

# Thomas and the Runaway Hamster



**I**T WAS FRIDAY AFTERNOON and time to choose someone to look after Hector, the class hamster, for the weekend. Thomas crossed his fingers as the teacher, Mrs. Cook, checked the list of students' names. Thomas loved Hector and wanted more than anything to take him home. Mrs. Cook looked up from her list. "Thomas," she said.

Thomas was so excited. "Thank you, Mrs. Cook," he said with a smile as his teacher gave him the hamster cage. He carefully carried Hector to the school gate. Thomas's mother was waiting there. "Mom, look what I have!" he said. He waved the cage in front of her.

“Careful,” said Thomas’s mother. “You don’t want to frighten him.” She carried Thomas’s book bag and Thomas carried Hector. When they arrived home, Thomas went up to his bedroom and put the cage on his desk.

Thomas spent his whole weekend looking after Hector. He cleaned out his cage and fed him and played with him.



On Sunday night, Thomas went upstairs to play with him one last time. But when Thomas looked in the cage, Hector was gone!



Thomas saw that the door to Hector's cage was open. He called his mother and together they searched for Hector. They looked under the beds and in all the closets and Thomas even looked in the garden shed!

Finally, Thomas saw Hector on the kitchen counter. He tried to grab Hector, but he ran across the counter and knocked over a glass of milk. He jumped off the counter, ran between Thomas's legs and disappeared.

Later that night, after Thomas went to bed, his mom continued looking for the hamster. She saw him twice more, but both times when she tried to catch him, Hector ran!

▶ **Find the words in the text that have the same meaning as the words and phrases below.**

a. gave food to    b. scare    c. shook    d. storage place

Thomas was extremely upset on Monday morning. He was worried about going to school and telling his teacher and the rest of the class that Hector was lost.

“Mom, please can I stay home?” Thomas cried.

“No, Thomas,” his mother replied. “You have to tell Mrs. Cook what happened. Just tell her you’re sorry. She’ll understand it was an accident.”

Thomas went to school early, to find Mrs. Cook and tell her about Hector.



She was sitting at her desk in the classroom. "Come in," she said with a smile when she saw Thomas at the door.



"I have something to tell you," he said in a quiet voice. He stood in front of Mrs. Cook and put his hands in his pockets. Thomas was nervous. He looked at his feet. After a few moments' silence, Mrs. Cook touched Thomas gently on the shoulder.

"What's the matter, Thomas?" she asked.

"I'm so sorry, but Hector ran away," Thomas said quickly. He was still looking at the ground, trying not to cry. "It was an accident. I went to play with him and the cage was empty. We looked everywhere, but we can't find him."



“Thank you for being brave enough to come and confess,” Mrs. Cook said kindly.

“Aren’t you angry with me?” Thomas asked, surprised.

“You didn’t lose Hector on purpose, did you?” said Mrs. Cook with a smile. “It was an accident and you came straight here to apologize—of course I’m not angry.”

“Really?” asked Thomas.

“Really,” said Mrs. Cook. “And I lost Hector once. He likes to go on adventures sometimes. He’ll come back.”

**▶ Answer the questions.**

1. Why doesn’t Thomas want to go to school?

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2. Why isn’t Mrs. Cook angry with Thomas?

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Thomas felt much better, but he had another concern. "I'm really worried about the other kids," he said. "What if they all hate me for losing Hector?"

"They won't hate you," said Mrs. Cook. "But if you like, we can tell them together."

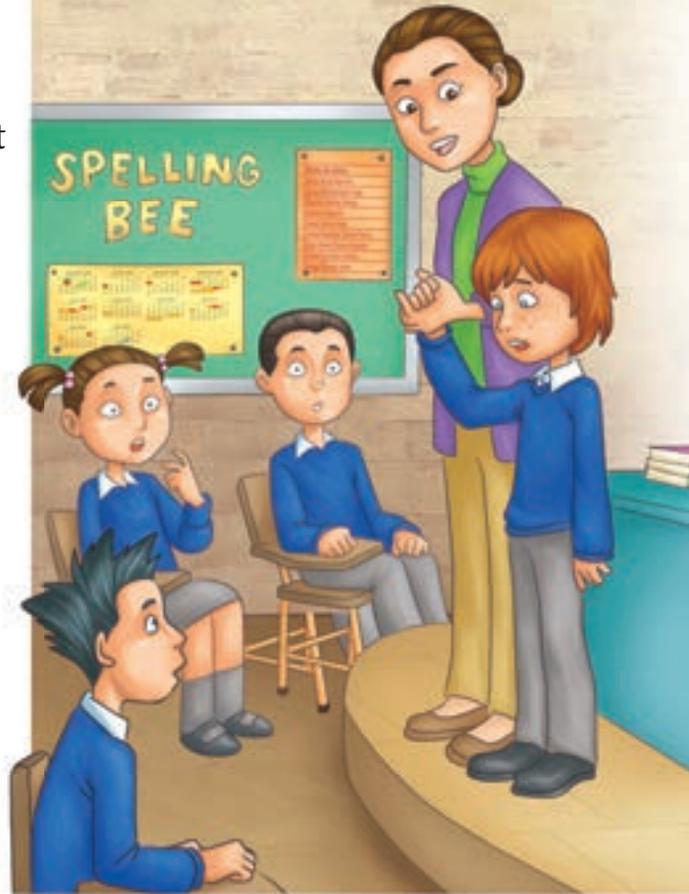
"Yes, please," said Thomas. He decided he liked Mrs. Cook. She was a very kind teacher. Thomas was still nervous about telling the class, but he could do it with Mrs. Cook's help.



The bell rang for the start of class and Thomas's stomach was in a knot as his classmates came in. He held Mrs. Cook's hand tightly. He didn't want to look at any of his classmates because he felt so guilty about losing Hector. He hoped they would still want to be his friends.

After all of the kids sat down in their seats, Mrs. Cook and Thomas stood up.

"Thomas has something to tell you," said Mrs. Cook, "and he is very brave to be so honest."



- ▶ Find and underline the phrases in the text that show Thomas was upset or nervous.
- ▶ How do you think the students will react when Thomas tells them about Hector?

Thomas took a deep breath and finally looked at his classmates.

“I’m really sorry,” he said in a shaky voice. “I went to play with Hector after dinner and he was gone. I saw him in the kitchen, but I couldn’t catch him. I looked everywhere after that, but I couldn’t find him again.” Thomas’s best friend got up and put an arm around him.

“Oh, no!” cried one of the girls. Thomas looked around the room at everybody. They all looked upset, but not angry.

“He did the same when I looked after him,” one boy said.

“Same here,” said a girl. “You’ll find him.”

“He’s always escaping,” said someone else.





Thomas breathed with relief.

“I told you no one would hate you,” said Mrs. Cook.  
“Keep looking for Hector when you get home and we’ll keep our fingers crossed that he shows up.”

Thomas went and sat down. He opened his school bag and reached inside to take out his books. But instead of pulling out a book, he pulled out Hector!

“I guess he crawled inside my bag before I left this morning,” said Thomas excitedly.

The whole class started laughing, but soon they were cheering because Hector was home!