

## SARAH AND THE NUMBER KNIGHTS

*They were just ordinary children. But then again, are any children just ordinary?*

“Was it really you, Sarah, who answered THE QUESTION?”

“People say so,” replied Sarah.

“Well, what exactly did you say at King Maximo’s feast?”

“I don’t actually remember?”

“Sarah, you always remember things just as people said them.”

“I know, but it was my first time serving in the Great Hall and I was terribly excited!” she insisted. “Not that people were eating much food. They couldn’t take their eyes off the knight who was speaking. I simply couldn’t imagine how any of the knights was greater than another, and the words just flew out of my mouth before I could stop them.”

“Well then, what did the knights say?” asked Peter.

“Yes, what did they say?” implored several others.

“I guess I could start with Sir Owen,” said Sarah, thinking back to the feast. “Sir Owen said was that whatever is greatest is One.

“But one is the smallest number,” Peter blurted out.

“Yes, but Sir Owen insisted it was the greatest. After all the sky, the sun, the moon, the earth, there’s only one of each. It seemed as though no one had ever thought of that before. Yet now it seems obvious. Then he told how he had asked a boy he had encountered what he thought was the greatest number. ‘A thousand,’ the boy had answered. ‘A thousand and one,’ Sir Owen then replied. ‘There is always another one we can add, isn’t there’. I never had thought about that, either. Then the boy asked Sir Owen a question. He said, ‘You know how when you look toward the sun and blink your eye that you see a ray of sunlight? ‘Does everyone have their own ray of light, Sir Knight?’ ‘Well, yes, I certainly believe so,’ Sir Owen had replied. Then Sir Owen said that we are each of us an

individual, no one else is exactly like us. Yet, at the same time, we are the same in so many ways. Together we are all One.

King Maximo and the Number Knights thought that it was so grand what Sir Owen had said. Then Jocomo jumped up and tossed his golden ball way up into the air and caught it and recited:

ONE IS THE SUN

ONE IS THE SKY

ONE IS THE WORLD

AND ONE AM I

The children found themselves clapping, for Sarah, for Jocomo, for Sir Owen, they didn't even know.

Without realizing it the children had formed a circle around Sarah. Sarah bent over and picked up a ball, a pig bladder stuffed with straw that they had been kicking around when she'd walked past. "I have an idea. Here, you be # 1," said Sarah tossing the ball to W. "And you be #2. Now # 3, 4, 5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12. There. I'll be the Sun in the Middle. Now I'm going to toss up the ball and I'll call a number. If it's your number then run after it. The rest of you run as far from the ball as you can until you hear the catcher shout STOP. Now, the catcher must roll the ball at someone close by. If it hits her then she gets a point against her. After each roll everyone has to get back into the circle before I count to three slowly. Ready. Number 4...' They played several times but then Sarah had to go. " King Maximo is entertaining Duke so and so," she said.

Next day they waited for Sarah to come. W. tossed a round rock into the air and each time recited one line from Jocomo's verse, ending with a bow. "That's great," D. said , "but somebody could get hurt with that rock". "

Alright,' I'll say it like this," he said, passing the rock from left hand to right, and then around his back, keeping rhythm to the verse. By the time they'd said good bye they could all recite Joccomo's verse, and even bow together at the end as they imagined he would.

Each day they waited for Sarah, but she didn't come. That didn't stop them. "Let's play Sun In the Middle," Andrew cried out. And so they did, over and over.

"Let's make our circle grow like a bubble," said Rosemary. "Now smaller, but be careful. Keep it round."

"Hey, let's move the circle in the direction of the castle," called Peter."

"Now let's move it over toward the big boulder," called Jessica.

" Now let's do the same thing and pass the ball around the circle at the same time," suggested Mary, and off they went. As they were doing this a knight came riding by, his shield a brilliant yellow sun on a blue background. The children stopped what they were doing and ran over.

"Children, I am very pleased to see you working this way," said the knight.

"We're not working, we're playing," answered Elizabeth merrily.

