

Practice Passages

Examiner Packet (No Equated Scores)

Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment—Version 2.0 © 2010 Texas Education Agency, University of Houston, and The University of Texas System

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Practice Passages

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A Move
TCLD Title: Moving On
Lexile: 360
Source: TAKS 2006

19 A year ago my father lost his job. He could not find another one where we lived. Finally, he
 38 decided to look for work in another city. When my parents told me, I was stunned. I was furious
 that they hadn't asked my opinion.

44 "What about my friends?" I shouted. "And baseball? I'm finally playing center field." I paused to
 60 take a breath. "Dad, I've lived here all my life. I don't want to move. You may not get a job there
 82 either!"

83 "Ernesto!" my mother exclaimed. She was shocked by my harsh words.

94 I knew I'd been cruel. But I was not sorry. I did not want to move.

110 Dad seemed to understand. "It's all right," he told my mother. "His whole life is about to change.
 128 We're all upset by this uncertainty."

134 Dad smiled at me. "Something good will come out of this. I know it's hard to believe now. Just
 153 keep an open mind."

157 The next few weeks were a blur. Dad was in a city 200 miles away. He was looking for work.
 177 Mom and I stayed in our house. We began packing our belongings. We knew we would have to
 195 leave soon. We just did not know when. One day my father called with good news. He said he had
 215 found a job. I felt numb. It was not good news to me.

228 We finished packing and left our home. We pulled away from the house slowly. I took one more
 246 look at my house. My mother saw the sadness on my face. It was hard to leave my home. I did not
 268 want to go.

271 "Ernesto, life goes on," she said. "We can have a wonderful new life. But we have to work at it."

291 I thought about those words. They seemed to echo what my father had said before he left. I tried to
 311 look on the bright side. But it was hard.

320 "I'll try, Mom," I promised in a small voice. I started to feel a little better. However, this
 338 mood faded as we drove into the new city. Everything seemed so unfamiliar. Seeing our new

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neighborhood helped. There were tall trees and quiet sidewalks. It looked nice. Then I spotted our house. It just kind of looked right to me. Dad rushed out the front door to welcome us.

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“This is it,” he said. “It’s not home yet. But I suspect that you and your mother might have a few decorating tips to change that.”

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My father was trying to be cheerful. I could see that he was a little nervous too.

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I said, “Actually, Dad, I think it looks kind of cool.”

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Dad excitedly told us all the details. “There’s a neighborhood swimming pool two blocks away.

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And believe it or not, the Little League coach lives right across the street! He told me he could use a strong arm in the outfield. I’ll take you to meet him tomorrow.”

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“I’m ready, Dad,” I said. And I was.

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A Lesson
TCLD Title: A Lesson
Lexile: 380
Source: TAKS 2006

Miguel came home from school. He was upset. His mother could see that.

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“What’s wrong?” she asked.

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“Robert ran off after school again. He was supposed to help me with pitching. He hasn’t helped me in weeks. He can’t see me after school. He’s not home on weekends. He’s always too busy practicing for a dance.”

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“Have you ever asked Robert about his dance?” his mother asked.

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Miguel looked at his mother. She was looking him in the eye. He knew he should think about what she just said. He had not talked to Robert about the dance.

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Miguel mumbled, “No.”

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“Well, Robert’s mother called this morning. She invited us to watch Robert dance at the powwow tomorrow,” Miguel’s mother said. “I told her that we would love to go. You will see what Robert has been doing.”

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“O.K.,” Miguel said softly.

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Miguel had never been to a powwow. The next morning Miguel and his mother entered the building where the powwow was being held. He saw people in bright costumes everywhere. Some people wore headdresses with feathers. Others wore breastplates on their chests. Even the moccasins on people’s feet were decorated.

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“Mom, I don’t think we are dressed right,” Miguel said. He looked down at his jeans and T-shirt.

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“Those are the dancers. They’re supposed to be dressed like that,” said his mom.

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Miguel was looking around. Suddenly he saw Robert. At least he thought it was Robert. This boy looked like him. However, he had decorated his face with red paint. There were feathers in his hair. There were beads, ribbons, and feathers all over his clothes.

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“Robert?” Miguel asked. “Is that you?”

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“Yeah,” Robert said. He started to say something else. Before he could, another boy grabbed him by the arm. He pulled him away.

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Robert waved to Miguel. Then he disappeared behind another group of dancers. Miguel and his mother found seats. He couldn't wait to see Robert dance. A man started singing. Everyone became quiet. Drummers began to play. Then a group of dancers began moving to the drum beat. Others joined them. Miguel didn't see Robert. Miguel leaned forward to look for his friend. His mother pointed to a new group of dancers. Robert was one of them. More people started to sing. Robert began to dance. Robert was spinning and moving around with the others in his group. Miguel thought Robert was terrific.

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“No wonder Robert had to practice so much,” Miguel thought.

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The dancing ended. Miguel went to find Robert. “Wow!” Miguel said. “That was cool! Why didn't you tell me you could do all that?”

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Robert shrugged and said, “You never asked.”

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“Yeah, I know,” Miguel said. He realized how he had been acting. “So what else can you do that I don't know about?”

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Lydia’s Sister Comes Home From College
TCLD Title: Lydia’s Sister Comes Home From College
Lexile: 400
Source: TAAS 2001

- 17
34 The day was special for twelve-year-old Lydia. Her older sister, Marcie, was coming home from college. She would be home all summer. Lydia could hardly wait. She wanted to go swimming and to the movies. They would have so much fun.
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75 Marcie finally arrived. She walked in the door happily. The sisters greeted each other with fierce hugs. Lydia wanted to hear all about Marcie’s college experiences. They were going to make pizza that night. Unfortunately, Marcie had made other plans. Lydia was disappointed.
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119 They had breakfast together the next morning. Lydia asked Marcie to go shopping. Lydia wanted her to help pick out some summer outfits. She even offered to treat Marcie to lunch. Once again Marcie already had plans.
- 123 “We’ll spend some time together tonight,” Marcie promised.
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185 Lydia felt happy. She rented a movie for the two of them. However, Marcie changed her mind. She came home that afternoon excited. She told Lydia that some friends were coming over later. Lydia pretended to be reading. She didn’t want her sister to see the tears in her eyes. She knew her sister had friends. She didn’t want her to stop seeing them. But she missed her sister’s company.
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260 Marcie’s friends arrived. Lydia was not polite. She intruded into their conversations. She made rude comments. She also asked questions that had nothing to do with their discussion. She sang loudly while Marcie was on the phone. She even changed the channel while everyone was watching television. Lydia’s bedtime finally arrived. She was feeling very ashamed because of the way she acted. Marcie had not said anything about Lydia’s behavior. However, she did look hurt.
- 276
294 Lydia wanted to apologize to her sister. She missed her. She wanted to be close again. She decided to write Marcie a letter apologizing for her behavior. She left it for Marcie on her pillow.
- 311
328 Later that night Lydia heard Marcie tell her friends good-bye. She went into her room. Minutes later Marcie knocked on Lydia’s door.
- 334
351 “I’m the one who should apologize,” Marcie said. “I’m sorry that I’ve been so selfish. I didn’t realize how much I had hurt your feelings.”

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Lydia invited Marcie to sit beside her on the bed. One of Marcie's old letters had fallen on the floor. Lydia had been rereading it. Marcie picked it up and smiled.

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"At school I read your letters over and over, too. They kept me from being lonely." Marcie and Lydia hugged each other.

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"Let's make some popcorn. We can watch a movie," Marcie suggested.

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Lydia hurried toward the kitchen. Marcie smiled and followed Lydia. She remembered how much she had missed her best friend—her little sister.

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Being the Leader
TCLD Title: Being the Leader
Lexile: 430
Source: TAAS 2002

- 15 Coach Einhorn blew her whistle. It was the end of basketball practice. Tamika followed her teammates into the locker room.
- 20 “What a great practice!” Tamika said. “Sondra and Imelda, you two were awesome today.”
- 34 “Thanks for your encouragement, Tamika,” Sondra said. “You played great today, too. You’re one
 48 of the best players on this team. I wish Coach Einhorn would let you start. I don’t understand why
 67 she won’t.”
- 69 Tamika had been wondering that too. She never missed practice. She played her best in every
 85 game. She kept her grades up. She was the second-highest scorer on the team. But none of this
 104 seemed to matter to the coach. Coach Einhorn never let her start.
- 116 Everyone left the locker room. Tamika stayed behind. She wanted to talk to the coach. Tamika
 132 knew players were always welcome to talk to the coach. But she felt nervous anyway.
- 147 Tamika approached the coach’s office. She stopped for a moment. She wanted to collect her
 162 thoughts before entering. Tamika wanted ask Coach Einhorn why she would not let her start.
- 177 Tamika knocked on the coach’s door. Coach Einhorn sat at her desk. She looked up and smiled.
- 194 “Sit down, Tamika,” Coach Einhorn said. “I was thinking about you.”
- 205 “You were?” Tamika asked.
- 209 “You looked sharp in practice today. Your game last week wasn’t as good as it usually is. I didn’t
 228 see your normal energy and skill. Is something bothering you?”
- 238 Tamika had planned how she would begin. She wanted to talk about her skills. She wanted to talk
 256 about her strengths. Instead, she blurted out her question. “Coach, why is it that you never let me
 274 start?”
- 275 The coach looked at her for a moment. Tamika held her breath. She was not sure what the coach
 294 would say.

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Coach Einhorn smiled. “I’m glad you came to me. I don’t think starting you is the best thing for the team. I think of you as the team’s spark plug.”

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“What do you mean?” Tamika asked.

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Coach Einhorn explained her statement. “A spark plug gets a car moving. You are like that because you get our team moving when we slow down. You work hard. You keep the others from giving up. That’s why I don’t start you. I save you for when we need you most. I don’t think of you as a starter. I think of you as a leader.”

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Tamika looked at her coach in astonishment. “You mean I’m too good to be a starter?”

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Coach Einhorn laughed. “Well, I guess that’s one way of putting it.”

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A smile spread slowly across Tamika’s face. “I’m a leader,” she thought. To her surprise, it sounded just fine!

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Beyoncé
Lexile: 450
Source: Original Work

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Beyoncé Knowles was born on September 4th, 1981. She is from Houston, TX. As a child, Beyoncé loved music. She loved to dance. She also loved to sing. She was a soloist in her church choir. People knew there was something special about her.

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By age seven, Beyoncé was in dance school. Her teacher was very impressed with her. She encouraged Beyoncé's talents. She thought Beyoncé had potential. The teacher took Beyoncé to various competitions. Beyoncé won over 30 local singing and dancing contests.

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After high school, Beyoncé helped form a Rhythm and Blues group. This group was called Destiny's Child. Destiny's Child became an instant hit. It was one of the most successful groups of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Their success was worldwide. Destiny's Child had several number one singles. The group had two number one albums. It also had numerous top ten hits.

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In 2003, Beyoncé did something bold. She released her first solo album. It reached number one on the Billboard charts. The music on this album was fresh. It was exciting. Her fans loved it. As a result, she was honored at the 2004 Grammy Awards. She won 5 Grammys. They were all for her solo efforts.

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The next year brought a special award to Destiny's Child. The group was no longer together. However, it was honored at the 2005 World Music Awards. Record sales for Destiny's Child had topped 50 million. The award was for becoming the biggest selling female group of all time. This was an amazing achievement. Fans were ecstatic. They could not have been happier.

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Beyoncé is only in her mid-twenties. But she has made a huge impact in America's pop culture. In a recent Universal Music poll, Beyoncé was voted the Princess of Pop. Her fans continue to love and support her. Record sales continue to soar. Fans will enjoy Beyoncé's music for many years.

Great Chief
TCLD Title: The First Butterflies
Lexile: 510
Source: TAKS 2006

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Long ago, when the world was still new, Great Chief sat and thought about how beautiful the world looked. He observed the flowers and the leaves. He watched rabbits hop. But he especially loved to watch the children play.

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“These children love the simple things,” he said to himself. “They love to play with all the things around them. They dance. They roll in the green grass. They chase grasshoppers. They even spread their arms and try to fly like the birds.”

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He quietly watched the happy children. Soon, however, he became upset.

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“What will happen if someday things change? What if one day the children are sad? What if they get sick or hungry? What happens when they are old and tired? Severe winds could come. These strong winds might be too much for the children,” he said.

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Great Chief thought for a while. Then he came up with a plan to keep the children happy. He emptied the bag which carried his food. Then he began to fill it with the beautiful colors around him. He found leaves that were red, yellow, and brown. He put in green grass, purple and blue flowers, and red fruit. He continued to add things with bright colors. Almost done, he put a touch of sunshine into the bag, but not too much. At last he added the wonderful songs of birds. Great Chief closed the bag tightly. He wrapped a leather strap around the top to keep it shut. He shook it many times.

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Great Chief walked over to where the children were playing. He asked one of the young girls to open the bag. The rest of the children gathered around. The girl opened the bag slowly. Out flew these amazing things with wings. They were all of the colors of the rainbow. They also sang beautiful songs.

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The strange new things flew around happily. The children asked, “What are these things called, Great Chief?”

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“They are for you,” he answered. “They are butterflies. They will be your friends whenever you need them. They will make you happy when you feel sad. If you are afraid, they will bring you comfort. When days are bad and you do not think things will get better, the memory of butterflies will help you. Just remember how special they are, and the butterflies will take your worries away.”

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The children were very happy about the new butterflies. However, the birds were not.

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“Great Chief, why did you give the butterflies our songs? Songs have always been for birds. It is not right for butterflies to have our songs!” exclaimed the birds.

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Great Chief thought about this. He decided that everyone, including the birds, should be happy.

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So he put all the butterflies back into the bag. He shook the bag once. He asked the birds to gather around. When he opened the bag, only the songs came out, and the birds swallowed them. The butterflies flew out and were just as beautiful as before, but they could not sing. Now every living thing on Earth was happy.

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The Legacy
TCLD Title: The Legacy
Lexile: 560
Source: SDAA 2004

Laura often visited her Grandmother Sarah’s house. She loved to explore the drawers and closets. Often Laura found trinkets. She would ask her grandmother to tell her the story of whatever old keepsake she came across. The stories were always wonderful.

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One rainy Saturday Laura found a faded handbag. It had two names on it. They were Sarah Garber and Katie Garber. Laura’s grandmother paused a moment. She explained that her family did not have a lot of money. When she and her sister were girls they couldn’t afford two handbags. They shared one.

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“Oh, did we argue over that bag,” Grandmother Sarah recalled. “We’d both want to use it at the same time. We were always making deals for it. One of us might say, ‘If you let me use it this Saturday, I’ll shine your shoes.’ Once, Katie hid the bag. She wouldn’t produce it until I agreed to wash the dishes.” Grandmother Sarah laughed at the memory.

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Laura was delighted by the story. She laughed about this memory with her grandmother. Another time Laura discovered a tin box. It was filled with old buttons. Laura asked about them.

