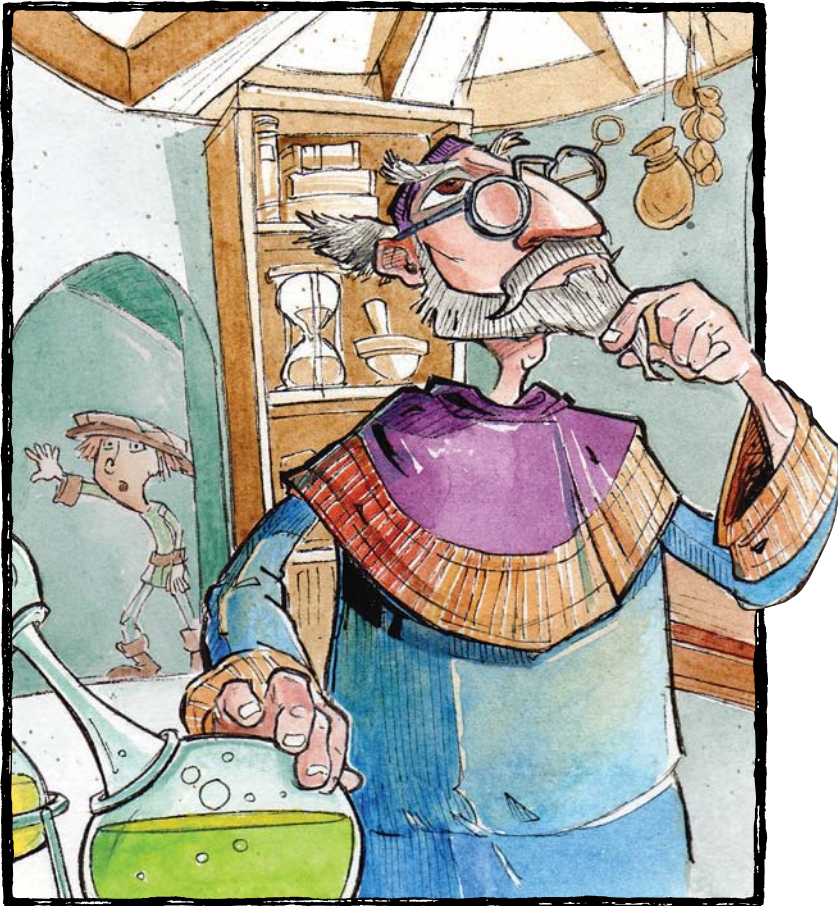


Meegor and the Master

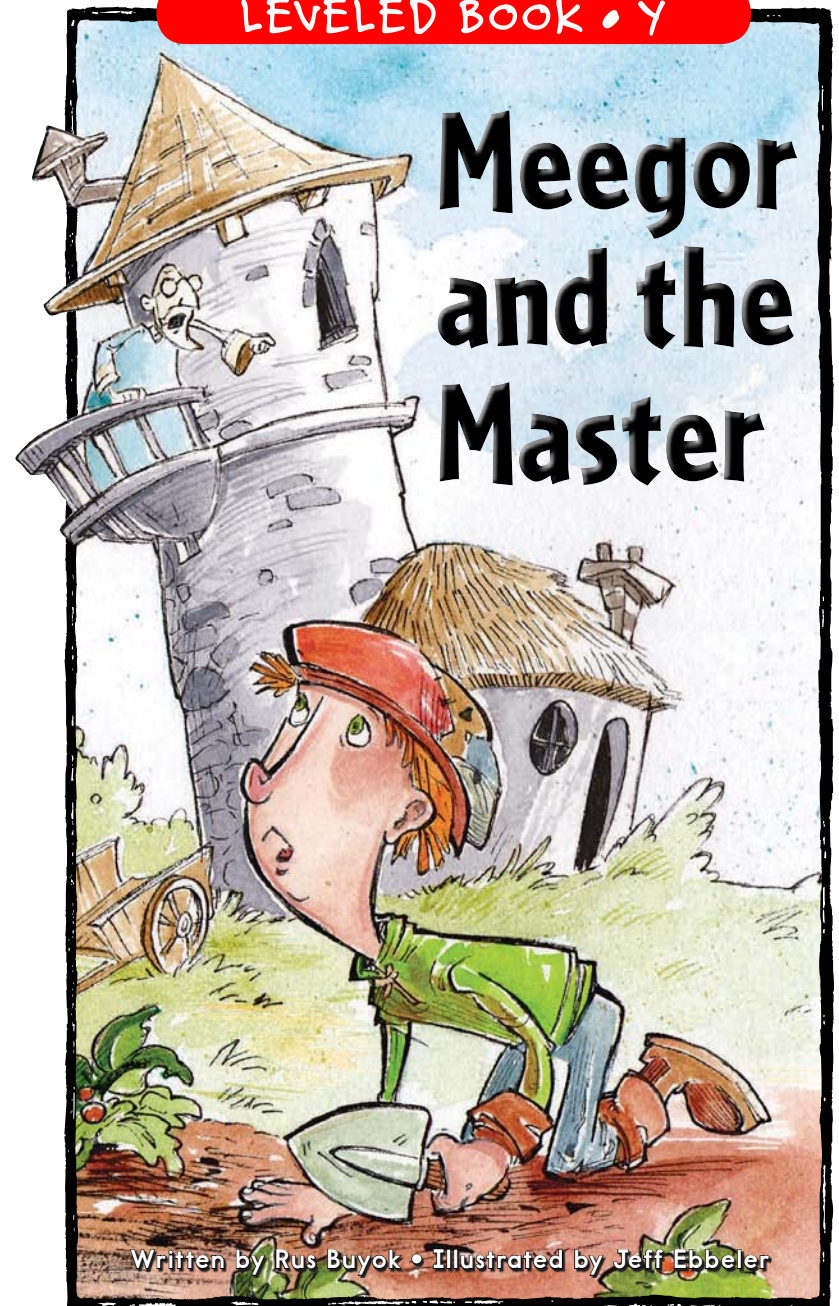