Sir Owen chuckled.

The circle is the shape of Oneness. All that is greatest is One."

"Oh yes, we know" they cried. Sarah told us everything you said."

"Sarah?"

"Yes, Sarah," S. cried out. The one who answered THE QUESTION!"

Sir Owen looked thoughtful for a moment, and then he smiled. "Oh, Sarah."

"Boys and girls, I want to show you something. Let's go over to that bare patch.

"Are you Sir Owen?" asked Rosemary suddenly as they walked.

"Yes, I am," the knight replied.

“It’s Sir Owen!” Rosemary shouted excitedly to her friends.

Sir Owen took out two rings and tied a thin rope to each of them. Then he picked up a thick, straight stick, and also a smaller one. “There,” he said, “now watch. I’m going to hold the long stick straight. Now you,” he said pointing to Andrew, put the short stick through the other ring and stretch the rope. Now keep it taut and walk around the pole.”

“There,” he said, “what do we have?”

“A circle,” they cried out as one.

“Yes, a nearly perfect circle. Good-bye boys and girls, and remember always keep your circles round.”

The children’s eyes silently followed the knight as he mounted his horse and rode off.

And did the children practice. There was something inside them that wanted to make the circles as round as possible. Sir Owen had left them the rope and the rings, but they somehow preferred drawing the circles freehand. One day Daniel came to the meadow all excited. “I just found this bird’s nest in the bramble bush.” First he scribbled the bramble bush with a stick and then he made a circle over and over inside of it. It was more and more round the more he went around. Of course everyone now had to try the bird’s nest.

Jessica found she couldn’t get the picture on Sir Owen’s shield out of her mind. At last she tried drawing it with her stick. How beautiful it looked. Most of the others tried it too.

“Yours looks just like Sir Owen’s,” said Mary. “Mine doesn’t. How did you do it?”

“Well, I started top, bottom, left, right. Then I put two evenly spaced in each part.”

Knowing this seemed to make everyone’s look better, this and practice.

One day they made a big circle with the rope and placed the sun's rays as evenly spaced as they could.

It had been two weeks since Sarah had come home from the castle and the children watched for her each day. They played Sun in the Middle and practiced making circles in the dirt. The more they practiced, the more perfect their circles became. They had also begun collecting round things, apples, plums, pumpkins, and round stones from the stream. Raymond came one day molding clay from the stream bank into a ball, and next day Barbara brought some dough her mother had spared for her. The game came to be called 'Bring-a-Thing'.

## TWO

It was late in the day. Sarah was trudging home from the castle and the children spied her. The children had guessed right and were hiding behind the bushes and trees when, finally, Rosemary, the youngest of them could stand it no longer and cried out, 'Sarah! Where have you been?' Sarah was startled at first, but as she was encircled by her friends, she smiled at them and answered, "I've had to work very hard at the castle. I've had no time for play."

"Wanna play?" called Peter. "Here," he said, tossing her an apple. She tossed it back to him as he walked backwards keeping his eyes on her. Sarah, meanwhile was thinking, "This is not just an apple, this is a 'sphere', that's what Sir Owen would call it. I like that word." So, back and forth it went till soon the other children were doing the same with apples or round stones. Some began reciting, "One-Two, buckle my shoe, Three-Four, shut the door, Five-Six, pick up sticks, Seven-Eight, lay them straight, Nine-Ten, a big fat hen".

"Now this reminds me of Sir Twain!" remarked Sarah.

"Yes, yes, what did he say?" inquired Mary.

"He said that two is the greatest number, because everything has its opposite: Day and Night, Left and Right, In and Out," ... "Whisper and Shout," called Robin.

"Yes and No, here we go," added Elizabeth.

“Hey, hey,” said Hugh, who was the son of a woodcutter. “To and fro/The saw does go. I’m thinking of a new kind of saw that my father showed me. Two people have to work together to use it, but when they do they can saw a huge log in two much easier than a man with an axe. Here’s how they do it,” he said, showing them how two people could hold each other’s thumbs and imitate sawing back and forth. All the children, of course, had to try this.