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Her grandmother’s eyes twinkled with joy. Then she answered softly, “To me, these buttons are like gold. They belonged to your great-grandmother. We were desperately poor when we came over from Europe. My mother altered clothes to earn money. There were seven of us children. We had very few toys, so we played with the buttons in her button box. As she sewed, my mother tried to learn English. She would have us read the newspaper to her. One day a story used the word legacy. My mother wanted to know what it meant. We explained that it often referred to the riches that wealthy people pass down to their children. But we went on to explain that it could be anything of special value that one family member wants to give to another. When my mother heard that, she laughed. Then she pointed to the buttons. ‘Those will be my legacy to you,’ she said.”

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Grandmother Sarah continued, “One by one the seven of us grew up and found good jobs. My two oldest brothers became quite wealthy. All of us, though, the rich and the not so rich, were happy to help support our mother. After all, she had worked so hard to support us. When she died, we went to her apartment after the funeral. We wanted to sort through her belongings. My oldest brother started looking through her closets and cupboards. The rest of us asked him what he hoped to find. He wouldn’t say.

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“He searched for about 15 minutes. Suddenly he held up that old button box. ‘This is what I was looking for. It’s Mama’s legacy,’ he said. His eyes shone with tears. Then he carefully divided the buttons among us all.

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“So you see, Laura,” Grandmother Sarah concluded, “those buttons are as good as gold. Each one stands for years of love and hard work. And someday, if you like, they can be your legacy as well.”

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Famous Amos
Lexile: 490
Source: Original Work

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Wally Amos was born in 1936 in Tallahassee, Florida. He lived there until he was 12. Then he moved to New York. There, he moved in with his aunt. To make him happy, his aunt baked him cookies. He thought her cookies were the best he ever had.

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Because of his aunt, Wally developed an interest in baking. He enrolled at a vocational high school for food trades. But he did not graduate. Instead, he joined the Air Force.

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Wally spent four years in the Air Force. During this time, he received his GED. He was honorably discharged from the Air Force. Then he began college to become a secretary.

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Wally's first job was at a clothing store in New York. He did not like it. He was underpaid. He was not treated well. He left there without another job. But he remained positive.

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He quickly found a job with the William Morris Talent Agency. He began in the mail room. In one year, he worked his way up to talent agent. This was a great achievement. Wally became the agency's first African American talent agent. Wally worked with many famous people. These included Marvin Gaye and Diana Ross. Agents used to send invitations to famous stars. They wanted these stars to hire them. Wally used to bake cookies to include with his invitations. He thought it might entice clients to hire him. People loved to receive his cookies.

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In 1975, a friend convinced Wally that his cookies were good enough to sell. Wally took a chance. He opened his own cookie store. He called it "The Famous Amos Chocolate Chip Cookie Store." It was an immediate success.

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Wally opened two more stores within a year after opening his first store. Grocery stores throughout the country began carrying his cookies. Bloomingdale's in New York City even began selling them.

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Less than five years after opening his first store, Wally Amos was a millionaire. His company grossed five million in 1980. It doubled that and grossed ten million in 1985. Wally had lived up to his cookie title—Famous Amos.

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Wally eventually sold "Famous Amos." It is now owned by the Kellogg Company. However, this did not stop him from doing what he loved. He still bakes. He is still famous. Nearly 20 years

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after he opened his first store, Wally and a friend started a muffin company. The company makes nutritious muffins. Some are fat free. Some are made with soy. Others are all natural.

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Stores nationwide now sell these muffins. “Famous” Wally Amos continues to be famous.

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A Useful Invention
TCLD Title: Making Life Safer
Lexile: 520
Source: TAAS 2002

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Garrett Morgan was born in Kentucky in 1877. His parents were former slaves. They owned their own farm. Garrett spent his childhood working on the family farm.

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In 1895, Morgan moved to Cleveland, Ohio. He hoped to find new opportunities for himself there.

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He held several jobs. He eventually formed his own business. Success came easily to him.

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In 1912 Morgan invented a special mask. Its purpose was to protect a person's face against harmful

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gases. It would also protect a person's lungs from harmful air. The mask covered the face. It was

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hooked to a bag of clean air. The person would breathe in only the clean air. The harmful air would

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not be inhaled. This would keep the person safe.

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Morgan first used his gas mask in 1916. An explosion had trapped some men in an underground

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tunnel. They were 250 feet beneath Lake Erie. The tunnel was filled with smoke. The men could

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not breathe. They needed help to get out.

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Morgan and some volunteers hurried into the tunnel. They were wearing the masks. The gas masks

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allowed them to breathe freely. Garrett and his friends helped the men out of the tunnel. They all

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survived.

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News of this exciting rescue spread quickly. After this event many firefighters contacted Morgan.

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They wanted to learn more about his gas mask. Soon, they were using the masks to breathe safely

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in smoke-filled buildings.

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A few years later Morgan was given a gold Medal of Bravery by the City of Cleveland. His gas

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mask won a gold medal from the International Association of Fire Chiefs. It also won a gold medal

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from the International Exposition of Sanitation and Safety. His invention has helped save many

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lives.

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A Love of Nature
TCLD Title: How Was Yosemite Valley Protected?
Lexile: 550
Source: SDAA 2003

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John Muir loved nature. He lived in California's Yosemite Valley in the early 1900s. He loved to hike in its forests. He loved to study its rock formations. Muir respected nature. He wanted to preserve the valley in its natural state.

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Muir was concerned about the valley. People brought animals to graze on the land. People cut down trees to clear places to live. This caused the soil to wash away. Muir thought that the damage people were doing was wrong. Protecting nature became his passion. Muir fought hard to save Yosemite Valley.

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In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt heard about John Muir. He asked Muir to guide him on a tour of Yosemite Valley. Muir thought that this was a great opportunity. He wanted to persuade the President to help save the valley.

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When Roosevelt arrived, Muir took him to the most beautiful places in the valley. The two men climbed mountains. They rode horses. They camped under the stars. Muir showed Roosevelt how the land was being destroyed. Muir warned that its beauty might be lost forever. He asked the President to help save the valley. The President was awed by the valley's beauty. He became convinced that it needed to be preserved.

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In 1906, Yosemite Valley became part of a national park. This was mostly due to President Roosevelt's support. New regulations were put in place. Cutting down trees was banned. No one could clear the land to build highways, towns, or large numbers of houses. The land would be preserved so that people could hike, camp, and enjoy nature.

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Today, some historic areas in California honor the work of John Muir. A peaceful forest of giant redwood trees is named for him. Muir's work helped save many areas. People will enjoy these beautiful wilderness areas for years to come.

Cynthia’s Big Decision
TCLD Title: Cynthia’s Big Decision
Lexile: 640
Source: SDAA 2003

- 18 Cynthia had always been afraid to try new things. She wanted to learn to play the trumpet in middle school. However, her mother wondered whether the trumpet was the best choice for her.
- 33 “I’m happy that you want to play an instrument. Don’t you think you would rather try the flute?”
 51 her mother asked. “That’s the instrument I played when I was in school. We already have one. A
 69 flute makes a lovely sound. It’s also much easier to carry from place to place.”
- 84 But Cynthia was adamant. She was determined to master the shiny golden instrument with the
 99 bold sound. Band classes began, and it soon became apparent that Cynthia was an exceptional
 114 musician. While other students squeaked their way up and down the scales, Cynthia played simple
 129 melodies in pure, sweet tones.
- 134 The trumpet provided a new way for her to express her feelings. Cynthia found herself making
 150 new friends. The other trumpet players often asked Cynthia for suggestions on how they could
 165 improve their playing. Cynthia was growing more confident.
- 173 By the time Cynthia reached high school, she was one of the best trumpet players in the band. One
 192 day Mr. Peters, her band teacher, asked Cynthia to see him after class. She was eligible to audition
 210 for the countywide youth orchestra. He would be delighted to recommend her. Was she interested?
- 225 Cynthia hesitated. Playing in the youth orchestra would be a dream come true. The orchestra was
 241 made up of the best young musicians in the county. But it meant that she would have to memorize
 260 a piece of music. She would also have to audition in front of a group of music teachers. What if
 280 she didn’t do well? What if she forgot the notes? She would be embarrassed. Mr. Peters would be
 298 disappointed.
- 299 Cynthia swallowed hard. She told Mr. Peters that she would think about it. The next day Cynthia
 316 talked to her mother.
- 320 “I want to audition, but I’m also afraid. I don’t know what to do!” she told her mother.
- 338 Cynthia’s mother looked her in the eye. “Remember when I told you that you should play the
 355 flute? Well, you knew all along that the trumpet was right for you. I think you know what is right
 375 for you now.”
 378

Stella the Spelunker
TCLD Title: Stella the Spelunker
Lexile: 670
Source: TAKS Study Guide 2003

“Careful! Low bridge!” Marcos said in a clear voice. It echoed throughout the cave.

14 “Low bridge!” called the next woman as she passed under the low part of the stone ceiling.

31 Stella was next in line and her father was close behind. She wanted to be near him because she was
 51 a little afraid in the dark cave. The world under the ground was so unfamiliar to her and she was
 71 not sure how to react. It was not like any other place she had ever seen.

87 It was Stella’s turn to call out the warning. “Low bridge!” she yelled.

100 Stella and her father were spelunkers today. Marcos had explained that a spelunker is a person who
 117 explores caves. Marcos was the tour guide. The tour group came to a large open space where soft
 135 lights exposed many beautiful colors in the cave.

143 Things that looked like stone icicles hung from the ceiling. Because Stella lived in a warm place,
 160 she had never seen real icicles before. Her father had told her that, when it was very cold, the
 179 water flowing off the roof of a house could freeze. More and more water would build up to make
 198 an icicle. The icicles in the cave were not made of water, but of a mineral called calcite. Many
 217 different colors could be seen shining in them. Stella noticed something strange about these cave
 232 icicles. Some hung from the ceiling, but others stuck up from the ground.

245 When everyone had gathered together, Marcos spoke. “These are stalactites and stalagmites,” he
 258 said. “Does anyone know how to remember the difference between the two?”

270 An older woman raised her hand. “You might step on those sticking up from the ground. They’re
 287 stalagmites.”

288 “You’re right,” Marcos said. “That will help you remember the difference. Anyone else have an
 303 idea?”

304 A boy answered. “Stalactites hang tight to the ceiling of the cave.”

316 Marcos agreed with the boy. Stella saw a place where a stalactite and a stalagmite had joined at the
 335 middle.

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“Look,” she said. “Those two are stuck together. The one from the top meets the one from the bottom and they join to make a column!”

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“Exactly!” said Marcos. “That’s what it’s called—a column.”

371

As they walked, Marcos told about other rock formations in the cave. Some of these unusual shapes had their own special names. Most were named after what they looked like. A long hollow tube was called a soda straw. “Ribbons” looked like rows of soft hanging ribbons. Marcos pointed to some rounded shapes of rock that were grouped together.

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“Which snack do they look like?” he asked.

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One little girl in the tour group said they looked like grapes, while another tourist said they looked like lemons. Just then Stella had an idea.

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“Popcorn!” she called out.

468

“Exactly. Popcorn is the name of this rock form,” said Marcos.

479

Stella moved along with the other spelunkers. She was no longer afraid. In fact, she felt quite the opposite, and was filled with wonder. What would she see around the next corner? What else would she learn? She was excited about the surprises to come.

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An Amazing Insect
TCLD Title: An Amazing Insect
Lexile: 580
Source: TAAS 2002

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Some people call it a horse stinger. Some call it a snake doctor. The real name is dragonfly. A dragonfly is an insect. It is large and attractive. It does not harm people. It can be any one of the colors in the rainbow. It can be bright blue, red, green, or yellow. On a summer day it can often be seen flying around a stream or a pond. Sometimes it lands on a rock or a tall plant. The dragonfly is very different from most other insects. It can do many surprising things.

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The dragonfly can fly very fast. It can quickly zip up or down. It can also go from side to side. Other times it hovers in the air in one spot. It doesn't even move. It can do all of these things very easily. This is because it has two pairs of large wings that stick out from its sides. When the front pair of wings goes up, the back pair goes down. The wings also turn to the side. This allows the dragonfly to fly in loops or go backward.

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The dragonfly can see better than most other insects. It can also move its head freely in any direction. It has two gigantic eyes that take up half of its head. These large eyes have thousands of parts. Each part sees a piece of what the dragonfly is looking at. If a dragonfly is looking at a leaf, each part of each eye sees a different piece of it. All these pieces fit together like a puzzle. They help the dragonfly see the whole leaf clearly. The dragonfly has the ability to see things up to 40 feet away.

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The dragonfly has a big appetite and is bigger than most other insects. It spends much of its time hunting for food. Each day it eats hundreds of mosquitoes and flies. It uses its legs like a basket to gather up insects while it is flying. Some large dragonflies are strong enough to lift small fish right out of the water.

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The dragonfly is an amazing insect. It delights and amazes everyone who watches it.

More Than a Zoo
TCLD Title: More Than a Zoo
Lexile: 600
Source: TAKS Information Booklet 2004

20 Popcorn Park Zoo is not like most zoos that you may have seen. It is a very unique place. This
 39 zoo gives help to animals in need. Workers at the zoo care for hurt or sick animals. Those animals
 57 that cannot continue to live on their own stay at Popcorn Park Zoo. The animals that are healthy
 enough are returned to their natural habitats.

64 This unusual place was not originally a zoo. At first it was called the Forked River Animal Care
 82 Center. The workers there took care of lost or unwanted cats and dogs. Today the center is part of
 101 the zoo. However, many other kinds of animals are helped there, too.

113 The changes to the center began in 1977. A raccoon was brought to the center. One of its front
 132 paws had been badly hurt. The workers cared for the animal until it became healthy. Yet it could
 150 not care for itself. The raccoon was allowed to live at the center. Then a hurt deer was brought to
 170 the center. It, too, stayed there after it got well.

180 People realized there was wonderful work being done at the center. They began taking all kinds of
 197 hurt or homeless animals there. Soon the center was no longer just a home for cats and dogs. There
 216 were many animals living there. It became more like a zoo.

227 It was time for a new name. Many of the animals there liked to eat popcorn made without oil or
 247 salt. This popcorn is sold at the zoo. They use this money to care for the animals. People buy the
 267 popcorn to feed the animals as a treat.

275 Popcorn Park Zoo now takes care of more than 200 kinds of animals. Tigers, lions, monkeys, and
 292 bears live there. The zoo is also home to squirrels, birds, and many other animals.