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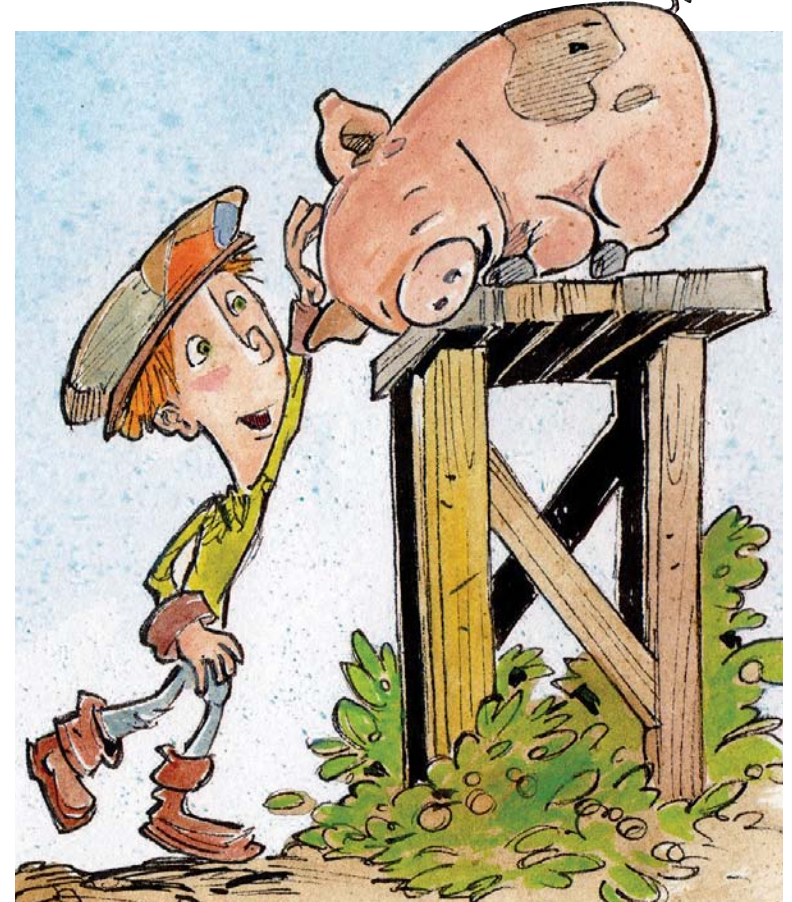
Written by Rus Buyok • Illustrated by Jeff Ebbeler