“Sarah, Sarah,” cried Rosemary excitedly, “did Sir Twain really insult Sir Owen’s nose as people are saying.”

“No, no,” laughed Sarah, “he was just being dramatic. He was trying to show that two is also in our bodies: Our nose has two nostrils, we have two hands, two feet, two eyes, two ears. But,” she said after pausing, “the two do actually work together to do one thing. Just like the two knitting needles make one fabric, or our teeth work together to chew our food, or the grindstones grind the grain at the mill.”

“Not only that,” added Peter, “our legs work together when we walk, and our eyes see together, if you know what I mean. I’ve been thinking about it a lot.”

“Yes, yes, that’s it!” cried Rosemary.

“Look, look, said Raymond, his eyes growing wide. He was pointing to the darkening sky suddenly turned pink and orange and purple. The small band became quiet as they watched the glowing colors.

Sarah found herself whispering,

TWO ARE MY EYES

EARS HANDS AND FEET

DARK AND LIGHT

AT SUNSET MEET.

“Come on, everyone,” she called, taking Rosemary’s hand, “we need to get home before dark!”

Together they ran down the road toward the sun setting beyond the town.

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Next day they were back in the meadow. "Listen to this, called Robin. "Up and down/Sky and ground."

"That's good," responded Rosemary. "I have one, too. It goes 'Night and day/Work and play'."

"That's really good, too!" said Robin. "

"How's this? Happy/Sad/Good and bad," said Mary.

"Here's mine," said Peter, "Hill and valley/Street and alley,"

"Win or lose/Pick and choose," said Daniel.

"I and you/you and I/Crust and filling make a pie," said Elizabeth.

"Now that takes the cake!" cried out Jessica.

"What about Bring-aThing?" asked Hugh, who was getting dizzy from all the rhymes.

"I brought this coin," said Jack.

"How's that 'two'?" Hugh questioned.

"Well, the coin has two sides, heads and tails."

"Oh," said Hugh, "I get it."

"Well, my mother says there are two sides to every story. That's almost the same thing, isn't it."

The children hadn't forgotten about their circle, or Sir Owen. They wanted to 'keep it in shape' they said. In fact, they had gotten so good that they could keep the circle turning while they moved it around the meadow. They were concentrating so hard that they were not aware that someone had ridden up.

“Hold it there! he cried, jumping down from the saddle. “I can’t believe my eyes! Just move your circle a little closer to the one on the ground. That’s it. Perfect! Now you, come here, son,” he shouted, pointing to Nick. “Yes, you. What do you see?”

“Well, I see two circles,” said Nick uncertainly.

“Yes, and...”

“And one circle is taking a bite out of the other.” Sir Twain then called Mary over and asked her, “And what do you see?”

“I see that both circles are taking a bite out of the other.”

“Yes, it does look that way. And what do you see?” he asked, calling Daniel over.

“Strange as it seems, it looks like there’s an almond in the middle.”

The children laughed. Daniel looked uncomfortable.

“Children, don’t laugh until you’ve seen it. It has often looked like an almond to me, too.”

“Well, how can we see it if we’re in the circle?” asked Andrew.

“There is a way you can see it for yourselves, but I’m going to leave that up to you. Actually, I was on an important errand when what you were doing caught my eye.”

The children were sad to see Sir Twain going. He hefted his shield and climbed onto his horse. Then, for the first time, the children could see the symbol on it.

“What is that?” gasped Daniel. “There’s something about it that is so mysterious.”

“Sir Twain, please tell us the story of your shield before you go,” pleaded Elizabeth.

“Well, that is an ancient symbol I came upon on my adventures. It shows opposites, but it also shows that opposites are not always so far apart. Just to make sure they have put a bit of the one into the other.”

The children felt that the sign was burning itself into their minds. They didn't think they would ever forget it.

“Good-bye, children, called out Sir Twain, waving, as he rode off.