307 Many of the animals live freely at the zoo. Some of the gentler ones, such as goats, sheep, geese,
 326 and deer, walk among the visitors who come to see them. Others are kept in large closed-in areas.
 345 These areas are almost like their natural habitats, or homes. All the animals at the zoo get lots of
 364 care and love.
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Kate Shelley: The Heroine of the Bridge
TCLD Title: Kate Shelley: The Heroine of the Bridge
Lexile: 620
Source: SDAA 2004

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- A thunderstorm raged on the night of July 6, 1881. Fifteen year old Kate Shelley and her mother were awakened by a booming crash. The Shelley’s small house sat near where the tracks of the Northwestern Railway crossed the Honey Creek Bridge. Kate Shelley quickly realized what the crash meant.
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- “The bridge has collapsed in the storm. The midnight train is due,” Kate said. She hurried to get her coat. “I have to warn the train’s engineer!”
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- Her mother protested. Despite these protests, Kate grabbed a lantern and stepped out into the storm. She struggled toward Honey Creek. She saw what she had feared. The bridge was gone. She was appalled to see a train engine in the wild water. In the wavering light Kate saw two people clinging to a tree on the other side of the creek. She realized they were the crew sent to inspect the bridge before the midnight train came through.
- 156
- “I’ll get help!” Kate shouted to them.
- 163
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- The nearest station was almost two miles away across the Des Moines River Bridge. Kate ran through the slashing rain and stinging wind. Finally she reached the bridge.
- 191
- “What if it collapses, too?” she thought.
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- She decided it was better not to think about that. Crossing the bridge was very dangerous for Kate. The wind blew out her lantern. It was virtually impossible to stand upright in the high wind. She had to crawl on her hands and knees.
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- The tracks were very high above the ground. The bridge spanned 500 feet. The midnight train would reach the bridge Kate was on at any time. The rails were wet and slippery. Kate was very frightened. She could smell the river water below, but she couldn’t see anything through the blinding rain. Still she crept onward. Finally she reached solid ground. Bleeding and wet, Kate struggled to the station.
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- “Stop the midnight train! The Honey Creek Bridge has collapsed!” she shouted to the men inside. “The inspection crew has already gone off the bridge, and they need help quickly.”

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When the midnight train reached the station, the passengers learned that an amazing girl named Kate Shelley had saved their lives. Many newspapers printed the story. Kate Shelley became famous across the nation. In songs and stories she was called the Heroine of the Bridge.

Jake's Homecoming
TCLD Title: Jake's Homecoming
Lexile: 690
Source: SDAA 2003

18 Thomas had not seen his cousin Jake in almost three years. Jake and his family had moved to
 34 Japan after Jake's father had received an overseas job assignment. The move had been hard on
 50 both boys. Jake and Thomas had been inseparable. Ever since they had been babies, they had rarely been apart.

53 After Jake moved away, the boys corresponded by letter and e-mail. However, writing wasn't
 67 the same as talking face-to-face. Now Jake was returning to spend the entire month of July with
 86 Thomas's family. Thomas had spent weeks planning what they might do together.

98 Jake had a great sense of humor. He loved to laugh, so Thomas checked out several comedy DVDs
 116 from the library. Thomas also planned a day of fishing at the lake. He thought back to their first
 135 fishing trip. He grinned at the memory of Jake's attempts at baiting a hook.

149 When the day finally arrived, Thomas and his parents drove to the airport to pick up Jake. Thomas
 167 could barely contain his excitement as he scanned the crowds swarming through the airport.
 181 Suddenly he felt a tap on his shoulder and spun around. A tall, lanky boy wearing a backpack and
 200 carrying a battered guitar case stood beside him.

208 "Hey, Thomas," the tall boy said in a deep voice.

218 Thomas stared in disbelief. Could this stranger be Jake? He stood at least six inches taller than
 235 Thomas. He also appeared much thinner than he had been three years ago.

248 "Jake, is that you?" Thomas asked.

254 "Of course, Thomas! Who else would I be?" Jake said as he punched his cousin's arm.

270 Thomas smiled weakly. Jake looked and sounded so much older. Thomas hadn't known that Jake
 285 played the guitar. Had Jake changed in other ways, too? Thomas shifted uneasily from one foot to
 302 the other. He wondered whether they still shared any of the same interests.

315 "Let's go get the rest of your luggage, Jake," Thomas's father said. "Thomas, why don't you help
 332 Jake with his guitar?"

336

Thomas reached for Jake's guitar case and was surprised at how light it was. "What kind of guitar is this?" Thomas asked.

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"Open it and see," Jake said, grinning.

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Thomas set down the case, flipped the latches, and opened the lid. Tucked inside were two halves of a fishing pole, a reel, and other fishing gear. Thomas started to laugh.

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"It was the safest way to transport my gear from Japan to Texas," Jake explained to his relatives.

414

"You were planning on a trip to the lake, weren't you, Thomas?"

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The Come-Back Coffeehouse
TCLD Title: The Come-Back Coffeehouse
Lexile: 720
Source: TAAS 2002

17 The sign in the window read “Carl’s Coffee Shoppe.” It was spelled the old -fashioned way. Hallie
 34 shook her head at the name. She wondered how many times she had suggested an alternative. Only
 one customer was there when she entered.

41 Hallie dropped her schoolbooks on the counter. She looked over and saw her father dejectedly
 56 shuffling some papers. She knew they had been having financial difficulties lately. She was very
 71 concerned.

72 Hallie began cleaning the worn countertops. She looked at all the old, worn-down items in the
 90 shop and sighed. She longed to make some changes. At closing time, Hallie’s parents came out of
 107 the kitchen and sat beside her.

112 “The shop has not been lucrative lately,” Mr. Rhodes began. “We need to decide if it is even worth
 131 keeping open. We’re going to visit Uncle Harold over spring vacation. He’s an accountant. He can
 147 look over the books and tell us what our options are. You and Aunt Tess will stay here and manage
 167 the shop for the week.”

172 By spring vacation Hallie was ready for the adventure. Her parents gave some instructions, said
 187 good-bye, and left. As she watched her parents leave, Hallie stared absently out the window at
 204 the passersby. They were not the same people that her grandpa had served when he had run the
 222 restaurant. Hallie realized that the clientele had changed, but the restaurant had not. Suddenly she
 237 had a brilliant idea. She confided it in Aunt Tess. Aunt Tess liked the idea, and the two eagerly set
 257 to work.

259 At the end of the week, Hallie was carrying a tray from the kitchen when she saw her parents at
 279 the door. They looked bewildered. She hadn’t even heard the little bell over the hubbub of patrons
 296 placing orders and laughing as they played board games.

305 She smiled as her parents stared at the teens clustered around the counter and the young families
 322 seated at the tables.

326 “Welcome back!” Hallie greeted them. She swept her arm to present the restaurant’s cheerful new
 341 decor. Bright, attractive coverings adorned the tables. Modern posters hung on the walls. And
 355 colorful mismatched dishes contributed to the pleasant atmosphere.

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“What happened while we were gone?” asked Hallie’s mother.

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“I took a look at who was out there,” Hallie answered. “We were still catering to Grandpa Carl’s generation. What we needed was a fresh approach and a new look.”

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“How could you afford all this?” asked her father.

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“I brought board games and puzzles from home,” Hallie added excitedly. “The bookstore down the street donated the posters. When we talked to our friends about what we were doing, they were happy to give us some dishes.”

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“Everyone certainly seems to like the changes,” noted Mrs. Rhodes.

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“Speaking of changes,” Mr. Rhodes said as he walked toward the sign, “I see our name has changed, too.”

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“Do you mind? I changed our name to ‘Come-Back Coffeehouse’ to make the shop sound welcoming . . .,” Hallie faltered, hoping her father wouldn’t be offended.

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A smile spread across her father’s face. “I like it,” he said. He looked around the bustling room and realized that he had never wanted to close his father’s shop.

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“The new name is fitting. Thanks to you, this place certainly has made a comeback!”

The Bank Deposit
TCLD Title: The Bank Deposit
Lexile: 740
Source: TAKS 2004

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69 Jennifer watched as her mother carefully counted the money from the cash register and filled out the morning's bank deposit slip. It was the first week of summer vacation. Jennifer was finally getting the opportunity to work a real job. Mom and Dad had agreed to let her work at the family diner. Jennifer wanted to earn enough money to buy a new computer. She was in charge of cleaning the tables. She secretly desired to do more than merely clean up after customers, though.
- 85 "I'll take this money to the bank later," Mom said, locking it securely in a small lockbox.
- 102
119 Jennifer offered to take it, but Mom explained that she was needed at the diner. Jennifer frowned. She knew that her mother did not trust her with the money.
- 131
149 A few minutes later, Mom discovered that they were nearly out of coffee. She asked Jennifer to run across the street to buy some.
- 155
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190 Jennifer willingly agreed and went to the office to grab her jacket. She remembered the bank deposit in the desk drawer and knew it was ready to take to the bank. Thinking she would surprise Mom by depositing it, she took it with her.
- 199
217 Jennifer walked to the bank to make the deposit first. However, when she opened the door, she saw an enormous throng of people and decided to go back after the market.
- 230
250 She walked next door to the market and grabbed a can of coffee. She set the bank bag down while she reached into her pocket to get the money for her purchase.
- 262
280 Afterwards, she returned to the diner and began to make the coffee herself. Just as she was starting the pot of coffee, her father returned.
- 287 "Frank," Mom said to Dad, "will you take the money to the bank? It's in the desk drawer."
- 305 Jennifer felt her stomach drop as she thought of the bank deposit! What had she done with it?
- 323 "I don't see it," Dad called a moment later from the office.
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351 Mom went to join in the hunt. After frantically searching the office, she concluded that someone must have stolen it.

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“Mom, Dad,” Jennifer said hesitantly as she approached them, “I lost the bank deposit.”

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Jennifer explained as quickly as she could. Realizing that it must be at the market, she and her

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mom dashed across the street. They retraced Jennifer’s steps. Finally Jennifer spotted the bank bag

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lying under the edge of a shelf.

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“I found it!” Jennifer yelled in relief.

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Mom opened the bag nervously. “The money is gone, but the checks and the credit card receipts

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are still here. It’s not a total loss.”

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Jennifer hung her head. She felt more miserable than she had ever felt. They went back to the diner

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and explained everything to her father.

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“Jennifer,” Dad said, “I know you were trying to help, but that doesn’t excuse your actions. You

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cannot take money without asking us.”

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“I guess you don’t want me to work here anymore,” she said softly. Jennifer felt sick to her

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stomach. She couldn’t even look at her parents.

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“On the contrary,” Dad said. “You need to work to reimburse the diner for the money you lost.

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After you’ve paid your debt, you might still be able to save enough for that new computer.”

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The Hindenburg
TCLD Title: The Hindenburg
Lexile: 760
Source: TAKS 2006

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- Leanna and her father were on their way to Lakehurst Naval Air Station. They were going to see the *Hindenburg* land. Leanna was very excited to see the largest aircraft ever to fly. At over 800 feet, the *Hindenburg* was longer than three 747s placed end to end. It was going to be an amazing sight to watch the airship land only hundreds of feet from her.
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- Leanna had won the right to cover the docking of the *Hindenburg* by entering a writing contest at her high school. By winning this contest, she received the opportunity to watch and write about the airship landing. She was thrilled to be covering the story with her father, who was a well-respected journalist.
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- After clearing the Lakehurst Naval Air Station security, Leanna and her father parked the car and waited for the airship to come into view. Leanna sat on the roof of the car, scribbling ideas in her notebook. She heard the noise of the crowd rise suddenly, and she looked in the direction of the Atlantic Ocean. From far away the airship was only a dark spot in a twilight sky. As it neared, it began to take shape. The airship was impressive but not beautiful, she thought. She had never seen anything so big.
- 215
- “I guess those fins are used to steer the airship,” her father said pointing.
- 229
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- Suddenly a ball of light erupted exactly where her father was pointing. Leanna thought at first that people aboard the airship must be taking photographs with large cameras and flashbulbs. But, in an instant, she realized she was wrong. She was not seeing light, but fire.
- 275
291
- The *Hindenburg* was burning! She looked at her father in horror. Always the newsman, he grabbed his camera from the backseat. He paused for a second to reassure her.
- 304
321
- “We’re safe here,” he promised. “Don’t think about it. Just write. That is why we’re here. People are counting on us to report this story. I’m getting the pictures.”
- 333
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- She felt sick about reporting a tragic event, but she knew his instincts were right. She started to write down everything she saw and heard.
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- For the next several moments, chaos reigned. Engulfed in flames, the back end of the airship fell first, and then the front end collapsed toward it. Crumpling to the ground, the airship looked as if it

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had suddenly become tired of flying. The people on the ground closest to the inferno ran to escape the heat and falling debris. Leanna could feel the air temperature rising.

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“It will burn forever,” Leanna thought. She heard sirens wailing as fire trucks began to arrive. To Leanna it seemed like putting out a forest fire with a garden hose.

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In all, 36 people died in this fiery explosion. Leanna couldn’t imagine the horror the victims endured on the airship as it burned. Amazingly enough, 62 people from the airship survived.

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After several hours, Leanna and her father climbed numbly into their car. The burning of the *Hindenburg* seemed too immense to comprehend. The images of the tragedy haunted Leanna. She wanted to go home and sleep, but she knew she would not rest for a long time.

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Poison-Dart Frog

Lexile: 770

Source: Original Work

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Traveling through the rainforests of South America, you will find thousands of interesting creatures. From the tiniest insects to the largest animals, a countless number of species live in the rainforest. Many are unlike anything that most people have ever seen in the United States.

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One such beautiful creature is a frog. This is no ordinary green frog, however. It is a very beautiful one called the strawberry poison-dart frog. Poison-dart frogs are so named because South American tribesmen used to use secretions from the frog's skin to create poison darts. These poisonous darts were then used in tribal warfare and in hunting. The toxins of some frogs are very strong. The poison from one skin can coat the tips of 50 darts.

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The strawberry poison-dart frog is a beautiful example of a poison-dart frog. These frogs have bright red bodies with blue on their back legs. The bright color of the skin is a signal to predators. It tells them that the frogs are poisonous. The skin of some frogs will only make their predators sick. However, the poison on the strawberry poison-dart frog is extremely toxic. It may only take one lick to kill a predator.

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Unlike the female, the skin of the male strawberry poison-dart frog is not always red. During the mating season, he changes colors. He can be brown, green, or blue. This helps the female frog identify with which frogs to mate.

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Strawberry poison-dart frogs are tiny. At just under one inch in length, these frogs mainly eat insects. However, their small size makes them easy prey. Birds, snakes, and spiders all hunt them. The toxin on their skin serves as great protection against these larger creatures.

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Strawberry poison-dart frogs are very devoted to their babies. After mating, the female will lay three to five eggs on a leaf. It is the male's job to ensure that the eggs are kept hydrated. After about ten days, the eggs hatch. Then the female transports the tadpoles on her back to a place with water.

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The tadpoles are placed alone at separate locations. This is because they are cannibalistic. The female frog understands this and tries to protect her babies. She knows she must keep them separated.

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When all the tadpoles are safely moved, the female will come to each tadpole every few days and deposit food eggs. After about a month, the tadpole will become a small froglet. Generally, these

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froglings then stay near their water source for a few days. They do this for protection while they absorb the rest of their tail. After that, they are able to live on their own.

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The strawberry poison-dart frog is an interesting frog. It has learned to adapt well in its environment. Its poison is useful, and its skin is beautiful. The rainforest is home to many amazing creatures.