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Glossary

conclusions (<i>n.</i>)	decisions resulting from careful thinking (p. 8)
experiment (<i>n.</i>)	a scientific test or trial (p. 9)
factors (<i>n.</i>)	facts or circumstances that contribute to a result (p. 10)
formulate (<i>v.</i>)	to carefully create something based upon observations, methods, or rules (p. 6)
hypothesis (<i>n.</i>)	a proposed explanation that is based on evidence but has not been proved (p. 6)
inferences (<i>n.</i>)	conclusions or opinions based upon evidence and reasoning (p. 8)
observations (<i>n.</i>)	acts or instances of careful watching and recording of something as it happens (p. 6)
predict (<i>v.</i>)	to say what is going to happen in the future, often using observation or experience (p. 11)
proof (<i>n.</i>)	something that shows or demonstrates that something else is correct or true (p. 14)
revised (<i>adj.</i>)	rewritten or reorganized in order to correct, update, or improve (p. 19)
scientific method (<i>n.</i>)	the process scientists use to test theories and ideas through experimentation and observation (p. 5)
variables (<i>n.</i>)	things capable of changing or varying (p. 9)

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Correlation

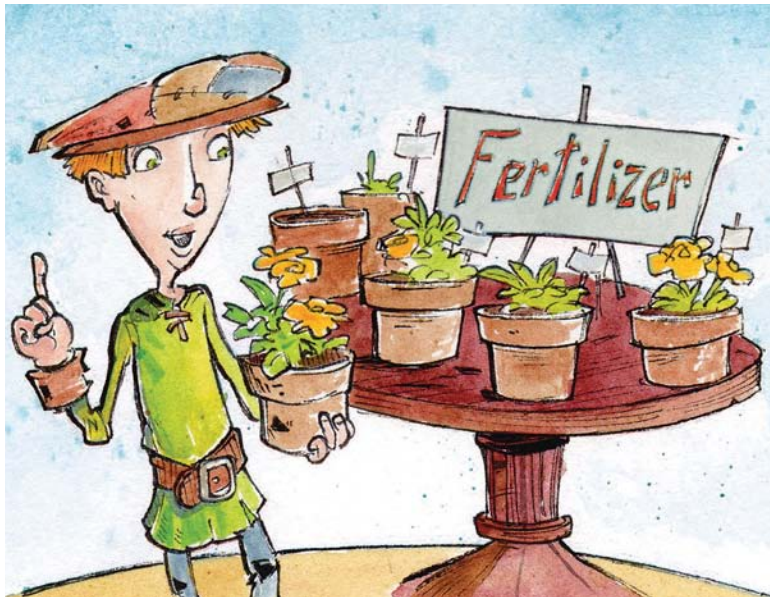
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The judges talked with each other for barely a minute before they announced that Meegor was the winner. Everyone cheered loudly, except the Master.

“You’re still my assistant,” the Master said as they rode home later, Meegor holding his trophy, “and you stole the name of my discovery!”

Meegor didn’t say anything. He rode along, smiling, knowing that he had used the scientific method to discover something that would help people for many years to come.



"Looks like we have one more presenter this year," the judges said. "Is there a Meegor here?"

Meegor stood up and took the stage with his potted plants. He was nervous at first, but as he explained how he had followed every step of the scientific method to reach his final conclusions, it became easier. He told them how the right mixture of manure and slop made the plants healthier and made them produce more. "I call this mixture 'fertilizer!'" he said at the end.

