

This is my unauthorized version of *The Little Red Hen* (Mary Mapes Dodge, 1874).
David Asai, 2021

The Little Red Hen

One fine spring day, the Little Red Hen had an idea. She thought that it would be a great improvement to the barnyard if they could add a new item to their menu. Instead of just the daily pecking at dried corn and munching hay, the citizens of the barnyard might enjoy having some freshly baked bread in their diet. “What an improvement that would be!” thought the Little Red Hen. “Bread will enable some barnyard citizens who cannot easily digest hay or dried corn to obtain important nourishment.”

And so the Little Red Hen asked the citizens of the barnyard to help her. “Who will help me till the soil and plant the seed?” “Who will help me weed the field and water the soil?” “Who will help me harvest the wheat and mill the grain?” “And who will help me bake the bread?”

The Little Red Hen asked the barnyard dog if he could help. “I really admire your spunk and all, but most of you always only had corn and hay to eat....and, of course, I get dog food anyway, so this doesn’t affect me. And let’s not forget that I’m a dog and we all know that you can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” he replied.

Next was the barnyard cow, the most senior citizen of the barnyard, who responded, “I don’t want to be part of this conversation because it sounds like you’re being critical of our current diet of dried corn and hay, and that makes me uncomfortable and feel guilty. I don’t want to be blamed for the fact that we didn’t try out this idea many years ago.”

The barnyard pig was next. “Well,” he said. “Miss Hen, you go right ahead and try out your nice little idea. Of course, I’m much too busy with all of my enormous responsibilities here so I can’t help....but I know you’ll do a good job.”

And finally the Billy Goat, who was the boss of the barnyard. “I want to support your work. I’ll arrange for you to be able to apply for a grant so that you can purchase some of the farming equipment you’re going to need.”

So....because no one was able to help, the Little Red Hen went ahead and learned how to grow the wheat, and mill the grain, and bake the bread. Along the way, she made some mistakes but learned from them and, in the end, the bread was good, and it was a great addition to the barnyard, just as the Little Red Hen predicted.

And so it came to pass that every year the Little Red Hen went about her tasks....she tilled the soil and planted the seeds, she weeded the field and watered the soil, she harvested the wheat and milled the grain, she baked the bread and everyone enjoyed eating the bread.

Then one spring, the Little Red Hen decided to retire. And because the dog and the cow and the pig and the goat and all the other citizens of the barnyard had not learned the skills of farming and milling and baking, because none of them had had the courage to change, because none of them had had the time to try new ideas, because none of them had had the willingness to share in the responsibility, the barnyard never again had freshly baked bread. The end.