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Anything for the Bike
TCLD Title: Anything for the Bike
Lexile: 810
Source: TAKS 2006

- 16
34 Mrs. Radcliff wasn't really as mean as everyone said. At least that's what Jordan kept telling himself on the way to ring the doorbell of the scariest looking house in the neighborhood. He had picked Mrs. Radcliff's house because he figured no one else would come here to ask for work.
- 51
68
83 As he got closer to Mrs. Radcliff's house he thought about turning around and walking in the opposite direction. However, he knew that the bicycle he wanted was really expensive and he needed to earn some money. He told himself that he should at least talk to her.
- 99 The gate into Mrs. Radcliff's yard opened with a scary squeak, and Jordan wanted to run away.
- 116 "That's all right," Jordan said to himself, taking a deep breath. "I can fix that."
- 131 The path leading to the house was overgrown with numerous weeds and bushes.
- 144 "That's O.K.," Jordan thought. "I can trim the bushes and pull those weeds."
- 157
174 Summoning all of his courage, Jordan knocked on the old door. When he heard rustling inside, he took a tentative step back and thought about walking away.
- 184 The door opened just a little, and somebody said, "Yes?"
- 194
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233 Jordan was afraid of what he would see. The kids in the neighborhood told stories about Mrs. Radcliff. It was said that no one came to see her and that she never went out. As the yard inside the fence had grown wilder over the last year, so had the stories.
- 245
261 The door opened all the way and Jordan swallowed when he saw that shadows covered the woman's face.
- 263 "Yes?" she said again.
- 267
287 "My name is Jordan Wells," he said in a shaky voice. "I live with my grandma down the street, and I was wondering whether you had any work I could do around here."
- 300
316 "You're Lillian Wells' grandson," Mrs. Radcliff said in a quiet voice. Then she turned her head toward her yard. "Well, yes, I guess I could use some help. Please come in."

331 Mrs. Radcliff stepped back and held open the door. Jordan watched her closely as he stepped inside
348 the dark house.

351 “Sorry it’s so dark,” she said, looking upward. “I guess that bulb is burned out.”

366 “Come into the kitchen,” Mrs. Radcliff said as she walked in the dark. Jordan stood still, letting his
384 eyes adjust to the darkness. When he could see, he noticed that all the furniture was covered with
402 sheets. At least he thought it was furniture.

410 Then Jordan heard a shrill noise that sounded like a scream. The noise scared him so badly that he
429 couldn’t take another step.

433 “You’re just in time!” Mrs. Radcliff said as she swung open the kitchen door. The room was bright
451 and cheerful inside. A teakettle on the stove was whistling. Mrs. Radcliff smiled, and Jordan was
467 reminded of his grandmother. “It’s been a little difficult for me to do everything around here since
484 my children moved away.”

488 Jordan looked at the woman and smiled. “What kind of work can I help you with?” he asked.

506 “Well,” she said, getting out another cup, “I always have a cup of hot chocolate this time of day.
525 And I just baked some chocolate chip cookies. How about joining me and having some cookies
541 and milk? As we eat, we can talk about the things you can do for me around the house.”

560 “That would be great. Thank you,” replied Jordan.

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Allison’s Gift
TCLD Title: Allison’s Gift
Lexile: 890
Source: TAKS 2006

- 19 I will never forget the precise moment that caused me to set aside my gift because I wanted the
 37 gift that my older sister Carla had. My family was spending a week at the beach. One morning,
 58 Carla went to the beach early, but I stayed behind to finish a sketch of a seashell I’d found the day
 before. After I finished the drawing, I put on my swimsuit and walked to the beach to join Carla.
- 77 I was about a hundred yards away from the ocean when I spotted Carla doing cartwheels in the wet
 96 sand. Lean and muscular, Carla was a champion gymnast. Her motions were slow and perfect as
 112 she wheeled along the shore. The beauty of that sight froze me in awe, and I decided instantly that
 131 I too would become a gymnast.
- 137 It is important at this point to mention that I had never been very athletic or particularly
 154 coordinated. Physical education was my least favorite subject in school. Nevertheless, I told my
 168 parents I wanted to take a gymnastics class.
- 176 “O.K., Allison,” my mother said with surprise.
- 183 The next week I enrolled in a beginners’ tumbling class. If only my parents had talked me out of
 202 this misguided plan and spared me the agonies I went through! Five minutes into the first class, it
 220 was obvious that I didn’t have the makings of a gymnast. I couldn’t even master a somersault, but
 238 I kept at it. During this time drawing and painting—which had been my two passions—all but left
 257 my mind. I abandoned art to practice what, in my case, can only loosely be called tumbling.
- 274 It must have been painful for my family to put on an encouraging face as they watched my dogged,
 293 but fumbling, efforts. I was blindly determined to be like Carla. I just would not relent.
- 309 At some point during this period, on the advice of Ms. Renquist, my art teacher, I hurriedly
 326 submitted my seashell sketch for an art contest in our town. One night, as I was groaning my way
 345 through an attempted back bend, the phone rang. I unbent myself gracelessly as Carla handed the
 361 phone to me. It was Ms. Renquist.
- 368 “You won the contest!” she announced.
- 374 “Really?” was all I managed to reply.

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“Yes,” Ms. Renquist said. “They’re going to give you an award at the annual banquet. And that’s not all. The winner is automatically accepted into Wildale’s Summer Fine Arts Institute.”

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“Wow!” I shouted into the receiver. I couldn’t believe that I’d gotten into such an elite program. Only a handful of young artists were accepted each summer.

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When I hung up, Carla made me recount every word of the conversation.

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“That’s fantastic, Allison!” she said. “Let’s go tell Mom and Dad.”

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That night I didn’t go back into the living room to continue practicing. And when my tumbling class ended the next week, I didn’t sign up again. Gymnastics was Carla’s gift, not mine. It had taken me a while, but I realized that I had a valuable gift of my own.

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Nana’s Barn
TCLD Title: Nana’s Barn
Lexile: 900
Source: TAAS 2000

- 15 Amy had promised to help Nana, her grandmother, with this year’s spring cleaning. Nana had started by scrubbing the hardwood floors and Amy was assigned to clean out the hall closet.
- 31 As Amy was removing some of the old clothes, she discovered an old board about four feet long
 49 with white paint that was peeling and faded. She noticed there were several sets of initials carved
 66 on one side. Thinking the board couldn’t be something Nana wanted to keep, Amy started to carry
 83 it out to the garbage.
- 88 “Wait, Amy,” said Nana. “Where are you going with that?”
- 98 “I guess to the garbage. Do you need it?”
- 107 “Well, I don’t really need it, but it is special to me.” Nana said, walking over to her desk and taking
 128 out a small album. She opened it to a page of old photographs and showed Amy a picture of a
 148 group of people standing in front of a big barn.
- 158 “Here I am in the white dress,” she said, pointing. “I was about your age then. This is my father,
 178 mother, and Uncle Bud. All of the other people were dear friends and neighbors. We had just raised
 196 that barn on my family’s farm,” she explained.
- 204 “Raised a barn?” Amy asked, looking puzzled.
- 211 “Back when I was a girl, when someone in the area needed a barn built, people brought their
 229 hammers and saws and joined them. We started on a Friday night with a large congregation of
 246 neighbors, relatives, and friends. People began arriving in the evening, and we shared a delicious
 261 meal. Then the children sat around and sang songs while the adults discussed the building plans for
 278 the barn. Enough food was prepared to feed everyone for the entire weekend.
- 291 “On Saturday the work started. It was hard, but with everyone working together, the job was
 307 finished quickly. We built it in two days!
- 315 “On Sunday night, when the barn was finished, my father asked me to help him put the weather
 333 vane on the roof. We carefully climbed up a tall ladder and, when we got to the top, my father held
 354 me as we stepped onto the roof. It was so high that I could see all the surrounding farms and even

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the rooftops in town. When my father bolted the weather vane to the roof everyone clapped as they saw it slowly begin to turn in the wind.

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“When we got down, everyone gathered around one corner of the barn. As the finale to the busy weekend, we carved our initials on the side of the barn. And that’s where all those initials came from,” said Nana.

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“What happened to the barn?” asked Amy.

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“Well, that’s the part I don’t like remembering,” replied Nana in a faded voice. “It was torn down when the new highway was built.”

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After a pause Amy suggested, “Let’s put the board back in the closet so it will be safe forever.”

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“I have a better idea,” said Nana. “Let’s go down to the hobby store and get some wood to build a nice frame for it. We can hang it right here on the kitchen wall.”

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“I think that’s a great idea,” answered Amy.

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Inventing the Ride
TCLD Title: Inventing the Ride
Lexile: 840
Source: TAKS Study Guide 2003

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Ask any skateboard fan about the sport's greatest performers, and Tony Hawk's name will be at the top of the list. Hawk has spent a lot of his time promoting the sport of skateboarding. His work has helped win worldwide acceptance for this extreme sport. Although he retired from professional competition in 1999, Hawk still inspires young skaters today.

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From the beginning, people knew there was something special about Hawk. He was always full of energy. His parents saw in him the drive that would one day make him a champion. Young Hawk was very bright. He enjoyed going to school and learning to play the violin. Once he began skateboarding, though, his new interest began to take much of his day. He found little time for anything else.

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Hawk's older brother Steve was a surfer. Sometimes, he and his friends would practice surfing moves on their skateboards. One day when Hawk was nine years old, Steve gave him an old skateboard and rolled Hawk through his first lessons. Steve modeled many of his surfing moves for Hawk. Hawk mastered the basic moves quickly.

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Hawk did not become a champion overnight. He entered his first skateboard contest at the age of 11. He jokes that he finished in about 99th place.

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At first Hawk did not have the muscle to skate well, but he had the willpower. He slowly learned the tricks he saw more experienced skaters doing. As his skill increased, he invented his own difficult moves. When he was 13, Hawk gained support from businesses to help pay for his training and travel to competitions. At the age of 15, he became a professional skater. By 16 he was being called the best skater in the world.

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Just before he retired, Hawk became the first skater to perform a trick called the "900." Many skaters have found only injury and frustration trying this two-and-a-half mid-air flip. The trick is still a challenge for Hawk. He continues to skate for show and his own pleasure.

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Today Hawk is married. He has children of his own. They are the reason for the Tony Hawk Foundation. This is a nonprofit organization he began in 2000. The foundation helps cities plan and build skate parks for young skaters. Hawk believes that young skaters should have a place to practice their sport. Without a place of their own to skate, they tend to go to malls, parking lots, and other places where skateboarding is not safe.

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The Tony Hawk Foundation also works to build positive relationships between skaters and the communities that may see skaters as troublemakers. For Hawk and many other skaters, skateboarding is the opposite of troublemaking. Skating helps build character. It also helped keep Hawk out of trouble when he was young. He believes that the sport can give young skaters today a way to focus their energy, build their physical and mental skills, and learn to believe in themselves. Hawk's career has shaped the skateboarding world and has given people a new outlook on the sport.

Smart Houses
TCLD Title: Smart Houses
Lexile: 860
Source: SDAA 2003

19 Imagine a house that sounds a buzzer if you forget to take out the garbage. Picture a house that
 38 turns on the lights for you just before you arrive home. Envision a house that raises and lowers the
 55 window shades as the sun moves across the sky. Such houses are not science fiction. They really
 71 exist. They're called smart houses. They are designed to make life simpler and easier for their
 owners.

72 Smart houses are controlled by a computer panel. This computer panel integrates all of the home's
 88 electronic systems. It links together the communication systems such as the telephone, cable
 101 television, and Internet. This is all to make life easier for the homeowner.

114 To build a new smart house, all of the existing communication systems can be connected while the
 131 house is being built. However, to change an older home into a smart house is a more difficult task.
 150 Workers must sometimes break through walls, floors, or ceilings to install new wiring and connect
 165 the home's systems. This makes the installation of a smart system in an older house a big job. In
 184 a few years, however, turning an older house into a smart house could be much easier. Wireless
 201 technology will allow people to connect systems through a central control unit without having to
 216 rewire their homes.

219 Some people wonder whether smart houses are really such a good idea. They think that it is
 236 unnecessary to have a refrigerator that makes its own shopping list. Even some owners of smart
 252 houses are unsure about their greatness. Programming and operating the control panel require
 265 technical skills that many people lack. This can be intimidating. When things go wrong, owners
 280 often feel helpless.

283 Others believe that smart houses are a great idea, especially for the elderly and other people
 299 with special needs. Things can be done for them that they cannot do for themselves. Beds can be
 317 lowered and raised with the touch of a button. Showers can be turned on at preset times. Doors can
 336 be opened automatically. Some new systems can even answer voice commands. Some can respond
 350 to hand motions. For people with special needs, an automatic house would not be a toy. It would
 368 be a tool that could eliminate some of their daily obstacles.

379 Smart houses can be both intimidating and useful. It all depends on the perspective of the potential
 396 owner. But one thing is definite—the technology of today will allow for this type of house to be

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more common. Whether built out of convenience or out of necessity, smart houses will continue to impress their owners.

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Strength in Numbers
TCLD Title: Strength in Numbers
Lexile: 910
Source: TAKS 2006

- 18 I spotted several bulls grazing at the center of a grassy field, each facing a different direction, each looking like a delicious meal.
- 23 As I planned my attack, I sharpened my claws on a nearby log, and dreamed of the feast that
 42 awaited me. I skulked through the underbrush, waiting for an opportunity to take advantage of my
 58 good fortune.
- 60 “How I would hate to be as weak as a bull. Surely they live in terror of strong animals like me.” I
 82 thought with satisfaction, “I fear no one, except the hunter who comes here now and then.”
- 98 I dashed across the plain, preparing to pounce on a bull. But, to my surprise, the bulls quickly
 116 stood back to back, facing outward. Try as I might, I could not attack them. No matter which
 134 direction I tried to spring from, I was stopped by a menacing pair of horns threatening to pierce my
 153 hide.
- 154 “This is not as easy as it seemed at first,” I thought, as I crouched beneath a tree. I was frustrated
 175 and out of breath, but did not want to dwell on this failure. Patience would be of utmost importance
 194 here, and I was determined to be patient.
- 202 “All it takes is a little time,” I said before dozing off. For three hot days I hid under the tree and
 224 watched the bulls. For three days, they stood there together, waiting for me to go away. On the
 242 fourth day something unusual happened that caught my attention, and made me hopeful.
- 255 “I’m tired of facing east,” said one bull. “The sunrise hurts my eyes. Let’s switch places.”
- 271 “Oh, no,” said another bull. “Don’t you remember how you insisted on being the one to face east?
 289 You wouldn’t let anyone else see the sunrise. That’s what you get for being so greedy.”
- 305 “If anyone gets to switch places, it should be me,” growled another bull. “I face south and have
 323 to smell that horrible watering hole all day. I do more for this group than anyone else, and no one
 343 appreciates it.”
- 345 Soon all the bulls were arguing loudly. Each claimed that he had it harder than the others. They
 363 began to forget about me and the importance of their unification.

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“This looks like a good opportunity,” I thought, licking my chops. I ran toward the bulls and leaped into the air. Each bull ran in a different direction, and a broad smile spread across my face, for I knew dinner was near.

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“Things are looking simpler,” I thought.