The judges asked him questions. Some he had the answers for, some he didn't. "I don't know," he would say when he didn't know the answer. "I can do an experiment to find out."



"Meegor! Meegor, I need you in the tower now!"

Meegor rolled his eyes—the Master always needed him for something, even if it was just to yell at him.

"Meegor, where are you?" The Master's voice echoed down the long, twisting stairwell.

"Coming, Master," Meegor called back as he trudged up the steps. After the long trip to the top, Meegor found the Master standing right where he had expected—looking out the big window that faced the town.

"I will defeat her this year," the Master growled, his dark cape and cowl flapping in the wind. "I will vanquish her completely. When I'm finished, the judges won't even remember the Professor's name."

"That's hard to believe," Meegor said. "She's won every Better Flat Earth Competition since it began."

The Master twirled around to look at Meegor. His eyes narrowed as he said, "This year will be different. I have the perfect idea that will defeat the Professor's touchy-feely discoveries."

"You thought of something better than proving that bathing is good for people, or that mice don't come from old grain, or that rats carry disease?" Meegor asked.

"Yes, I did. This land was once fertile, producing enough food to feed everyone, but now the land is giving us less. People are going hungry, but I know how to feed them—the pigs are the key."

"The pigs? Pigs are the key to pork chops, ham, and bacon. Are you going to give everyone pork chops, ham, and bacon? If so, we're going to need to get some more pigs; we only have four in the pen right now," Meegor said.



"How do you know it will happen again? How do you know it was the pigs? How do you know if it would be the same with all pigs? How do you know it wasn't something else, something that didn't have to do with the pigs themselves? Why put the pigs on platforms? You know these plants don't grow well in the shade, right?" The judges fired the questions at him one after another.

The Master stood stunned and scratched his head. Finally, he said, "I wanted to put the pigs in slings, but someone said my idea was *cruel*." The judges looked shocked and unhappy. The Master walked off the stage feeling defeated.

Finally, the day of the competition came. The Master and Meegor traveled together to town. The Master was surprised when Meegor started setting up a display showing off his healthiest plants.

“Is this your experiment?” the Master asked.

“It is,” Meegor said proudly.

“Doesn’t look like much,” the Master said with a sniff.

The Professor was the first to present the results of her research. She proved that the world was actually round, which didn’t go over well with the judges of the Better Flat Earth Competition. The Master cheered loudly as she was laughed off the stage.

Then the Master had his turn. He explained his experiment and what it had proved. He spent a long time explaining the pig platforms Meegor had built (not giving Meegor credit, of course), which he called “The Abundacizer!”

“You only did one experiment?” the judges asked.

“Only one was needed. I had my proof,” the Master replied.

“This, Meegor, is why you’re the assistant and I’m the Master. You must use the **scientific method**. Do you know what that is?”

Meegor knew all about the scientific method, but he wanted to see where the Master would go with this, so he said nothing.

“Last year,” the Master continued, “I was walking among the farms and found one that was producing an impressive crop—far more than any other farm around it. As I walked through the field, I saw pigs squealing and playing in it. The first step in the scientific method is to form a question, and mine was, ‘How do I win the Better Flat Earth Competition and beat the Professor by making everyone’s fields grow this well?’ The judges would love the answer to that one.”

“You said the same thing about your hole to the other side of the Earth,” Meegor said.



“Thousands could have benefited by trading with the other side of Earth.” The Master jabbed his finger at Meegor. “If only you had worked harder.”

Meegor raised an eyebrow.

“You wouldn’t understand; you’re not a scientist,” the Master said. “Now I had a question, but I needed an answer. I knew I had to make **observations** in order to **formulate** my answer. It was squealing right at me—the pigs! The pigs are the key.”

