

Hammy on the Run: A Missing Hamster Mystery



Grandparents: before you start reading, get your grandkids to make a code sheet with a simple letter-number substitution cipher (A=1, B=2...Z=26), and tell them they're going to be detectives who will be writing down the number clues in the order they hear them, and then decoding them to solve a mystery. Number clues will be in bold.

You are a member of a top-notch mystery solving club, the Mystery Masterminds. Last night you received a text message on your mystery hotline from the famous detective Heimlich von Snoop. He needs your help! So this morning you meet von Snoop at the home of his twin niece and nephew, Heidi and Herbert.

"What's the mystery?" you ask.

"It's Hammy, our pet hamster!" cries Heidi. "He's been missing for **nineteen hours!**"

"We have no idea where he is," says Herbert. "You have to help us find him!"

"So," declares Detective von Snoop, "this is the mystery of the missing hamster. Let us look for clues!"

As you search Heidi and Herbert's house, you notice something that's almost hidden behind the back of the couch in the living room. When you take a closer look, you realize that it's a plastic hamster ball, but the lid has fallen off. Inside the ball is **one sunflower seed**.

"What's this?" you ask the twins.

"That's Hammy's ball!" they cry.

"Oh no!" says Heidi. "He must have gotten out of his ball. Look, almost all of his sunflower seeds are gone, too. Those are his favorite. We always put some in his ball with him when he's in there."

You look closely and notice a trail of sunflower seed shells leading to the back door of the house, which is open just a tiny bit. "He must have gone out this way," you say.

You and Detective von Snoop explore the back yard, which leads to the driveway. "Aha!" yells Detective von Snoop. He points to **fourteen tiny muddy hamster footprints** heading down the driveway to the front sidewalk. "We're on the trail now!" he exclaims.

As you reach the street in front of the house, you notice that a house at the end of the block has a vegetable garden out in front. "Maybe Hammy went there," you say to yourself, "I know hamsters like veggies." You walk to the end of the block, borrow the detective's magnifying glass to get a closer look, and notice **four hamster-sized bites** taken out of the lettuce planted in the garden.

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"Nice work," says von Snoop. "But, where could he have gone from here?"

You look down the street to your left, and hear **two loud barking dogs**. "Not that way," you say. You look across the street to your right, and see a garbage can just across the street, with some garbage spilled out onto the ground in front of it. "I bet the barking dogs scared him, and he ran over here to hide," you say. As you inspect the garbage can, you see there are **fifteen pieces of trash** on the ground, including a cardboard paper towel tube. When you peek into the tube you see pieces of hamster fluff on the inside.

"Eureka!" cries the Detective. "You've done it again! But now where do we look?"

"Hmm," you say. "There's a house with its sprinklers on across the street, so he probably didn't go that way. But is that a playground farther down this street? That seems like a place a hamster might go."

You and Detective von Snoop head over to the playground and talk to all **twenty four kids** that are there, but no one has seen Hammy. The Detective scratches his head and says, "I'm stumped. Do you know where Hammy might have gone?"

You take a good look around, think for a minute, and say, "I've got it! I know where Hammy is!"

Where is Hammy the hamster? It's time to use your code-breaking skills to solve the mystery!

Grandparents, now's the time for your grandkid to take all those numbers he or she has been writing down, and use their code sheet to decode the answer. Just in case they've had a little trouble, the code should be:

S A N D B O X
19 1 14 4 2 15 24

"He must be in the sandbox!" you say. "Hamsters love to dig tunnels in the sand." You race over to the sandbox, and sure enough, there's Hammy, sound asleep in a little burrow he'd dug for himself in the sand.

"Brilliant!" says Detective von Snoop, as you gently pick up the sleepy little guy and put him in your pocket. "Let's get Hammy back home."

So, you and the Detective bring Hammy back to his relieved and grateful owners, and as you get ready to head home, the Detective shakes your hand and says, "Thanks so much for your help. You truly are a master detective!"

THE END