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Just then, however, a hunter appeared and frightened me. We stared at each other for what seemed like minutes, until I ran quickly in the other direction. He fired a few shots, but was nowhere close to hitting me. In all the chaos, the bulls quickly escaped.

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“I think we have learned a valuable lesson,” said one of the bulls. “We are strong only when we stand together.”

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The other bulls agreed. After that the bulls never again argued, and I have had to seek my meals elsewhere, for I will never get the best of those bulls.

Rafting in Santa Elena Canyon
TCLD Title: Rafting in Santa Elena Canyon
Lexile: 920
Source: SDAA 2003

19 Hank and Jack sat on the sides of the rubber raft while Uncle Troy and his friend Mr. Tillery
 37 pushed it away from the sandy shore. The men jumped aboard and the raft joined the Rio Grande
 54 current as the river flowed through Big Bend National Park. At first they floated lazily along under
 73 the hot sun. Turtles sunned themselves on tree limbs and slid off into the water with a plop when
 the raft approached.

76 Mr. Tillery said, “Relax while you can, fellows. We have difficult work ahead of us.”

91 Jack and Hank smiled. What might have seemed to be a puzzling statement was no mystery to
 108 them. Uncle Troy had prepared them for what they would encounter when they entered Santa
 123 Elena Canyon, and they were looking forward to it.

132 They finally came to the canyon opening. They gaped at the reddish brown cliffs that rose 2,000
 149 feet on both sides of them. The scene was magnificent. The cliffs blocked the sun and bathed
 166 everything in cool shade. The greenish water flowed faster as it squeezed between the high canyon
 182 walls.

183 “Uncle Troy, what’s that roaring sound?” Jack asked, raising his voice to be heard.

197 “The rapids, Jack,” Uncle Troy said, grinning widely. “Guys, make sure your life jackets and
 212 helmets are secure. Hang on to your paddles.”

220 As the raft rounded a bend, they saw huge boulders scattered across the turbulent river. The rafters
 237 would have to steer around the boulders while the river propelled them forward.

250 “Here we go! Hang on!” Mr. Tillery shouted.

258 Jack and Mr. Tillery paddled furiously on their side to move the raft to the left of the first boulder.
 278 The instant the raft passed it, Hank and Uncle Troy paddled hard to turn the raft’s nose downriver
 296 again, just in time to slide over a two-foot drop. Icy water washed over the sides and soaked their
 316 legs. A huge rock jutted into the river straight ahead. They all paddled vigorously, but the current
 333 pushed the raft sideways up onto the rock. The rubber raft tilted steeply, folding in the middle as
 351 waves splashed high in the air.

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For one moment Jack and Mr. Tillery looked down at Hank and Uncle Troy below them. Then the raft slid off the rock, and the rushing water pointed them safely downriver again.

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Jack and Hank yelled and laughed as they wiped water from their faces. Uncle Troy and Mr. Tillery raised their arms and waved their paddles in the air. They let out a whoop of celebration.

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What an exciting ride!

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The Sculptor and His Sons
TCLD Title: The Sculptor and His Sons
Lexile: 1000
Source: TAKS 2006

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39 Long ago there lived a man who was the greatest sculptor in China. As he grew older, his eyesight grew poorer, so one day he decided to prepare his three sons Chen, Li, and Tao to take over his business. The old man gave each son a specific task to complete.
- 51
72 “Chen, you are as strong and sturdy as a mountain,” he said. “It will be your task to find the finest marble in Asia, chisel slabs of it, and carry them home.”
- 83 Chen bowed and made plans for a trip to the quarry. Next Li approached his father.
- 99
118 “Li, you are good with your hands. Your task is to carve each slab, unlocking its inner beauty.” Li bowed and left the room.
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158 Finally the sculptor turned to his youngest son and said, “Tao, with your sharp eyes, you notice details that others miss. When Li finishes carving, it will be your task to smooth and polish each sculpture until it glistens like a thousand diamonds.”
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214 At first, the three brothers were happy with their different tasks. With Chen selecting the marble, Li carving it, and Tao polishing it, the brothers produced several fine sculptures. Word of their skill spread until it reached the emperor himself. He commissioned a sculpture for his fountain and promised the brothers a handsome reward when they completed it.
- 224 It was not long before greed got the better of the three brothers. They began to squabble.
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257 “Lugging home a gigantic slab of marble is tiring work,” complained Chen. “I might as well perform each task myself so that I can keep the emperor’s whole reward.”
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303 It did not take long for Li and Tao to chime in with their own complaints. Each brother believed his assignment was the most valuable. The brothers argued continuously until their father finally interrupted them.
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326 “My sons, you must stop quarreling and listen to me,” he said. “Each of you must go to the edge of the koi pond and bring me a stick.”
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351 The brothers looked questioningly at their father, but they did as they were instructed. The old man gathered the three branches and tied them together into a bundle.

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“This bundle represents my three sons. Chen, use your strength and try to break the bundle.” Chen took the bundle from his father and labored with all his might, but he could not break it. Li and Tao attempted the task next, but neither was successful. Then the old man untied the bundle.

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“Each of you must now take your stick and try to break it,” he commanded.

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Chen, Li, and Tao easily snapped their sticks in two. The brothers lowered their heads in shame.

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Having learned their lesson, the brothers worked together to create the most exquisite sculptures in all of China.

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New Life on Mount Saint Helens
TCLD Title: New Life on Mount Saint Helens
Lexile: 940
Source: TAKS 2006

Dr. Marie Tyler looked down at the desolate ground as the helicopter circled the landing area.

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The rocky gray ground looked like the surface of the moon. Only four months earlier Mount Saint Helens had erupted in the state of Washington, causing widespread damage. Tyler and other scientists were there to study the effects of the huge explosion.

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The area around Mount Saint Helens had been popular with tourists and hikers for its rugged beauty. People fished and rafted on clear lakes and rivers. Deer, elk, hawks, and other wildlife had lived in the vast forests around the mountain. All that changed on May 18, 1980.

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Tyler, a biologist, remembered the awful day Mount Saint Helens had ripped wide open, spewing rock, ash, and smoke. The volcano had been rumbling for months, and scientists believed that it was just a matter of time before something happened. However, nobody was prepared for the violence of the eruption. It killed 57 people and destroyed the landscape for miles around. When the north side of the volcano collapsed, it started the largest landslide ever recorded. Enormous chunks of the mountain flew into the valley below, filling it with debris. Acres of trees, many towering 150 feet tall, had been flattened. Water was blown out of lakes and replaced by ash and mud.

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As Tyler's helicopter landed, she worried about the wildlife in the area. Tyler and the other biologists surveyed the ground, which had been charred by the volcanic blast. There wasn't a living thing in sight, and she couldn't see even a trace of the thick forest that had been there. The scientists planned to take pictures of the area and record their observations. They hoped to use this information to learn more about how forests recover.

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As terrible as the Mount Saint Helens eruption had been, it offered a unique opportunity to learn about how nature copes with disaster. Javier Barilla, a biologist who specializes in forest wildlife, motioned for Tyler to come over to him. Barilla handed Tyler a pair of binoculars and pointed into the distance.

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"Elk," he said. "They've already come back. That's a good sign."

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Tyler peered at the large deer-like animals stepping carefully among the boulders as they searched for food.

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“They’re going to have a long, hard winter without anything to eat,” Tyler said. “They’ll have to move to a different area if they’re going to survive.”

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“Look at that!” shouted Tyler’s assistant, who couldn’t contain his excitement.

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Tyler turned to where Durbin was pointing, and a smile slowly spread across her face. Poking through the ashy soil was a tiny plant called a fireweed. The purple blossoms of the plant were bright against the dull ground. Tyler knew that as more fireweed grew, their roots would provide a base for other plants to take hold. Soon after the plants were restored, animals would also begin to return.

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The team of scientists took soil samples and continued to take photographs, but now the mood was brighter. Tyler knew that it might take a long time, but life would return to Mount Saint Helens.

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The London Eye
TCLD Title: London Eye Sees First Passengers
Lexile: 960
Source: TAKS 2006

- 15 London architects David Marks and Julia Barfield wanted to celebrate the New Year in a remarkable way. They designed the world’s largest Ferris wheel and named it the London Eye.
- 30 They chose a wheel design that would represent the turning of one millennium, or one thousand
- 46 years, into a new millennium. Their vision was to create a structure that people could play a part in
- 65 and enjoy.
- 67 Made of more than 1,300 tons of steel, glass, and cable, the wheel cost about \$50 million to build.
- 86 The main part of the wheel was built in the Netherlands, while other pieces were made in other
- 104 European countries. The assembly of the parts was done on large temporary platforms stretched
- 118 across the Thames River. Large cranes lifted the gigantic wheel to its upright position.
- 132 The opening, intended for New Year’s Day, was delayed a month. With the project that the workers
- 149 were undertaking, it is easy to understand why. When the Ferris wheel finally opened, visitors
- 164 were amazed.
- 166 The London Eye rises more than 440 feet above the city of London. The wheel sits on the south
- 185 bank of the Thames River, standing high above the House of Parliament and the famous Big
- 201 Ben clock. In clear weather, riders can see about 25 miles in every direction. They can even see
- 219 Windsor Castle.
- 221 The Ferris wheel moves continuously at about two miles per hour, and the ride lasts about 30
- 238 minutes. People can easily get on the Ferris wheel by stepping from a boarding platform into
- 254 the slow-moving passenger cars called pods. There are 32 pods on the London Eye. The pods
- 271 have glass walls, and are heated in the winter and cooled in the summer. Each pod can carry 25
- 290 passengers.
- 291 The plan of the builders was for the London Eye to remain running until 2005, when it was
- 309 supposed to be taken down. However, the Ferris wheel has been such a sensation that people
- 325 come from all over the world to ride it; so it still stands today. It is clear that the crowds of people
- 347 enjoying the London Eye want it to stay where it is for many years.
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Jenny’s Day at the Office
TCLD Title: Jenny’s Day at the Office
Lexile: 1020
Source: TAAS 2001

- 18
36 Jenny and her dad were doing the dishes one summer evening when he made a proposal she could not refuse. “Since you mentioned that you may like to pursue a career in advertising, I thought you would enjoy going to work with me for a day.”
- 46 Immediately energized, Jenny replied, “That would be fabulous!”
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101 On Thursday morning Jenny awoke earlier than usual. Wanting to look well groomed and professional, she put on her best dress and shoes. Hurrying downstairs, she discovered that her dad had already poured a bowl of her favorite cereal. She ate it ravenously, even though she was anxious to get to work with her father.
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146 About 30 minutes later her dad escorted her into his office. While he set out a large pad of paper and several markers, Jenny stood and admired the award that he had received last year for a television commercial.
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164 “Jenny, I have an important meeting scheduled for this morning,” he said. “While I’m gone, would you like to try to generate some ideas for an advertisement?”
- 175 “Definitely,” Jenny responded. “What’s the ad for?”
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235 “That’s the funny part. The product we are promoting is Crunchy Critters, your favorite cereal,” he said. “Try to envision what would make a good poster or magazine ad for the cereal and write down or draw any ideas that you have.” He gave Jenny an encouraging pat on the back and then left.
- 236
254 Jenny couldn’t wait to get started. After scrutinizing the cartoon lion on the box, she began to draw an idea she was conceiving in her head. A while later a woman peeked into the office.
- 271 “Excuse me,” she said. “I’m looking for Mr. Sullivan.”
- 280 “My dad’s in a meeting,” Jenny explained. “May I give him a message?”
- 293
309 The woman did not answer. Instead her attention turned to Jenny’s drawing. “Is that the new advertisement for Crunchy Critters?” she asked, craning her neck to get a closer look.

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“Oh, this is just a rough sketch,” Jenny replied. “I just started drawing an idea that I had.”

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The woman sat down beside Jenny, wanting to know more about her picture.

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“Crunchy Critters is the best cereal out there,” Jenny stated. “Kids love it because it tastes yummy

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and it’s fun to eat the little animal shapes. Parents buy Crunchy Critters because the cereal is

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nutritious, but many teenagers don’t eat it because they think of it as a kids’ cereal. So I think the

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ad should appeal to teenagers. I drew a picture of the cartoon lion behind the wheel of a sports car

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saying, ‘Start your day with Crunchy Critters and make your engine roar.’”

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The woman clapped for Jenny’s idea. Just then Jenny’s dad returned.

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“Did I miss something?” he asked.

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“A terrific idea for the Crunchy Critters ad,” the woman answered. “I’m going to call the company

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right now,” she added, hurrying down the hallway.

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“You’ve certainly won over Ms. Tortelli,” Jenny’s dad said.

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“Tortelli? Isn’t that your boss’s last name?” Jenny asked.

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“Yes, it is,” Jenny’s dad replied, laughing. “You just gave your first presentation to the president of

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the company!”

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The Job Offer

Lexile: 1030

Original Work

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All my life I have been interested in photography. It’s not only my hobby, it’s my passion—and I take impressive pictures. So, when I entered college and majored in business, people asked me what I was thinking. I knew I was a skilled photographer—I had even sold some pictures. But I didn’t think that I could make a living at it, and I had to be practical.
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I worked my way through college selling my photographs to newspapers and even to some private buyers. Friends and family told me that I should make a career of it, but I wasn’t ready to do that.
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After graduation, I took a position at an accounting firm. It was rather monotonous, but it paid the bills, and I still sold photographs on the side.
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Then one day, on October 14, 2005, I received a call I will remember forever. The gentleman on the other end of the line stunned me by introducing himself as one of the editors from Global Living Magazine. He told me that he had seen my work and that he had a job offer for me—with an immediate assignment, if I were available. We talked for a while and I told him I would call him back by the end of the day.
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Hanging up, I could not contain my excitement. This is what I had dreamed of my entire life. Taking this job would mean a pay cut, but I knew that wouldn’t be forever. It would also mean some initial instability, a lot of traveling, and new experiences.
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I called my dad for his advice and all he said was, “Son, you’ve denied yourself this dream all your life. It’s time to live it.”
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With a huge smile on my face, I phoned the editor back and told him I would be thrilled to take the position. Within 24 hours, I found myself on a plane, alongside one of the magazine’s writers, to Senegal, in West Africa, to do a story on the Mandinka tribe.
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I thought I knew what to expect, but nothing compared to actually being in Senegal. The Mandinka are amazing people who live in mud houses with thatched roofs. They are mainly farmers and live on rice, peanuts, and millets (grain). Often, the men must work part-time outside the farm in order to make enough money to survive—yet their annual income is still only about \$150 (in American dollars) per year.

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Only a small percentage of Mandinka is literate, so much of their culture is passed on through music—one of their richest traditions. They are also known for their drumming, and for the beautiful instrument known as the kora—a stringed instrument similar in appearance to a guitar.

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The elders of the tribe greeted us graciously and allowed us to photograph their homes, their people, and their fields. They told us (through an interpreter) that there would be a special ceremony that evening to initiate some of the young tribe members into adulthood.

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The ceremony that night was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. Rich with music, laughter, and happiness, it was like nothing that I had ever experienced. As we left Senegal, I knew I was growing into the person I hoped to be.