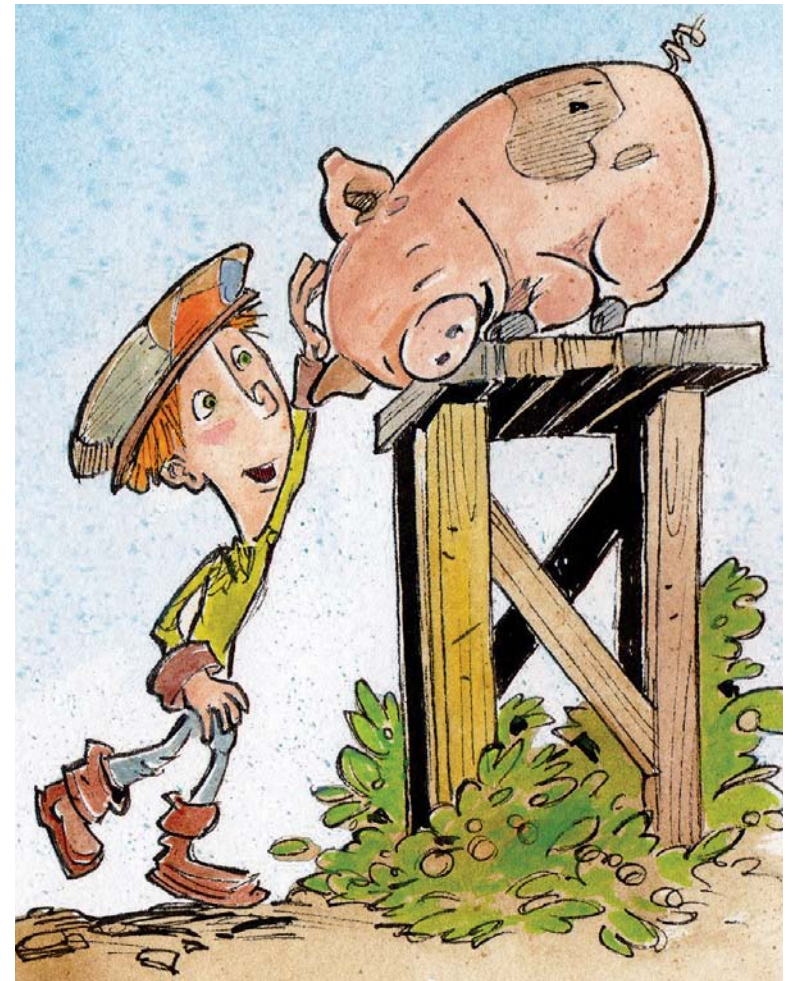
“Just pigs?”

“Yes! I had my **hypothesis** right there in front of me: the presence of pigs makes crops grow better and produce more food.” The Master laughed, waving his hands triumphantly in the air.

Meegor waited for the Master to finish before he said, “Then why isn’t the pigsty a lush garden?”

The Master lowered his arms, scratched his head, and said, “I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Well, while you ponder it, I have to go feed your ‘keys.’ ”



Weeks passed, and then a few months. Every day, Meegor took careful measurements of the plants growing in the pots and recorded them. When he could see which plants were doing better than others, he began to write a paper explaining his **revised** hypothesis. He did all this while still taking care of the (now) seven pigs.



After all this, he had some pots left over, so he decided to do the same experiment with different kinds of manure, which Old Man MacDonald was happy to give him. Instead of just doing one experiment, Meegor was doing many different experiments at the same time.

When the Master saw all these pots in his yard, he asked, “What’s all this?”

“I’m doing an experiment of my own,” Meegor said.

To this, the Master laughed and returned to his tower, where he was planning a great party for when he won the Better Flat Earth Competition.

As Meegor made his way down the stairs and into the yard, he thought about the farm that the Master had seen. Meegor knew it well, as he had passed it many times on his way to town. It belonged to Old Man MacDonald, who was known for raising abundant crops. The farm was also known for all the animals—not just pigs, but cows, dogs, goats, and sheep as well, which Old Man MacDonald didn’t like to keep confined all year long. Before his fields were planted, the animals roamed around freely, and Old Man MacDonald fed them out there. Once the fields were planted, though, he brought all the animals inside the fence that surrounded his big yard. The pigs, however, were notorious for sneaking into the fields.