The children were quiet for some time, some looking up at the clouds, others staring at the ground. Finally, Mary spoke. “Didn't Sir Twain leave it up to us to figure something out about the two circles?”

“Yes, he did,” seconded Andrew. “Let's take up his challenge as good knights would.” They stood up and headed over to their circle. “Hey, look,” he said, “the barrel hoop my father gave us to roll.” Seizing it excitedly, Andrew took the hoop, laid it on the ground, and twisted it back and forth until he had etched a perfect circle in the dirt. Then, observing carefully, he laid it again on the ground, taking the exact right sized bite out of the first, before etching the second circle.

With practice several of them could draw the two overlapping circles with a stick. Others used the hoops. For several days they found themselves doodling in the dirt, connecting points, following curves and shading areas. (Illust)

One day when they had all arrived Mary said, “You know I haven't been able to get Sir Twain's shield out of my mind.”

“Me neither,” added Anne

Before long they'd picked up sticks and were busy drawing their best circles. Some could actually copy the picture they had in their minds. Others couldn't.

“Now what do we do?” asked Nick, somewhat bewildered. He looked around and saw Jessica carefully drawing an S-curve in her circle. “I think I've got it,” she said. “What I did was start at the top, carve out just a little at first, make sure my S curved right through the center, and finished at the bottom. The secret is to really look at what you are copying and to notice things about it. It also helps to keep

checking to make sure both sides are oppositely the same, if you know what I mean. Lastly, practice makes perfect. I already drew this at home several times. It was the only way to get it out of my mind.”

### THREE

The children were growing impatient. If they were going to meet with Sarah they were going to have to waylay her again. They had all gotten up before dawn and were waiting for her when she walked by. This time she didn't smile when they surrounded her because she was in a hurry to get to the castle.

“Please, Sarah”, cried Elizabeth, “just tell us something about the next Number Knight. We can't wait any longer.” Sarah slowed her pace, but kept walking.

“Alright then, The Three Bears, a milking stool and these,” she said at last, picking up three sticks and thrusting them toward Andrew. “Triangles, three sides and three angles, that's what Sir Thrice spoke about. It's as simple as one, two, three.” With that Sarah quickened her pace and the children didn't follow.

Before long, they had all picked up sticks which the last week's storm had provided. “Now let's see,” said Andrew, never one to turn down a challenge, “if a triangle has three sides, then it also has three corners, that's obvious. See.”

“Not corners,” said Elizabeth, who was also fitting her sticks together, Sarah said ‘angles’.

“Alright, angles,” replied Andrew. “Same thing.”

“What's so special about triangles?” asked Nick.

“Isn't that what we're trying to find out? Isn't that the challenge Sarah gave us?” shot back Mary.

The children were all busy fitting the sticks together. “Wow, said Rosemary, “look at all the different triangles.”

“Yes,” agreed Mary, “the only thing that’s the same is that they all have three sides and three angles.”

“They kind of look like little sheep pens,” said Nick. “I wonder why they don’t make the pens this shape?” he wondered.

“I’ll tell you why,” answered Will, putting some stones inside, “the sheep would get stuck in the corners.”

“What good are triangles then, anyway?” thought Nick as they walked home at sunset.

“Look what my mother gave me today,” said Rosemary, excitedly. “Catch.” Elizabeth caught it, but, as sometimes happens with balls of string, the end flew loose like a tail, and Rosemary picked it up. Meanwhile Robin, ever mischievous, took the middle of the string and pulled on it.

“Stop it, you scamp,” cried Rosemary.

“No, wait,” said Elizabeth, “ look at what he’s done, he’s almost made a triangle. Just toss the ball back to me.” Everyone looked up. Robin, meanwhile, kept moving around, and each time he moved, a new triangle was made.

“I have an idea,” announced Will. “ let’s have each of us stand at one point on the circle. Then we can toss the string to three points, and see which triangle we come up with.”