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When the issue of the magazine with my pictures in it came out, I was incredulous. They were fantastic, and I knew that I had finally found my niche in life, and that I had made the right decision in taking this job.

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Tenali Fools the Thieves
TCLD Title: Tenali Fools the Thieves
Lexile: 1050
Source: TAKS 2006

- 19 Long ago a man named Tenali lived on a farm in India. The land around Tenali’s village was going through a drought and Tenali feared that, without rain, the vegetables in his garden would die.
- 35 There was little water in Tenali’s well and it took a great deal of work to get enough water from the well for the whole garden. Tenali was tired after pulling the bucket up from the well many times.
- 56
- 74 As he looked at the thirsty plants in his garden one morning, Tenali noticed three strangers watching him from a distance. Tenali had heard from neighbors that three men had been stealing from villagers. He feared that these men were planning to steal from him, so he thought of a plan to fool the thieves and save his garden at the same time.
- 90
- 106
- 125
- 137 Tenali called loudly to his son, “I heard in the village yesterday that thieves have been stealing things from people.”
- 154
- 157 “What can we do?” his son asked.
- 164 Tenali answered, “It is not safe to keep our jewels in the house. Help me put them into a trunk, then we’ll lower the trunk down to the bottom of the well where it should be safe.”
- 184
- 201 Tenali was certain that the thieves had heard all he had said. He smiled and led his son inside the house where he told him of his plan to deceive the thieves.
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- 233 They filled the trunk with heavy rocks and Tenali and his son dragged it to the well.
- 250 “Now the jewels should be safe,” Tenali shouted as he lowered the trunk into the well.
- 266 For the rest of the day, Tenali and his son worked in the garden. They dug small ditches between the rows of plants and they dug long ditches from the garden all the way to the well. As the thieves watched, they joked about how the man had led them right to his fortune. They decided to wait in the forest until nightfall when they would get the treasure from the bottom of the well.
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- 341 That night the thieves crept over to the well. One thief climbed into the well and quickly realized that he couldn’t reach the trunk without removing some of the water first. One of the other thieves found the bucket beside the well but no rope. He gave the bucket to the man inside the well, who filled it with water and slowly handed it to the man waiting beside the well. The thieves then took turns climbing into the well, filling the bucket, and climbing back out. Each time, they would
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dump the water beside the well. The water flowed through the little ditches that Tenali and his son had made and trickled into the garden.

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By the time the thieves reached the trunk at the bottom of the well, the sun was rising. As they climbed out of the well, they were astounded to find guards waiting to arrest them.

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The story of the thieves quickly spread throughout the village and everyone who heard the news praised Tenali for tricking the thieves and saving his garden.

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The Science Project
TCLD Title: The Science Project
Lexile: 1090
Source: TAKS 2006

- Mercedes glanced across the table at the other two people in her group and tried not to moan out loud. “I’m going to fail this science project,” she lamented.
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- “Listen carefully,” Mr. Kimura said. “You will pretend that you are Rube Goldberg—the prizewinning cartoonist who drew new inventions with lots of different connected parts. In his cartoons all sorts of unusual items are used to complete simple tasks in the most complicated way. Each group will design and then create a mousetrap, using a Ping-Pong ball to trap a plastic mouse in a cage.”
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- As Mr. Kimura explained the class project, Mercedes’ uncertainties grew. She just didn’t know how well her group was going to work. Chinh was one of the most popular kids in school, while Dustin had been at the school only a couple of months and always sat at the back of the room, never talking to anyone. His traditional dress was a black T-shirt and jeans with big black boots, and his long hair matched his clothes and almost covered his face.
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- Mercedes spoke first and said enthusiastically, “If we have 12 steps built into our mousetrap, we’ll get extra points. I think each of us should draw a plan tonight, then tomorrow we can decide on the best parts of each one. After that we can combine them.”
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- “Sounds like a plan,” Chinh said indifferently, then wandered across the room to chat with his friends.
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- Dustin nodded warily as the bell rang.
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- The next day, as they gathered around a table in class, Mercedes and Dustin both set their drawings on the table, but Chinh hadn’t prepared his plan.
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- Dustin pushed his paper to the middle of the table and Mercedes did the same. Mercedes was surprised when she looked at Dustin’s unique and innovative plan. His design used a hair dryer to push the Ping-Pong ball, but it had only eight steps. Mercedes’ plan required using a ladder and had the 12 steps they needed for extra points, but it wasn’t as imaginative as Dustin’s.
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- Mercedes and Dustin decided to combine their plans, certain that they would earn an “A.”
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Once they had decided on a plan, they made a list of the items each of them would be responsible to bring to school the next day to assemble their project.

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The next morning Mercedes lugged a box full of items into class and dumped it on the table, anxious to begin working. A few minutes later Chinh came in, empty-handed and not at all concerned.

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“Last night my puppy chewed up my list,” he said. “I couldn’t remember anything that was on it.” He shrugged and gave an apathetic glance toward Mercedes before going to talk to his friends.

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Mercedes was appalled and sighed angrily.

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“What’s wrong?”

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She looked up to see Dustin standing there with two boxes at his feet and a short ladder over his shoulder.

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“Chinh didn’t bring in anything, and apparently he would rather be in another group,” Mercedes said, with a tone of disgust.

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“I had a feeling something like this might happen,” Dustin said. “That’s why I decided to bring some extra stuff.”

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Mercedes turned to Dustin and smiled. He was full of surprises.

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Without a Home

Lexile: 1120

Original Work

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When I was 13, we packed our rundown car with all of our belongings and began the long journey from our impoverished town in Mexico to Maine, where we were going to reside with my aunt and her family. We had very little money and took all we had with us, but hoped it would get us to our destination.

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Our first episode of misfortune struck in Texas when our car died and we were forced to use a **substantial** amount of our money to repair it. When we embarked on our trip once more, it didn't seem as cheery or exciting; my sisters and I were extremely apprehensive, and our fears were made real when we had further car trouble in Virginia. This time, my aunt wired us money to fix it, but gave us some more shocking news. Her mother-in-law had fallen ill and she was going to move in with them; there would be no room for us.

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My father hung up the phone, destroyed and despondent, saying he had made a horrible mistake bringing us all here.

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Ever the optimist, my mother began to look in the phone book for an organization that could assist us. After a few calls, she hung up and collapsed, sobbing, into my father's arms whispering something about a homeless shelter.

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I couldn't believe my ears—a homeless shelter! I felt nauseous.

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We arrived there a few hours later and met the director who was very welcoming and didn't make us feel ashamed. She showed us to the one room with five bunks that we would all share, and told us that we would be allowed to stay for 60 days.

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I remember lying on my bed and weeping into my pillow.

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The first few days were tremendously difficult, and I was thankful it was summer so I didn't have to go to school; I left the room only for meals. My father found a job at a discount store, while my mom was hired at a nearby grocery store.

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A week after we arrived, there was a knock at our door and I opened it to find a girl about my age. She explained that she was the director's daughter and that she had started a group for the kids at the shelter—a support group to help us all connect and to give us an outlet to talk.

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Her name was Erika and she made me feel normal again. She didn't care that I didn't have a home, and she told me that she had even been homeless once.

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After the 60 days, we were approved for a housing program and were both ecstatic and proud to be able to move into our own house and support ourselves again.

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I have been the director of that shelter for three years now, and I feel a tremendous sense of pride every time I walk in the door. I see the place where my life started over and where I blossomed into the person who I am today. My story is not one of misfortunes, but of new beginnings and a new life—not only for me, but for the residents of my shelter.

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Rosa Parks
TCLD Title: Why Do You Push Us Around?
Lexile: 1070
Source: TAKS 2004

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Having skipped an earlier bus that was too crowded, Rosa Parks was relieved to see plenty of empty seats on the next Montgomery city bus that came to her stop. She walked past several empty seats and sat down just past the movable sign that read “Colored.” The year was 1955.

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Although African Americans had been free from slavery for 90 years, Montgomery, Alabama, enforced some of the country’s strictest segregation laws. Meant to keep African Americans separated from whites, these so-called Jim Crow laws angered Parks.

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The bus Parks was riding began to fill with passengers. At one stop four white passengers boarded. Three took seats at the front and one man grabbed the rail to ride standing.

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The driver twisted around in his seat, looked at Parks and the other African American passengers, and ordered them to get out of the seats.

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Parks’ eyes widened as she recognized James F. Blake, the same man who had once before ordered her off a bus he was driving. Blake’s scowl sent Parks’ mind tumbling back to that incident 12 years earlier.

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Montgomery bus drivers used their own discretion in how they enforced the city’s segregation rules. Some disregarded the rules, while others, including Blake, required African Americans to pay their fare at the front of the bus, exit, and then reboard at the back to find a seat. Blake had a reputation of driving off before riders could reboard the bus. On that day 12 years earlier, Parks had refused to exit and reboard at the rear because the back aisle was already crowded with standing passengers. Blake ordered her off. Rather than disgrace herself by obeying his petty demand, Parks left, vowing to never again ride a bus driven by Blake.

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But this day she hadn’t noticed who the driver was and she felt scared to hear him yell at her.

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Since African Americans weren’t allowed to sit in the same row as white passengers, Blake ordered everyone in the row to stand. Finally the two women across the aisle from Parks stood, and the man next to Parks stood too.

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When Blake asked Parks if she was going to stand, she replied that she wasn’t.

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Through gritted teeth, Blake told her that he would have her arrested.

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Parks didn't want to go to jail, but she had had enough. She wanted to be treated like a human being.

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She remained calm, but refused to move.

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The police arrived within minutes and had to arrest Rosa Parks. Her arrest led African Americans to come together in Montgomery to refuse to ride buses citywide.

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This protest helped give rise to the Civil Rights movement. The U.S. Supreme Court later ruled that Alabama's segregation laws were unconstitutional. Rosa Parks had become a hero.

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Angel Falls
TCLD Title: Angel Falls
Lexile: 1130
Source: TAKS 2004

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It was the beginning of the rainy season in Venezuela, and my father had just completed his work in the capital city of Caracas. He had promised to take me on a tour of Canaima National Park before we returned home, and now our trip was beginning. The 7.4-million-acre reserve is home to Angel Falls—Earth’s highest waterfall.

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Passing over the Orinoco River in our small airplane, we could see the distinct forms of the mountains as they jutted upward through the thick forest canopy. Ramón, our Venezuelan guide, explained that these rugged contours had taken millions of years to form.

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Flying over the thick vegetation, I felt as if we were entering a jungle that time had overlooked. As I looked down, I thought there were probably areas below the trees that had never been seen by humans. After all, as large as Angel Falls is, it was not discovered by the outside world until 1935.

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“Angel Falls is only a few minutes from here,” Ramón called out over the plane’s steady hum. “Its waters plunge 3,212 feet from the edge of one of these mountains,” he continued.

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Ramón explained that the falls are named after Jimmy Angel, the pilot who discovered them in 1935 while searching for gold.

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At Canaima National Park, our base camp, we spent a rainy night in hammocks under an open-sided thatched hut. Early the next morning we set off in the rain down the Carrao River in small motorized dugout canoes. The swift river tossed us wildly and I was afraid the canoes would sink, but our guides strategically kept them afloat.

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Finally the rain stopped, and the sky cleared to reveal jagged sandstone cliffs looming high above us. Through the thick trees, we caught glimpses of numerous waterfalls pounding piles of fallen rock. We turned up the smaller Churun River for the final five miles. The jungle became thicker almost immediately and seemed to close in on both sides. When the river narrowed, the guides stopped the engines and began to paddle through the still, tea-colored water as we were bombarded by strange squawks, roars, chirps, and whoops that echoed through the jungle.

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As the distant rumble of the falls became a dull roar, our guides nosed the boats onto the muddy bank. We hiked along a slippery path for about an hour as dripping vegetation soaked our clothes and shoes, and the roar now filled our ears.

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At last Ramón stopped and pointed up through the trees. There, towering above us, stretching into the clouds, was Auyán-tepuí—and the top of Angel Falls. We hurried on and soon broke into an open field scattered with huge boulders, many the size of houses. The mist and the roar of the crashing water suddenly engulfed us and I shielded my eyes and gazed upwards. The water tumbled straight down more than 2,500 feet before colliding with the rocky face of the mountain. Then it tumbled several hundred feet more, crashing over cracked stone before settling into a wide, deep pool.

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Standing there, I felt small and insignificant. This astounding sight is one of nature's most phenomenal masterpieces. I was so excited that I was able to see it in person. It was the greatest day of my life and I will remember the experience forever.

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Jeremy Goes to the Car Sale
TCLD Title: Jeremy Goes to the Car Sale
Lexile: 1160
Source: TAAS 2000

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Jeremy’s family owned a used car business, so his dad frequently bought cars at auctions to add to the lot. When a new shipment arrived, Jeremy would wander through the family’s lot for hours, as he thought it was fun to look at the cars and see from which states they came.

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One day Jeremy’s dad surprised him and asked, “How would you like to go with me to the auction tomorrow to buy some cars?”

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Jeremy showed his enthusiasm with a humongous grin, and said he would be thrilled to go. The next day he and his dad arose at sunrise because they wanted to get to the auction early enough to have time to inspect the various cars.

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Jeremy was amazed at the number of cars for sale. He peeked in the windows as his dad, wearing a dark green shirt, examined the cars and recorded notable details such as the year, model, and overall condition.

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About an hour after they arrived, a deep voice over the loudspeaker announced that the auction was about to commence. Everyone traipsed into a huge building where a stage was set up at one end with a large ramp in front of it. Everyone who wanted to bid on the cars sat in the bleachers, so Jeremy and his dad found seats in the third row.

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A car was driven up the ramp for the first bid, and the man standing on the stage began the auction by asking for opening bids. He spoke so fast that Jeremy couldn’t understand a word he said. As bids were being made on the cars, Jeremy watched carefully and could tell that many people were bidding on the same car. He also understood that the person who offered the most money for the car would get to purchase it. But he couldn’t tell exactly how the man on the stage knew who was making the bids, as the bidders didn’t raise their hands, nod, or seem to move at all.

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“Dad, I don’t understand,” Jeremy said in a confused tone. “How does the man on the stage know who is making the bids?”

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“Everyone has a subtle signal,” answered his dad. “It might be a wink or a small wave of a finger, but the man in front knows all the motions.”

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“How can you understand what he’s saying?” asked Jeremy.

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“I know he talks fast, but just try to listen for the prices he calls out.”

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Jeremy listened carefully and noticed that most of what the man said was just chatter, but he could hear the prices clearly.

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“Let’s give it a try,” Jeremy’s dad said. “I’d like to buy this next car. I looked under the hood at the engine and saw that it’s in good shape and has a lot of power. Here’s my signal,” he explained, as he raised two fingers.

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Jeremy sat motionless as the bidding started. Then his dad made a bid by raising his fingers. Other bids were made, so Jeremy thought his dad wouldn’t get the car. His dad bid again, and the man in front nodded to signify that he saw the two fingers raised.

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The man looked around the room again. “Going once, going twice, sold to the man with the green shirt in the third row. Thank you, sir.”