The Master might have been on to something, though Meegor doubted he was going in the right direction. Meegor thought things over as he dumped the pigs’ slop of old table scraps into the trough. The more Meegor thought, the more it seemed as though the animals had something to do with the crops growing so well—but what?

“Eureka!” Meegor heard the Master scream from the top of the tower. “Meegor, get up here! I’ve got it!”



Meegor put away the slop pail and climbed the stairs again. The Master was almost shaking with excitement.

"I've made my observations, and now I must use them to draw **conclusions** and make **inferences** and reach a new hypothesis." The Master looked at Meegor as if waiting for a sign that he understood the steps of the scientific method. After a moment, the Master continued.

"The pigs would trample any new plants trying to grow, but it's the closeness of the pigs that the soil needs. Pigs like mud, so it therefore follows that mud also likes pigs. If pigs aren't rolling in mud, the soil still wants to be close to the pigs. Since soil can't move, it grows better plants to try and be close to the pigs. It makes perfect sense!" The Master clapped his hands together.

Back at the tower, Meegor tried to explain this to the Master, but he would hear nothing of it. "I have my proof," he said, and then went back to singing, "I'm going to win. I'm going to win. The Professor is going to lose."

Meegor decided to take matters into his own hands. He had already made his observations and formed his hypothesis—he just needed to test it with some experiments. His dependent variable was still how well the plants would grow, but his independent variables changed to how much slop and manure were mixed into the soil. To control these variables, he filled up pots with soil from the same field and mixed in carefully measured amounts of manure, slop, or both. As a control, he also grew plants in soil that didn't have anything mixed in.



Meegor tried to say something, but the Master pointed at the door and shouted, “GO!”

As Meegor trudged into town, he passed all the farms with their scraggly plants. Then he came to Old Man MacDonald’s farm. His wheat, corn, pumpkins, and other plants were all large and healthy. As usual, the animals were making quite a lot of noise in the yard, which was fenced off from the fields. Meegor covered his ears and was about to walk on when something clicked in his mind.

He suddenly had a hypothesis of his own. He thought about it for the rest of his walk to town and the entire way back (with three more pigs in tow). If Old Man MacDonald let his animals run around the fields before planting and put them in their pens after the planting, then it must not be the animals themselves that were making the plants grow. Meegor thought about all the times he’d been covered in slop and had to bury pig manure. Old Man MacDonald was feeding his animals in the field, and if they were out there, they were certainly relieving themselves out there, too. When Old Man MacDonald plowed the field before the planting, he mixed all of that stuff in, and that made his soil fertile!

“Sounds pretty crazy to me,” said Meegor.

“I think your negative attitude is why I never win,” grumbled the Master, his shoulders slumping.

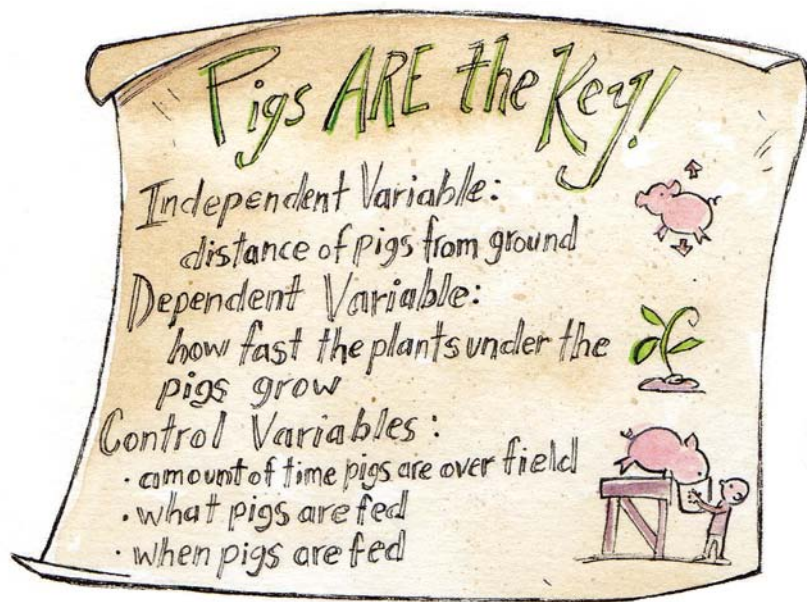
“Another genius hypothesis.”

