in the ditch in a race. He grew up challenging each snail to a race, and he was undefeated. Shawn started using his speed for his benefit and his benefit only, though, which was something he would later regret. Anytime there was a leaf that fell to the ground, Shawn would race to it and eat until he got full before anyone else would get the chance. Shawn was always quicker to the roots, too, and he'd eat them right up. If it rained, and puddles of water formed at the bottom of the ditch, Shawn drank and drank all he needed, right in front of all his friends and family, who were slowly gathering at the pools. It was almost as if Shawn was showing off how strong and fast he was all the time. The other snails liked Shawn, but the way he used his speed was making them angry.

After some time, when the other snails became particularly hungry because Shawn was beating them to all the food, the snails in the ditch decided that enough was enough.

"Shawn! Stop eating so much before we can have our helping," cried Blaine.

"Yeah, Shawn! We know you're big and strong and fast," agreed Susan. "You don't have to keep reminding us about how slow we are," she added.

Shawn was a little upset about their remarks. “Well, maybe if you would exercise a little bit more, you could beat me to the food and the water!” he said.

“How can we become stronger if you keep beating us to our food?” replied Harvey.

“We all think it’s about time you found another ditch, one that you can have all to yourself,” said Blaine.

That hurt Shawn. He felt a knot in his heart. Slowly, as slowly as he’d ever crawled before, he left the ditch for another place to find food and water.

He knew that there was another ditch across the road that was completely empty of other snails. Shawn was the only one who knew that because he was the only one capable of getting across the road safely, with his speed and all.

A couple of weeks went by. Shawn missed his friends across the road, and he realized that his ditch had even more food than the other, much more than he’d ever need. He decided he’d pay them a visit. He waited by the side of the road for the closest car to pass. Once it did, he speedily crossed back over to his old ditch. What he found made him more upset than anything ever before.

“Shawn!” cried Blaine. “We need your help. There isn’t enough food in this ditch anymore. We’re too weak and too slow to find enough for all of us to eat.”

Shawn’s friends were starving. Even though they had asked him to leave the ditch, it was only because of his selfish actions. Shawn knew what the right thing to do would be.

One-by-one, Shawn lifted each of his snail friends up on top of Shawn’s Place and as fast as he could, which, for Shawn, was pretty fast, brought them over to the ditch on the other side of the road. They were all safe and sound, especially after Shawn raced around the ditch getting food and bringing it straight to his weaker friends. Shawn would never use his speed to show off again.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why is Shawn able to beat the other snails to the food and water?

- A Shawn is smarter and meaner than the other snails.
- B Shawn is friendlier and more loving than the other snails.
- C Shawn is stronger and faster than the other snails.
- D Shawn is smaller and slower than the other snails.

2. After Shawn returns to the first ditch, he discovers a problem. There is not enough food for the snails in the ditch. How does Shawn solve this problem?

- A Shawn carries the snails to another ditch where there is more food.
- B Shawn races to a fallen leaf before any of the other snails can get to it.
- C Shawn complains and sighs that he has to carry a big weight on his back.
- D Shawn drinks all the water he needs out of a puddle in the ditch.

3. Shawn uses his speed for his own benefit.

What evidence from the story supports this statement?

- A When Shawn crosses the road, he realizes that his new ditch has even more food than the one he left.
- B When Shawn returns to his old ditch for a visit, his friends tell him that there is not enough food anymore.
- C Whenever a leaf falls to the ground, Shawn races to eat it before anyone else has a chance to.
- D If the other snails exercised a little bit more, they might be able to get to the food and water faster.

4. Why do the other snails tell Shawn to find another ditch?

- A They are starving and need Shawn to help them find more to eat.
- B They are worried that Shawn will get hit by a passing car if he crosses the road.
- C They do not like Shawn showing off by beating them to all the food and water.
- D The snails enjoy Shawn's sense of humor and like that he has named his shell "Shawn's Place."

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A Being slower and weaker than those around you will make them want to get rid of you.
- B When facing a problem, sometimes the best solution is to wait until the problem goes away by itself.
- C Having a sense of humor is more important than treating others with kindness and respect.
- D Using your abilities to help others is better than using them to help just yourself.

6. Read the following sentence: "If it rained, and puddles of water formed at the bottom of the **ditch**, Shawn drank and drank all he needed, right in front of all his friends and family, who were slowly gathering at the pools."

What does the word "**ditch**" mean in the sentence above?

- A a shell carried on an animal's back
- B a hole in the ground
- C a race to get food
- D a new place to live

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

In the beginning of the story Shawn uses his speed to help himself get food; _____ he uses his speed to help get food for others.

- A in the end
- B in particular
- C especially
- D first

8. What does Shawn do after spending a couple of weeks in his new ditch?

9. Why does Shawn go back to his old ditch for a visit?

10. Why does Shawn decide never to use his speed to show off again? Explain your answer using evidence from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 960

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8. What does Shawn do after spending a couple of weeks in his new ditch?

Suggested answer: He goes back to his old ditch for a visit.

9. Why does Shawn go back to his old ditch for a visit?

Suggested answer: Shawn misses his friends. Students may also interpret the detail that Shawn "realized that his ditch had even more food than the other, much more than he'd ever need" as an indication that he was interested in sharing the food even before being asked for help.

10. Why does Shawn decide never to use his speed to show off again? Explain your answer using evidence from the passage.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by evidence from the passage. However, all answers should show an understanding of Shawn's realization that the company of other snails is more important to him than showing off his speed.