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Jeremy smiled in satisfaction and felt a sense of accomplishment because his father got the car he wanted. Jeremy was looking forward to watching more of the auction and seeing his father bid on more cars. He felt it had truly been an exciting day.

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My Quinceañera
TCLD Title: My Quinceañera
Lexile: 1190
Source: TAAS 2000

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48 Although I was not quite fourteen, my aunt Isabel was already talking about having a quinceañera for me. Quinceañera is a Spanish word that refers to someone who is fifteen years old. Some Hispanic families hold this special celebration to recognize the beginning of a girl’s journey to adulthood.
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66 “I want Marissa to have a perfect quinceañera,” Aunt Isabel said excitedly, as she looked at me with a twinkle in her eyes.
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89 My parents were not as enthusiastic, and I couldn’t tell from their expressions if they really wanted me to have this traditional celebration or if they were just being polite to my aunt.
- 105 “We have to wait and see what Marissa wants,” my mother said, expertly concealing her feelings.
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154 Secretly, there was nothing I wanted more than to have a quinceañera for one unforgettable evening. Seeing the overjoyed look on my aunt’s face when she spoke of her own party made the idea even more appealing to me.
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197 Since I hadn’t heard my mother talk about her quinceañera, I began to wonder why she never mentioned it. Finally, I told my family that I wanted a little time to think privately about it, and I went into my room and quietly closed the door.
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276 Then I reached under the bed for the book I had checked out of the library called “How to Plan a Quinceañera.” As I looked at the pictures, I could imagine myself in a beautiful gown floating around a gaily decorated ballroom, listening to a mariachi band playing my father’s favorite song. I saw hundreds of relatives and friends wishing me well as I began my journey into the responsible world of young adulthood.
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354 When I turned the page, I quickly came back to Earth, as there was a long list of things to do to prepare for a quinceañera. One of the most difficult tasks, I thought, was selecting a Court of Honor—28 friends or relatives about my age who would serve as the traditional 14 couples representing each year of my life. I was not sure I had that many friends and relatives who would want to participate; I wasn’t even sure I knew that many people my age.
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389 I called my friend Lucy and told her about this tradition and all I would have to do to prepare. She loved the idea and said she would be thrilled if I chose her as an attendant; she said she knew our

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other friends would be too. I was surprised by her willingness and became excited thinking that, maybe, my other friends might want to be in the court as well.

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After hanging up the phone, I walked to the kitchen and overheard my mother saying to my father, “I do hope Marissa wants to have a quinceañera. I’ve always regretted that I didn’t have one, but I don’t want to force her to have one.”

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“Of course I want a quinceañera,” I interrupted. “I didn’t know that you didn’t have one, so my quinceañera will be for both of us. I just read that the important thing about it is to bring unity among family and friends.”

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With tears in their eyes, my parents hugged me tightly, and it felt like it was going to be the most perfect day of my life. It was more than a year away, but I could already feel the joy of turning fifteen and becoming closer to my mother through the sharing of my quinceañera.

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The Farm

Lexile: 1190

Original Work

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49 Rhonda was a good student and a good kid, until she started hanging out with the type of people who had too much influence—bad influence—over her. Her grades plummeted and she began getting into trouble. The trouble was minor at first—some vandalism—then it escalated to shoplifting and drugs.
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100 Her parents could not handle Rhonda’s extreme behavior any longer and felt she must leave her present environment. Summer was upon them, so they sent Rhonda to live with her grandfather on his farm. They were hoping that her grandfather, a former Naval officer, would straighten her out, and that she would learn some responsibility and compassion by working on a farm.
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184 Rhonda hated leaving her home, but finally agreed, because she knew her life was clearly headed in the wrong direction. For quite some time she had felt that everyday life was pointless. She could not have cared less about her family and even about what was happening to her life. But something about changing her life and going away for a while sparked an interest in her—and she stubbornly agreed to go.
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227 The first few weeks on the farm were difficult, as Rhonda was expected to be up by 5 am to clean the stalls, feed the horses, and milk the cows. Not knowing how to do any of this, Rhonda was easily frustrated and nearly ready to give up.
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304 Her grandfather was patient, yet tough, and wouldn’t let Rhonda have a moment to herself. Every moment of her time was spent helping around the farm and Rhonda yearned for some time to herself, some time to relax. Yet, she knew this might be her only chance to change, so she did as she was told and, from sunup to sundown, Rhonda worked with the animals, cleaned and painted the barn, or helped fix things that were broken.
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363 When all the chores were done around the farm, she and her grandfather volunteered at a local homeless shelter and would cook and serve meals. Even the weekends were dedicated to service—often they would bake meals for the families of children in the hospital, or for widows who had trouble doing their own baking.
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426 At first Rhonda was annoyed at all she was being forced to do, but she soon realized that she didn’t have to be forced to do them any longer—and that she actually liked doing them. Rhonda learned how to take care of other things and people, and how to take care of herself—and she slowly began to take pride in these newfound abilities.

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When she arrived at her grandfather's farm, the two barely spoke to each other. But, as the weeks wore on, they would often stay up late to talk, and they were becoming great friends. Rhonda began to see how she could make a difference, and how she could do something with her life instead of just let it pass her by.

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When summer ended and it came time to return home, Rhonda made the most difficult decision she had ever made. She called her parents and asked to be allowed to live with her grandfather. She didn't think she was strong enough yet to go back home and to see old friends; she was afraid that, if she went back, it would be too easy to slip back into her old behaviors. She knew that someday she would be strong enough to resist, but that day would be farther down the road. She was finding herself, but the process was slow.

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Knowing it was best for their daughter, her parents agreed—encouraging her to come back when she could. They knew that, someday when she opened the door and said, "I'm home," she truly would be home.

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Kamiko's Surprise
TCLD Title: Kamiko's Surprise
Lexile: 1210
Source: TAAS 2000

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- The students at Washington Middle School were looking forward to World Cultures Day, for on this festive day there would be music, dancing, costumes, stories, and food from many different countries. Students were encouraged to wear clothing that represented the country of their ancestors and to come prepared to tell a family story.
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- Kamiko's parents were native to Japan and had immigrated to the United States after high school. Kamiko had dreamed of visiting her parents' homeland since she was a little girl and she loved hearing their stories about growing up in Japan. When Kamiko's grandfather came to live with her family three years ago, her parents spoke to him in Japanese; and she would listen intently, savoring every beautiful sound. Then her grandfather learned to speak English, and Kamiko no longer had the opportunity to hear the Japanese she loved so much, for the predominant language of the house was English.
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- One evening Kamiko went to her grandfather's room to ask for a story to relate on World Cultures Day, but he was not there. However, the photograph of her grandmother that stood on her grandfather's dresser caught her attention, and she gazed lovingly at it. The young woman's shiny black hair was held up loosely with combs and she was wearing a Japanese kimono—a long robe with a sash for a belt. To Kamiko her grandmother looked like a princess, and she longed to exhibit that kind of beauty.
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- "You look just like her," her grandfather said, standing in the doorway and smiling.
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- Frowning at herself in the mirror, Kamiko saw only her long hair hanging down over an old T-shirt and thought she looked nothing like the exquisite woman in the photograph.
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- The next day, Kamiko's grandfather, who was very skilled at the Japanese art of Origami, handed her a piece of bright yellow paper folded into the shape of a bird.
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- "It's a clue," he said slyly, knowing how Kamiko loved surprises.
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- Kamiko stared at the yellow bird and puzzled over its meaning until she thought she understood. She hurried to her canary's cage in the kitchen, where she found clue number two—a green piece of paper in the shape of a tree. Kamiko ran to the front yard and, after searching the branches of the lone tree that stood out front, she found a little paper house perched on one of the branches. Remembering one of her most precious heirlooms, she quickly turned and ran to the dollhouse in

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her room, where she found a large box wrapped in silver paper. Kamiko opened it slowly, only somewhat aware of her grandfather standing in the doorway, watching.

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Gasping, and barely able to speak, Kamiko held up a beautifully wrapped kimono and asked, “Is this Grandmother’s?”

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Her grandfather nodded and replied, “She would have wanted you to have it. Keep looking in the box—the combs are there too.”

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Kamiko found her grandmother’s combs wrapped delicately in white tissue paper and nearly jumped into her grandfather’s arms. She couldn’t believe she had been given such a special gift and, suddenly, she felt immensely close to her grandmother.

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On the morning of World Cultures Day, Kamiko donned her grandmother’s kimono, and her mother put her hair up with the combs. Before leaving for school, Kamiko went to her grandfather’s room for one more look at the photograph of her grandmother.

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Looking at her reflection in the mirror, Kamiko whispered happily, “I do look just like her.”

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Duke Ellington: Master Musician
TCLD Title: Duke Ellington: Master Musician
Lexile: 1130
Source: TAAS 2000

18	Duke Ellington is known as one of the most important composers of his time, and his work has been enjoyed for more than 80 years by music lovers all over the world. During his lifetime, Ellington turned musical sounds into many compositions, mostly in the style known as jazz.
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49	Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in 1899 in Washington, D.C. Given his dislike of piano lessons as a child, no one could have predicted that he would become one of the most important composers of his time. It wasn't until Ellington was a teenager that his interest in music blossomed. He taught himself to play the piano by listening to local piano players. These musicians were pleased by the likable boy's enthusiasm for music. With their guidance he practiced constantly, trying to copy the lively ragtime tunes they played and to make the music sound just right. When Ellington became famous, he never forgot to give them credit for his success.
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160	Sometime around 1916 Ellington, who had been nicknamed Duke because of his dignified behavior, began playing the piano at high school parties. Ellington realized that he enjoyed entertaining people with his music. He soon became a very popular musician, playing at parties and other events in the Washington area. He regaled audiences of all ages with his music and showmanship. Young adults seemed especially delighted by the peppy, modern pieces he composed.
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232	In 1923, when Ellington was almost 24 years old, he moved to an area in New York City called Harlem. Harlem was home to a thriving African American musical community. He joined The Washingtonians, a five-piece group of musicians he had known in Washington, and he became the group's leader in early 1924. In 1927 Ellington and his orchestra auditioned for and won an engagement at Harlem's prestigious Cotton Club. He added more musicians and changed the name of the group to Duke Ellington and His Cotton Club Orchestra. For the next three years, his orchestra played at the Cotton Club nearly every night.
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337	Working at the Cotton Club sparked Ellington's creativity. Since the shows changed every six months, he was challenged by the need to continually develop new material. He had to compose a wide variety of music to accompany the various acts in the Cotton Club shows and to adapt that music to the strengths and weaknesses of the players in his orchestra. Ellington also gained notoriety from working at the Cotton Club. By 1928 the popular nightclub began radio broadcasts. From the broadcasts Ellington and his orchestra gained a national reputation.
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As Ellington's popularity increased, he realized that his orchestra could do well on concert tours.

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They left the Cotton Club in 1931 and toured America and Europe almost continually for the next

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43 years. In addition to touring, Ellington made recordings and continued to compose music.

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Most of Ellington's music was a blend of African American gospel, blues, ragtime, European and American light classical, and popular music that formed the uniquely American sound called jazz.

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His compositions encompassed a wide range of styles, tones, and emotions. He was a master at

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creating dramatic beginnings and exciting, beautiful backgrounds for solo musicians. Ellington

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worked with each musician to develop unique sounds and effects, and he experimented with

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unusual harmonies, rhythms, and musical arrangements to produce scintillating music. Duke

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Ellington played the piano, composed music, and led his famous orchestra for more than 50 years,

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until his death in 1974. Music lovers all over the world agree that the abundance of music he

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created will be enjoyed for many years to come.

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The Flag Designer
TCLD Title: The Flag Designer
Lexile: 1170
Source: TAKS 2006

Mr. Pratt silenced his class in an attempt to get the students' attention. "For years, the U.S. flag has had 48 stars, one for each state. Soon Alaska and Hawaii might become states and, if they do, we will need a new flag. Your homework assignment is to design one."

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The year was 1958 and Robert Heft sat quietly at the back of his history class. He was intrigued by the assignment and sat up straight in his chair as he listened to his teacher describe the assignment. Robert already knew that there were 48 stars on the flag and that there was one red stripe or one white stripe for each of the 13 original U.S. colonies. He thought about the two new states and devised a plan to make a flag with a star for each of the 50 states. He penciled a sketch of his design, which had five rows of six stars and four rows of five stars.

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When school was over that day, Robert went home to ponder the best way to sew together a flag. He found some red, white, and blue pieces of material in his mother's sewing bag and, after measuring the length and width of the stripes, he began making strips of the red and white material. Then he carefully cut out a rectangle of blue material. He used a pattern to cut out the white stars and tried to be as precise as possible since he wanted all the stars to be the same size and shape. When all the pieces had been cut, Robert laid them on the floor and looked at his design with satisfaction. He just knew it would make a great flag.

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After sewing together all the stripes and adding the blue rectangle, he sewed on all 50 stars. Twelve long hours of his weekend were spent cutting, arranging, and sewing his flag together, and Robert could hardly wait to show his teacher.

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The day that his assignment was due, Robert brought his flag to school and proudly hung it on the wall beside the drawings that the other students had completed. Robert knew he had gone above and beyond the expectations of his teacher, but Mr. Pratt was not impressed, and gave him merely a B-.

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"Anyone could make this same flag," he said curtly while Robert stared at him dumbfounded and in disbelief.

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Seeing the disappointment on Robert's face, Mr. Pratt said, "If you can get Congress to accept your flag, I'll give you a better grade."

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Robert went back to his desk and gazed sadly at his flag, knowing that it did not deserve a B-.

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Aware that a member of Congress lived in his neighborhood, he decided to introduce himself and

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see if he could get support for his design.

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Congressman Moeller listened to Robert and was receptive to his new design for the flag. Mr.

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Moeller took the flag and promised to show the president when the two new states were admitted.

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The days turned into months, and Robert wondered whether he would ever hear anything more

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about his flag. He finished high school and started college.

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Then one day he received a phone call from Congressman Moeller who said, “The president likes

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your flag, son.”

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Robert’s flag was accepted as the new American flag, and it is the flag that is still flown today.

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The Lost Continent of Atlantis
TCLD Title: The Lost Continent of Atlantis
Lexile: 1170
Source: TAAS 2002

Sometime between 360 and 350 B.C., the Greek philosopher Plato wrote about the legend of Atlantis. Some people believe that Atlantis was a great island empire that disappeared into the sea. Today archaeologists and other scholars have developed a compelling theory that may explain the legend of this so-called lost continent.