“I think so,” said the Master, “but we’ll have to test that one another time because I’ve devised an **experiment** to test my pig-and-plant-relationship hypothesis. We’re going to need some poles and fabric strong enough to keep a pig hanging above the ground.”

“Hanging? That’s cruel.”

“Don’t worry, they won’t be hurt,” the Master said. Meegor raised an eyebrow. “Well, you figure out a better way. Moving on . . . in any experiment, there are three kinds of **variables**: independent, dependent, and controlled.” The Master started drawing a diagram on a piece of parchment. “The independent variable is the thing that changes. In this case, it will be the distance of the pig from the ground. Since we only have four pigs, we’ll do four different distances—one foot, two feet, three feet, and four feet.”

The Master drew the pigs at different distances above the ground.



"The dependent variable is the thing being measured," the Master said. "In this case, we will measure how fast the plants grow under the pigs."

The Master drew little plants growing under each of the pigs.

"All of the other **factors** in the experiment must be the same; these are called the controlled variables. This means the pigs have to be over the same field for the same amount of time. The pigs also have to be fed the same amount at the same time. The pigs themselves are pretty similar, so I don't think we'll have a problem there."

The Master started writing up a schedule to manage the experiment.



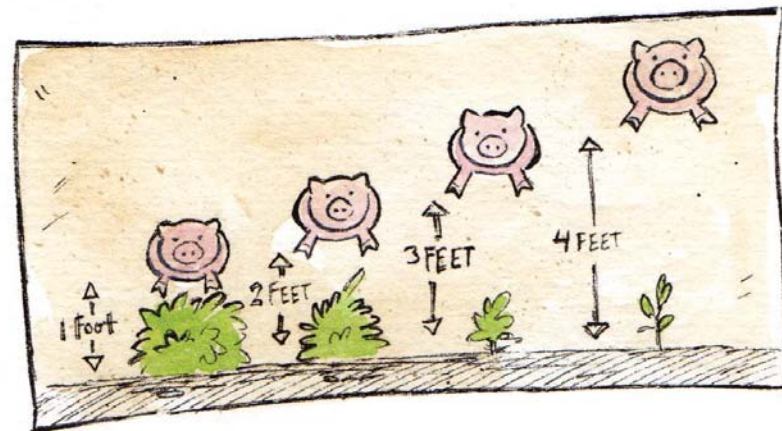
"It's **proof**! Pigs are the key. I knew it all along," he said as he jumped around the tower. "Imagine it, Meegor—fields upon fields of pigs on platforms with abundant crops growing around them. People will thank me, they'll love me, maybe they'll even make me king! We can be rich, too. When word gets out, everyone will be buying pigs—and we could sell them. Prices will skyrocket. Meegor, I want you to go into town and buy all the pigs you can find. Go, go, go!"

"Master," Meegor said, "if the fields are filled with platforms, nothing will grow. The plants won't get any sunlight. Also, you've only done one experiment, and that's not enough to prove anything. You need to do more experiments before you go around making these kinds of claims."

"Nonsense, Meegor."

"It's the scientific method!" Meegor stamped his foot on the stone floor. "You have to perform your experiment again and again, adjusting the variables each time, revising your hypothesis with the results, and then testing everything again."

