Stanley, the Very Fine Squirrel

Narrator: Once there was a squirrel named Stanley. He was quite content with being a squirrel. He gathered acorns and nuts. He ran up and down trees. He played with his squirrel friends. He teased the cats, and played a game on the street that he called “squeal.” He called it squeal because when he would run right in front of a car, the car’s tires would squeal when the driver hit the brakes. Sometimes they would even honk their horn at him. And every once in a while, the driver would even squeal. You get extra points for that. I’m sure you’ve seen squirrels playing this game. They all do it.

By all accounts, Stanley was a happy and rather ordinary squirrel. One day, he was scurrying up a new tree and encountered an owl house. He thought he would take a peek inside to look for acorns. Just as he stuck his nose into the house, an owl stuck his beak out.

Stanley: Oh, I’m sorry. I thought nobody was home.

Narrator: Of course, everyone knows that owls are very wise because they ask lots of questions. This owl was no exception.

Owl: Whoooo are youuuuu?

Stanley: I am Stanley.

Narrator: The owl looked at Stanley in a big-eyed, owl-like way. The squirrel looked too big to eat, but too small to be afraid of.

Owl: What are you?

Stanley: [proudly] I am a squirrel."

Owl: When are you?

Narrator: This seemed like a strange question, even to Stanley. He waited for the owl to finish his question, but then realized that he was finished.
Stanley: When am I?

Narrator: Thinking he was being very clever, Stanley finally said...

Stanley: I am right now!

Owl: Where are you?

Stanley: [waving paws and chuckling] I am right here!

Narrator: Stanley thought to himself that this owl wasn’t the brightest bird on the block.

Owl: How are you?

Stanley: I am very fine, thanks. And you?

Narrator: The owl didn’t answer, but did have one last question for Stanley.

Owl: Why are you?

Stanley: I don’t know what you mean. Why am I what?

Owl: Why are you?

Stanley: Why am I a squirrel? Why am I named Stanley? Why am I looking for acorns in your house?

Owl: Why are you?

Narrator: That’s all the owl would say.

Stanley: [frustrated] I don’t know. Why are YOU?

Owl: That is a very good question.

Stanley: Well, at least now we’re getting somewhere.
Owl: I am [pausing contemplatively] to teach. That’s why I am.

Stanley: Hmm…I never thought of it that way. Then, I guess I am…to tease cats, and collect acorns, and run in front of cars. That’s why I am!

Narrator: Stanley was very pleased with himself because he had figured out the owl’s game. The owl was quiet for a very long time, as owls tend to be. Finally, she said...

Owl: So you, Stanley, the very fine squirrel, are to tease others, collect things, and play, here and now. Is that it?

Stanley: I guess so, that’s what I do.

Owl: “But why?”

Stanley: Oh no you don’t. “Why do you teach?”

Narrator: Stanley was getting a little squirrely.

Owl: [calmly] I teach because others learn. Why do you tease, and collect, and play.

Narrator: Stanley was a quiet for a very long time. His eyes got as big as the owl’s as they stared at the moon together. It was getting dark by now. Stanley had never given any thought to why he did these things. He just did them. He was a squirrel and that’s what squirrels did. “But why?” he now thought to himself. After a while, Stanley said very seriously...

Stanley: I tease the cats so they will go away and not eat me and my family. PLUS, it keeps them from climbing the trees, so they won’t eat you. Cats aren’t smart like squirrels and owls, you know. They can climb up trees, but the can’t get back down by themselves. They need help.

Narrator: The owl nodded her head in approval.
Stanley: I collect acorns so that my whole family will have something to eat when we wake up after the winter, because we wake up before the trees do, and there aren’t any new acorns yet. PLUS, sometimes new trees grow where we hide the acorns. I help the forest to grow because trees aren’t smart like squirrels and owls. They can’t just go around planting themselves wherever they want. They need help.

Narrator: The owl again nodded her head in approval. After a few more minutes of staring at the moon together, Stanley said...

Stanley: I run in front of cars because they go too fast, which is dangerous for the human children, and the baby squirrels, and the turtles, and the ducks. PLUS, I help the chickens who need to cross the road because that what chickens do. I help keep everyone safe by slowing the cars down because humans aren’t smart like squirrels and owls. They are always going too fast, and can’t slow down all by themselves. They need help.

Narrator: The owl nodded a third time and said...

Owl: Stanley, the very fine squirrel, who is here and now, you have learned well.

Narrator: And with that she flew off into the night. Stanley sat for a little longer. He wondered what it would be like to be a teacher. He hopped into the owl house, forgetting all about the acorns he came for, stuck his nose out like a beak and stared at the moon. As he sat, he noticed a cat getting ready to climb the next tree over; he saw a car’s headlights coming down the road, and he knew that he had work to do. Stanley, the very fine squirrel, now knew who he was, what he was, when he was, where he was, how he was—which was very fine—and why he was....

Stanley: “Why are you? [Stanley scurries off]