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## Mrs. Speckled Hen's Lesson

*Abbie Phillips Walker*

Mrs. Speckled Hen called her chickens and put on her sunbonnet. "Come along," she said, opening the door for her little family to go outside.

"Where are you going, Mrs. Speckled Hen?" asked Toby from his doghouse.

"Where would I be going, Mr. Dog, but to find worms for my family?" said Mrs. Speckled Hen, shading her eyes from the hot sun.

"It seems to me that I have seen you eating food that is brought to you, too, Mrs. Speckled Hen," said Mr. Dog. "And as for your hard work, I wonder who protects you and your family from Mr. Fox while you sleep."

"Talk away if you like, Mr. Dog," said Mrs. Speckled Hen, not wanting to give him credit for working. "But I cannot stop to gossip. I must teach these chicks to scratch for their living."

Mrs. Speckled Hen found a shady spot under a bush and showed her chicks how to scratch for worms. Suddenly, she spotted Mrs. White Hen and ran across the road to gossip about Miss Henny Brown, who hadn't laid an egg in a week.

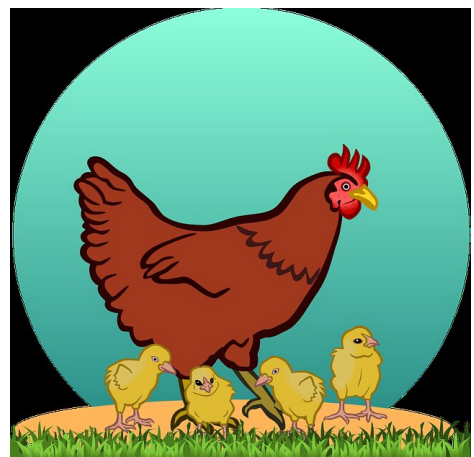
"Just waddles about and quacks and never does a thing but eat. I don't see why master keeps her eating up good food that we should have," complained Mrs. Speckled Hen.

"I have a lot to do - teaching my family to scratch for worms. I do more work than any other hen in this barnyard, except for you, of course, my dear Mrs. White Hen," she added.

"What do you mean by 'in my day'? Don't I do my share now?" retorted Mrs. White Hen, looking cross.

Before a confrontation could escalate, a commotion erupted in the barnyard. Toby Dog came running, barking at a hawk that threatened Mrs. Speckled Hen's chicks.

"If it hadn't been for me, you would have had less to do for a while," said Toby Dog. "That hawk would have taken two or more of your chicks if I hadn't scared



it away."

Mrs. Speckled Hen was too frightened to respond. She realized she had talked too much about her work and did very little. She clucked to her chicks and took them home, never mentioning her workload again.

"I guess I have cured her," said Toby Dog, watching Mrs. Speckled Hen diligently searching for worms with her little ones. He stretched out for a nap, knowing there was no need to boast about running things around there.

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