All agreed and found a place on the circle. A great number of triangles appeared, and the children noticed many things. On most of them the lines were of different lengths.

“This one looks like two legs walking,” said Daniel. “Two of the sides are the same length. And both the angles seem to be the same, too. I would bet on it.”

“One of the things I think I noticed time and again,” stated Raymond, “is that when one angle is small, it gives the others a chance to be bigger. Is that so, or am I imagining it.”

“No, I think you have something there,” agreed Mary.

The game went on for quite a while with children noticing different things. Suddenly Anne said excitedly, “Stop, stop. There’s something about this triangle that’s special. I think I know what it is...”

“All the sides are the same, and all the angles, too,” Will interrupted. Anne looked at him, crossly at first. Then she smiled. “Yes, some things are plain to see, but we don’t always notice. It is really like the most perfect triangle,” offered Anne. “Beautiful, even.”

Day was growing short, and the shadows growing long. “Let’s not to be late for dinner,” said Raymond. Off they went down the road toward the town.

Next day they were back as usual. They were fascinated by the “beautiful triangle” and were busy drawing it in the dirt circle.

Suddenly, Nick went to the top of the circle and walked to the three points that had made the ‘beautiful triangle’. “It’s easy,” he said to himself, “because they’re four spaces apart.” After he had done this a few times, the others could see the pattern and they wanted to try. It was as if they could feel it in their bones. They had gone to the three points so much that they had worn a triangle in the dirt. Rosemary decided to count her steps. “One, two, three, four, FIVE; six, seven, eight, nine, TEN; eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, FIFTEEN.

Now Andrew said, “I’m going to do it by threes. After all there are three sides to a triangle. Stretching out his steps, nearly to leaps, he counted “one, two Three, four, five SIX, seven, eight, NINE.”

Before long, they had all taken up the challenge and were trying with different numbers to take an equal number of steps to get “around” the triangle.

The next day they found that they could make triangles anywhere by walking the shape, and so long as the steps were the same size and there was the same number of them they would form the “beautiful triangle”.

Finally, Andrew etched the ‘beautiful triangle’ into the Great Circle with a stick.

Whenever the children got together, Barbara usually would braid another girl’s hair. “It takes three tresses of hair to make a braid,” it’s so obvious, but I never noticed before. Just thinking about three makes me notice things.”

“Well, that’s a nice thing to bring, braiding,” said Mary. We have completely forgotten about Bring a Thing,” said Nick.

“I haven’t!” said Rosemary, producing a trillium flower from her hair.”

“Nor have I,” said Hugh, “they were just too heavy to bring. I’ve been stacking the biggest logs my father has cut with two on the bottom and one on top. Like this,” he said, demonstrating with sticks.

“I see what you mean,” said Will.

“I didn’t forget, either,” said Nick. “I noticed that the finest houses in the village have triangles in their roofs. I couldn’t bring the houses, but I think you know what I mean,” he said drawing in the dirt.

“And I was talking with my father about triangles, said Raymond. “As you know he’s a mason. He said that the archways in the town wall, and even in the church, are triangles, though somewhat curved.”

“And look what we’re standing on every day,” said Elizabeth, plucking a three-leafed clover. “It even has the shape of number 3 in it. See, around the edge?”

And there it was.

“And I’ve been noticing how the soldiers stack their practice spears. First they stack three, and that allows them to stand up. Then they can add many more,” said Daniel.

“You mean like this,” said Robin, quickly putting three sticks into a tent shape.

“Just like that,” said Raymond.

“The milking stool!” exclaimed Jessica. “It reminds me of the milking stool Sarah mentioned! Three makes thing stand firmly. Even if the milking shed floor is bumpy, the milking stool doesn’t wobble.”

“Didn’t Sarah also mention The Three Bears,” Anne questioned. “What did she mean by that?”

“Well, let’s see,” pondered Mary. “There was Papa Bear, Mama Bear and Baby Bear. There was a big bowl, a middle-sized bowl, and a small bowl. The porridge was either too hot, too cold, or just right.”