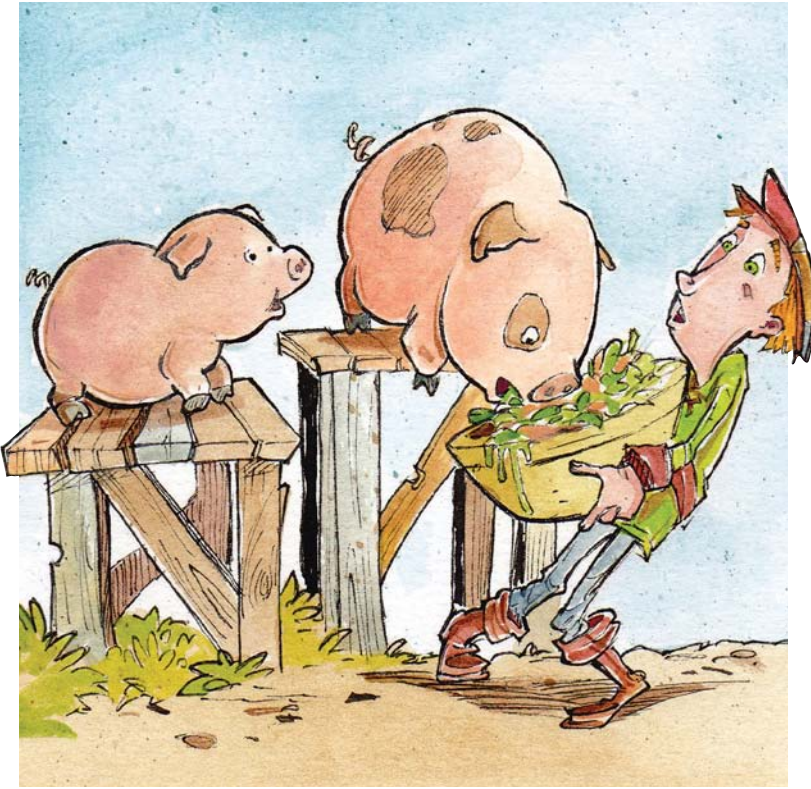
The Master snorted. "What would you know of the scientific method? You're just an assistant. I was the one who had to explain it to you. Now go to town like I told you."



"So here's how it will work: For the same two hours every morning and the same two hours every afternoon, the pigs will be *gently* positioned over the field behind the tower. You'll feed the pigs while they're there, so we'll know they're all eating the same amount of food. If my hypothesis is correct, which it is, I **predict** that the plants under the lowest pig will grow faster than the plants under the higher pigs."

Meegor looked at the parchment with its pigs, little plants, and schedule. "This sounds like a lot of work," he said.

"That it does, Meegor, which is why I'm glad I'm not an assistant. Better get to work! They don't give awards to lazy people," the Master said as he lay down on the ledge beside the window and stretched. "Let me know when we're ready to start measuring."



It took a few days, but Meegor made some platforms for the pigs to stand on. The pigs didn't like standing there for a few hours each morning and afternoon that much, but they calmed down when Meegor fed them. The feeding was the worst. He had to hold the bucket up while each pig ate, and the slop spilled all over him. The pigs didn't wait to be let down before relieving themselves, so Meegor had to clean off the platforms and make sure to always bury their old manure.

After a few weeks of this, Meegor planted one row of wheat, one of corn, and one of pumpkins. Even though the Master didn't tell him to, he also planted rows of the same plants in the same field away from the pigs. Meegor knew the experiment needed a control, or something to check the results of the experiment against. If the Master didn't grow some crops without pigs present, how would he be able to prove that it was the pigs that had made any difference in the results?

Then they waited. Meegor continued to feed the pigs on the platforms. They never enjoyed it, but they started squealing less, which made the Master happy. Meegor was also careful to water the experimental and control areas the same amount to keep the variables the same.

A few weeks later, young plant shoots appeared in the rows around the platforms and the rows without the pigs. No shoots appeared in the shade under the platforms. The Master had Meegor take careful measurements of the growing plants every day. The Master seemed pleased with the way things were going.

It became apparent as the plants grew that the ones around the platforms were larger and healthier than those in the control area. When the Master learned this, he almost squealed with happiness.