If You Ask Nicely

A story teaching polite requests

by Alex Case

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

Page by page version (with room for pictures)

When Billy was five and a half, he learnt to ask nicely. Before that, when he said “More cornflakes!” his parents always said

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“No way. We’ve told you a hundred times, if you are still hungry, you can have some fruit.”

But one day, when he said “Can I have some toast?” instead his parents said

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“I suppose so. What do you want on it?”

So the next day he tried “Can I have Chocoflakes instead of cornflakes?” His parents said

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“I’m afraid not. Chocoflakes are only for birthdays and Christmas.”

So when they went to the supermarket he changed it to

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“Could we buy Supersugarflakes?” and his father said

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“Well, okay. I guess at least they have vitamins in them”.

And when he worked out that “Could I eat my spaghetti with my hands?” wasn’t polite enough, he said

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“Could I possibly eat a sandwich in the sofa castle?” and his mother said

“I don’t see why not, but don’t make a mess.”

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

Now Billy was really getting good at asking politely, so he tried “Would you mind finishing off my homework for me?”, “I was wondering if I could possibly fly my radio controlled plane in the living room” and “If it’s not too much trouble, I was wondering if I could possibly shoot my fireworks from the balcony” and because he asked nicely, his parents said

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“Just this once”, “I guess that is okay” and “As long as you are careful”.

So the next morning Billy said “I’m sorry to disturb you when you are reading the newspaper but I was hoping it would be okay to ask whether it might be acceptable to have another bowl of cornflakes if it’s not too much trouble” and his parents replied

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

“Absolutely not. We’ve told you a thousand times, if you are still hungry, you can have an apple or a banana”.
THE END

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

If You Ask Nicely – A story teaching polite requests by Alex Case – 1 page version
When Billy was five and a half, he learnt to ask nicely. Before that, when he said “More cornflakes!” his parents always said

“No way. We’ve told you a hundred times, if you are still hungry, you can have some fruit.”

But one day, when he said “Can I have some toast?” instead his parents said

“I suppose so. What do you want on it?”

So the next day he tried “Can I have Chocoflakes instead of cornflakes?” His parents said

“I’m afraid not. Chocoflakes are only for birthdays and Christmas.”

So when they went to the supermarket he changed it to “Could we buy Supersugarflakes?” and his father said

“Well, okay. I guess at least they have vitamins in them”.

And when he worked out that “Could I eat my spaghetti with my hands?” wasn’t polite enough, he said “Could I possibly eat a sandwich in the sofa castle?” and his mother said

“I don’t see why not, but don’t make a mess.”

Now Billy was really getting good at asking politely, so he tried “Would you mind finishing off my homework for me?”, “I was wondering if I could possibly fly my radio controlled plane in the living room” and “If it’s not too much trouble, I was wondering if I could possibly shoot my fireworks from the balcony” and because he asked nicely, his parents said

“Just this once”, “I guess that is okay” and “As long as you are careful”.

So the next morning Billy said “I’m sorry to disturb you when you are reading the newspaper but I was hoping it would be okay to ask whether it might be acceptable to have another bowl of cornflakes if it’s not too much trouble” and his parents replied

“Absolutely not. We’ve told you a thousand times, if you are still hungry, you can have an apple or a banana”.
THE END

Suggested activities
While reading the story, you could ask them to guess the parents’ responses each time. After reading, you can:
- Get them to draw pictures for each page of the story
- Get them to brainstorm and rank language for requests, language for saying yes to requests and language for saying no to requests
- Act the story out
- Get them to roleplay similar conversations or write similar stories

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

Brainstorming stage
First of all without looking at the story, write language of requests in order of politeness and then positive and negative answers in the gaps below. Many answers not in the story are also possible.
Requests
Most polite

Least polite

Positive answers

Negative answers

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com

Mixed answers

Still without looking at the story for now, use the mixed answers below to help with the task above.

- Absolutely not.
- As long as you are careful.
- Can I…?
- Certainly not.
- Could I possibly…?
- Could we…?
- I don't see why not.
- I guess so.
- I guess that is okay.
- I suppose so.
- I was wondering if I could possibly…
- I would love to help, but…
- I'm afraid not.
- I'm sorry to disturb you when you are reading the newspaper but I was hoping it would be okay to ask whether it might be acceptable to…
- If it's not too much trouble, I was wondering if I could possibly…
- If it's not too much trouble, might I…?
- Just this once.
- No way.
- Not just now.
- Of course.
- Well, okay.
- Would you mind…?

Look at the story to start checking the phrases in there, then check all your answers together.

downloaded from https://tefltastic.com