Dixie’s Doodad

“Dashawn, can you explain what your invention does?” asked Ms. McGill, looking over her judge’s clipboard at the student standing before her.

“Well, it’s just a prototype, so I haven’t worked out all the bugs yet,” said the boy modestly. “We give my cat Dixie treats to keep her teeth clean. She can use this machine to get a treat by herself, but the primary reason I built it was mostly for fun. I call it Dixie’s Doodad.”

“That’s great,” said Ms. McGill, making notes on Dashawn’s science project. “Can you explain how it works?”

“Well, the first step in the sequence is when Dixie puts her foot on this latch here,” he said, indicating a small lever on the front of a contraption built with rods, connectors, and a long tube. It looked like a scaffold with a plastic container of cat treats secured to the top. “When she pushes the latch, it immediately pulls down on this rod, which connects to a little door on the bottom of the container. The rod pulls the door open, and a cat treat falls out into this tube. It shoots down the tube into the dish, where Dixie can eat it.”

“Because Dixie likes more than one treat a day, I added an equal number of dental treats and other kinds of treats she likes. That way, she only gets a dental treat sometimes—not every time consecutively. One dental treat a day is enough to keep her teeth clean.”

“Wow,” his teacher said, impressed. “It’s almost like you taught your cat to brush her teeth!” Dashawn grinned broadly, hoping he might win the prize for best project at the fair.