

M for Monitors

The good girls (and sometimes boys) are chosen to be Monitors. They wear a special badge to show their importance.

The Ink Monitors need careful steady hands. I have been chosen to be an Ink Monitor. I help Carol mix up a bucketful of ink by adding blue powder to water in the headmaster's room. If we spill any on the carpet, we are in big trouble. The bucket then has to be carried to each classroom- no spills mind- along the corridor. We dip a small enamel jug into the mixture and each inkwell, a tiny white china holder set into a hole in the desk, is filled so that we have no excuse to avoid dipping our scratchy nibs into the ink to practice "real writing".

The Milk Monitors carry the grey metal crates filled with small milk bottles from the playground into the school hall. At playtime we collect our 3rd of a pint and a stripy straw from the cardboard dispenser. I like the taste of icy cold milk on wintry mornings but shudder to drink the warmed milk left too long in the summer sun.

The Blackboard Monitor's job suits bossy girls. They not only have the responsibility of using the blackboard duster to rub out spellings and sums but they are on guard when we are changing for P.T. Stepping into shorts and tying up the laces of our plimsolls we are racing each other. The bossy girls patrol from the lofty heights of the teacher's dais waiting to spot the first child to be ready and correct. A large zig zag lightning strike appears on the blackboard, drawn boldly in yellow chalk. Alongside it is written the name of the first person lining up at the classroom door. Meanwhile Wilfred, it was always Wilfred, would still be trying to tie his laces or rummaging in his bag for his screwed up shorts. His name went on the blackboard alongside a picture of a snail.

The Pencil Monitor's job is enviable. They have sole access to the pencil sharpener which is screwed to the teacher's desk. Other children have to line up and await their turn to hand over their chewed pencil to be sharpened to a fine point.

The Bell Monitor is the position I aspire to. It means you have to be at school ten minutes early to collect the heavy brass bell from Mr Beard's office and then wait just inside the main door to receive the order to ring the bell, summoning the careering throng to line up in their classes. The weight of the bell swings my arm vigorously. The power could go straight to my head.