“And there were three chairs, too, a high one, a middle-sized one and a low one. As for the beds, one was hard, one soft and one just right,” added Robin.

“And stories always have a beginning, a middle and an end, like just like so many things, come to think of it,” said Anne.

“There’s yesterday, today and tomorrow,” Raymond contributed to a discussion that was becoming quite exciting.

“Good, better, best,” said Nick.

Easy, easier and easiest,” said Peter, smiling.

“Late, later, latest possible time to get home before dark. Let’s get going,” said Jessica, emphatically.

Each day seemed to add more discoveries.

“First, second, third,” The children were counting as they tossed the string in the form of the ‘beautiful triangle when a knight rode up. Dismounting, he approached their circle. “I see you are working with triangles,” the knight observed, taking in the scene.

“Yes, Sarah has told us about what Sir Thrice spoke of on the night of the feast, said Elizabeth proudly.

“Oh, Sarah,” the knight replied, smiling.” I’ve heard a lot about her, and about you children, too, for that matter. Both Sir Owen and Sir Twain spoke to me of their encounters with you.

“Are you Sir Thrice, by any chance?” Mary ventured to ask.

“Why, yes I am, as you can see,” he said, gesturing to his shield.

“Now, allow me,” he said, stepping over to the large triangle still visible in the dirt circle. “Tell me when my sword hovers over the middle of this side,” he said.

“There,” the children chorused.

“Exactly,” said Sir Thrice, making a mark.

“Now for this line,” he said moving his sword. Again, they were right on.

“And for the third...”

“There.”

“Now watch,” said the knight, skillfully connecting the three points.

He had just completed the last line, when the band of children seemed to hold their breath.

“The beautiful triangle is now four beautiful triangles!” exclaimed Robin, jumping up and down.

“Hooray for Sir Thrice,” the children shouted.

“Thank you, children.

“Oh, dear Sir Thrice,” begged Mary, “Please show us something else before you go.”

“You know, I’ve been thinking of what Sarah said about how much we all depend on each other,” the knight said. When Sir Thrice began to erase the triangle with his boot, Hugh and Raymond went to fetch the branch broom they used as an eraser. Soon the dirt circle was swept clean.

“Sir Twain told me that he showed you the almond. Well, who can make that?” Jessica jumped up, etched one circle with the hoop and then took the bite out of it. “Good,” said the knight, obviously pleased. “Now watch this, first I draw a line straight across the widest part of the almond.”

“Sir Thrice,” questioned Nick, “am I mistaken, or does the line connect the centers of the two rings? It looks like it does to me.”

“Precisely. And now see how I go to the top where the two circles cross, and pass right through those two centers until I have these legs standing on the two circles.”

“Yes, yes,” cried out Rosemary, “and you have cut the circles in half! It is plain to see.”

“And look,” added Daniel, “It looks just like the letter A.

“Yes it does,” said Sir Thrice, “but we’re not done.”

“I know,” said Robin, “It wants to be a triangle, a “beautiful triangle’.”

“Precisely,” said the knight, deftly drawing the line between the two legs. “It makes it all connected and strong, we might say. But we’re still not quite done, are we.”

The children were making all kinds of guesses in their minds.

“It’s something inside the triangle, I know it is,” mumbled Raymond, who’d been watching very carefully.

“Yes,” called Mary, “I can see it. It wants to be your four-in-one triangle.”

“Precisely,” said Sir Thrice. “I must go now. I’m off to pay a visit to my friend, Thomas the Tinker.”

“Thomas the tinker” said Elizabeth. “That’s my father.”

Next day, they were all practicing the four-in-one triangle in the dirt circle, and doing very well indeed. Ever since Sarah had given him the three sticks, Andrew had been working with them. One day he had challenged himself to lash together a beautiful triangle. Before long he had quite a stack of triangles, all the same size. Then, laying one down, he followed by placing one carefully at each of the three sides.

“The four-in-one,” the children gasped. “Hooray for Andrew!”