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In his writings, Plato referred to records left by the Greek statesman Solon about 200 years earlier. Solon told a story he had heard about an island nation called Atlantis that had been destroyed and had sunk beneath the sea. According to Plato, Atlantis was a place of abundant natural resources and remarkable human creativity. It was a fertile land of mountains, plains, lakes, and rivers. A multitude of animals roamed its countryside, and many varieties of fruits, nuts, and herbs grew plentifully. The Atlantean people built systems of canals that provided transportation, irrigation for their crops, and a means of trade. Their magnificent dwellings had indoor plumbing and opulent decorations of silver, gold, and ivory. The rulers of Atlantis oversaw a peaceful and prosperous empire that included many of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

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Some modern archaeologists and other researchers are trying to establish whether Atlantis really existed. Having compared the descriptions of Atlantis with the historically recognized Minoan civilization, many now believe that the two empires may actually be the same one. Founded about 3000 B.C. on the present-day island of Crete, Minoan was the earliest civilization in Europe. As it grew, it established colonies on nearby islands, including Thera. Soon Minoan became wealthy, powerful, and cultured.

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One similarity between legendary Atlantis and the Minoan civilization was their influence over countries with Mediterranean ports. According to Plato, Atlantis used vast numbers of ships to maintain its rule over other lands. Likewise, the Minoans built a large merchant fleet and maintained extensive trade with Egypt, Sicily, Greece, Syria, and Palestine. Both Atlanteans and Minoans were aficionados of art, decoration, and personal comforts. Tales of grand Atlantean buildings decorated with precious metals were equaled by descriptions of Minoan palaces full of incredibly detailed, colorfully painted murals and art objects. The plumbing system that Plato attributed to the Atlanteans resembled the bathtubs with running water available in Minoan homes.

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Another parallel between Atlantis and Minoan is that both civilizations ended abruptly. Plato wrote that Atlantis was shattered by earthquakes and floods and then swallowed by the sea. Likewise, around 1500 B.C. on the Minoan island of Thera, a volcano erupted so violently that it destroyed most of the island. The powerful eruption also showered volcanic ash on the island of Crete about

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70 miles away. One theory contends that the volcanic ash along with an earthquake and a tidal wave contributed to the end of the great Minoan civilization.

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Much of what is known about the Minoans comes from the discovery of several palaces and a wealth of artwork and other artifacts on Crete. A buried city on Thera uncovered about 60 years ago may provide even more information. The city is so large and full of artifacts that it still has not been studied completely. Much remains to be learned about the Minoans. Perhaps one day we will know for sure whether their civilization was the legendary empire of Atlantis.

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Old Faithful

Lexile: 1220

Original Work

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Yellowstone National Park is a magnificent part of the United States that spans a vast area in three different states—Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. Tourists from all over the world visit the park in order to glimpse its natural beauty and experience its rich nature. One of the primary attractions within Yellowstone is a geyser called Old Faithful.

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A geyser is a powerful spout of boiling water that shoots from the ground at regular intervals. Geysers are found in volcanic regions or in regions where a volcano has been recently active. Old Faithful is a cone geyser—a geyser that erupts in a narrow jet of water instead of in different directions.

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To produce a geyser, groundwater trickles downward toward a magma chamber—a body of cooling, molten rock that is deep underground. This water is then heated beyond the boiling point, at which point steam forces it back upwards with tremendous force. The result is a powerful flow of water upwards—the geyser.

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Old Faithful was named in 1870, and was the first geyser in Yellowstone National Park to receive a name. It was so named because it erupted at regular intervals. One of the most amazing facts about Old Faithful is that it erupts about 20 times each day. The time between eruptions can range anywhere between 45 minutes to 110 minutes; and people will sit and watch patiently just to be able to see the geyser erupt. Each eruption lasts between one and five minutes, with the water spraying as high as 130 feet in the air—sometimes it is a little more, sometimes it is a little less—but it is always a spectacular show.

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The amount of water it sprays up during a single eruption is substantial—nearly 4000 to 8000 tons—depending on the length of the eruption; and the water that sprays out reaches temperatures of over 200 degrees Fahrenheit. The steam temperature has even been measured at 350 degrees Fahrenheit!

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People come from all across the country to watch Old Faithful erupt and are in awe of its beauty and enormity. It is an amazing trip for people of all ages, and a wonderful way to witness firsthand the strong and amazing forces of nature.

Tiger Woods

Lexile: 1230

Original Work

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32 When Eldrick Woods was born, his parents never imagined that he was destined to become one of the world’s greatest golfers, and at an extremely young age. Nicknamed Tiger, after a family friend, this young prodigy seemed to love the game of golf before he even learned to walk.
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118 When Tiger was barely crawling, he watched his father play golf and would imitate his father’s golf swing. At the age of two, Tiger was showing off his prowess to the world by putting on the Tonight Show. When he was just three years old, Tiger shot an amazing score of 48 for nine holes of golf—a score that many adult golfers attain. Another extraordinary accomplishment came when Tiger shot his first hole-in-one at the age of six, in 1982.
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166 As Tiger matured and continued to practice, his amazing talent for golf grew; he began to enter and win amateur tournaments. Between the ages of 8 and 15, he won the Optimist International Junior tournament six times.
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202 With each tournament, Tiger’s golf game improved, and people began to take notice of this young man. He received many honors as an amateur, including being named Player of the Year five times between the years 1991 and 1994 by different golfing magazines.
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244 In 1993, Tiger received a scholarship to Stanford University and entered there as a freshman in 1994. A year later, he was voted Stanford’s Male Freshman of the Year—an honor that encompasses all sports at the university.
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269 Tiger debuted as a professional golfer in 1996 at the age of 20, and his rise to celebrity was immediate. Less than a year later, he became the youngest golfer ever to be ranked number 1.
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304 Since then, Tiger has been dominant on the golf course and has won 75 tournaments—55 of those being on the Pro-Golfers Association (PGA) tour.
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365 Tiger has won the Masters four times—in 1997, 2001, 2002, and 2005. When he won the Masters for the second time, in 2001, he became the first golfer ever to hold all four professional major championships at the same time. He has broken records for both low scores and number of wins and will almost certainly continue to do so over the next several years.
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394 Not only has Tiger Woods delighted fans of golf, but he has rejuvenated and increased the popularity of the sport, especially among minorities. Tiger is proud of his ancestry and enjoys

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talking about the fact that he is a mix of many different nationalities—including African American, Chinese, Thai, Dutch, and Native American. He believes he is the perfect combination of both his mother and father.

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In summary, from a very small age, Tiger Woods has been a unique and amazing presence on the golf course. He has broken numerous records, won dozens of tournaments, and achieved a status few people will ever achieve. Tiger Woods is unquestionably one of the world's greatest golfers and he will continue to impress and intimidate on the course.

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The Accident

Lexile: 1250

Original Work

16 My brother and I used to fight incessantly; every conversation between us turned into a huge
 34 argument. In fact, I don't remember getting along with him much before he was in his car accident.
 55 But, when my parents and I were awakened in the middle of the night with news that Bill had hit a
 tree, I did not think once of all the fights we had.

67 He was driving home alone from a party one night when he **smashed** into a tree going over 70
 86 miles per hour. They said his blood alcohol level was twice the legal limit. This was a mistake
 104 he will pay for every day for the rest of his life because, while he knows he is lucky to be alive,
 126 he will never experience the joy of walking again; his spinal cord was severed and is completely
 143 inoperable.

144 In addition to the spinal cord injury, Bill's short term memory is not as sharp as it used to be—or
 165 should be. He's very forgetful now, and often cannot remember a conversation he had just days, or
 182 sometimes hours, prior. He is cognizant of his memory problem and is continually frustrated by the
 198 fact that he cannot do anything to improve or change it.

209 My parents had always warned us not to drink, but they also realized that some day we probably
 227 would, so they tried to make it clear to us that they would rather we call them at 1 A.M. needing
 248 a ride, than to have the police call them saying we were hurt—or worse. Both Bill and I had
 268 promised that we would trust them enough to call them if ever we found ourselves in that situation.

286 I often contemplate why my brother made the decision to drive that night, but I don't think I will
 305 ever have an adequate answer.

310 It's heartbreaking to see Bill like this but, in a strange way, the accident has brought us closer
 328 emotionally, as we spend a lot of time together talking. He's angry at himself for driving that night,
 346 for injuring himself, for ruining his life, and for putting us through this nightmare. Even though his
 363 memory fails him, his thoughts are intelligent and his words provoking. What he says he is most
 380 thankful for is the fact that he didn't hurt anyone else that night, as he doesn't know how he would
 400 cope with the guilt of injuring another person.

408 Bill was going to attend college on a basketball scholarship; now he will probably not go to college
 426 at all, as his memory problems significantly impede his learning. However, despite his limitations,
 440 Bill has come to realize different aspirations and dreams for himself.

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With help from my parents and me, Bill has developed a program entitled “Hurt No More” and travels to different high schools to talk to kids and their parents about the dangers of drinking and driving. He brings along with him habitual drunk drivers, police officers, and the family members of drunk driving victims to talk about how lives can be shattered in an instant because of a decision to drive a vehicle while intoxicated. The program is powerful and emotionally draining, but its objectives are to get kids to think, and to open avenues of discussion between kids and their parents.

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Bill always ends his program by saying that, had he just called home, he may have been grounded for a while, but he wouldn't have ended up in a wheelchair or with memory problems. Looking at it that way, being punished doesn't seem so bad.

The Woman I Admire
TCLD Title: Gabriela Mistral: Poet, Teacher, Diplomat
Lexile: 1250
Source: TAAS 2000

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Our English assignment was to research a famous person and to write about the attributes that made him or her stand apart from others. I was excited because I knew exactly whom I would choose—Gabriela Mistral—a poet, educator, and diplomat from Chile who received many awards and honors for her accomplishments. She was also my grandmother’s best friend; they grew up together in Chile and were inseparable as children.

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I had heard about Gabriela all of my life and longed to be like her, for the example she set is one I have followed and hoped to set myself. One of her greatest achievements was receiving the Nobel Prize in literature in 1945—she was the first Latin American writer to ever receive the award, which honored her for writing exceptional poetry. I can recite many of her verses by heart because they are so beautiful and wholly resonate with my life; I feel like she’s talking to me and to no one else.

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Even though she loved to write poetry, Gabriela devoted much of her life to teaching, and taught in several high schools, mostly in small communities and rural areas. She eventually held the position of director in the largest high school in the capital city of Santiago—the highest position that could be attained in the high school system in Chile. Her love for the children she taught was greatly reciprocated and is evident in the words of her poetry—most of which was written for them.

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My grandmother would often talk of Gabriela and, even though I never had the opportunity to meet her, I feel like she was my friend too—I feel that there’s a closeness there that doesn’t occur very often. She wasn’t just another faceless author or poet, but real, a friend—a friend I admired and aspired to be like. It was almost as if the words of her poetry were guiding me down a path—a path I wanted to go down but had been afraid to.

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I am a skilled writer and the words often seem to pour out of my pen rather than out of my head; sometimes they come so fast I cannot keep up with them. My parents and my teachers make me feel special when they tell me I have a tremendous gift, and I have to wonder if this is how Gabriela felt when she began writing. It is this encouragement that drives me to expand my ideas, develop my writing, and to be a strong leader—just like Gabriela.

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Gabriela never stopped writing about children or working to improve conditions for them and, even though I am only 16, I, too, see the plight of impoverished or undereducated students. Many students live in fear of gang activity, bullies, drugs, or other issues, and don’t have anyone to fight

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for them—to show them how to choose the right path. I feel that this is what Gabriela's words did for me, and she has inspired me to do this for others.

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My English paper must be only ten pages long, yet I fear that I won't be able to articulate all that I want to in ten pages. How can you limit your words when talking about a woman who has not only inspired you, but given you hope for your future? All too often it's easier to choose the well-traveled path rather than the lesser traveled path. I see my future and, in it, Gabriela and I are hand-in-hand forging our way down the lesser traveled path in an attempt to make it safe for others.

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Reunion

Lexile: 1260

Original Work

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- It had been 20 years since I had seen his face, yet as I stared at the television screen, a flood of memories came to me as if no time had elapsed at all. I couldn't hear what the anchorwoman was saying, but the screen showed a picture of the man I almost married after high school. The caption at the bottom said only that he was wanted for questioning in connection with a bank robbery.
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- My hands trembled over the remote as I attempted to increase the volume so that I could hear the news but, by the time I was able to do so, I had missed the story. I sat down limply, still stunned because of what I had seen and the questions that flooded my mind, yet hopeful that I hadn't gotten myself into a dangerous situation.
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- My head was spinning and I was beginning to feel like I would be sick, when suddenly the doorbell rang. My stomach twisted in knots, and I breathed a sigh that was a mixture of both determination and regret.
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- I opened the door and greeted Tony, who entered quickly and closed the door behind him, asking if anyone had contacted me looking for him. I reiterated what I had told him on the phone just twenty minutes prior—no one had.
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- Once inside, he took my hand and guided me to the couch, indicating that we should sit down to talk. Tony began to explain that he had been inadvertently involved in a bank robbery where a security guard was killed. Tony was working in a back office of the bank when he heard shots, ran to investigate, and found a guard in a back room. As he knelt over the body, he heard footsteps and looked up to see a man with a gun coming toward him. Thinking it was one of the robbery suspects, Tony fled out a nearby emergency door.
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- Finding himself in an alley, Tony ran to the front of the building where he overheard someone say that police had exchanged gunfire with the robbery suspects, and that neither of the suspects had survived. Eyes widening with surprise, Tony recognized the man he had seen inside—he was talking with other officers, giving them a description of Tony, and identifying him as an accomplice.
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- Upon realizing that he was a suspect, Tony said he panicked and fled, and called me—most likely assuming that, because I am a lawyer, I could help him. When he called he said only that he had something urgent he needed to discuss with me. Having no inclination that he was in trouble with the law, I welcomed him.

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Tony knew he had made a bad decision when he left the scene, and I agreed with him that it did make him look suspicious, but he steadfastly proclaimed his innocence. Tony begged me to be with him when he talked to the police, and I agreed, pointing out that forensic evidence should exonerate him if he were, in fact, innocent.

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I phoned the police to let them know Tony's whereabouts, and the sergeant on duty told me that they would immediately send a car for him.

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The police arrived within minutes and, as they led Tony out the door, he turned and smiled at me, then drew closer until he was close enough to whisper in my ear, "When this is over, I'll tell you where I hid the money."

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My eyes widened and I gasped. He looked at me and winked, with that old twinkle in his eye, and I had to wonder if things would ever be the same again.

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How Did Pa Find His Way Home?
TCLD Title: How Did Pa Find His Way Home?
Lexile: 1290
Source: TAAS 2001

- 17 Annie paced nervously in front of the window of her north Texas house and wondered aloud about her father, “The work shouldn’t have taken him this long and he should be back by now.”
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52 Clouds of dust obstructed her view and she wondered how Pa would ever find the house in the blinding storm.
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90 “He’ll probably follow the fence that borders our land,” Annie reasoned. “But how will he get from the road to our front door? During bad storms others have gotten lost trying to find their own front doors.”
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127 Annie watched the dust as it blew in rippling waves against the window and she knew she had to do something. She was beginning to feel hopeless when, suddenly, she had a brilliant idea that she was sure would work.
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147 Approaching her mother with excitement, Annie declared, “We can lead Pa home with a rope,” and explained her plan.
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188 Her mother who had, until now, been quite reserved, nodded in agreement and seemed to brighten a bit. “A rope might be your Pa’s only path to the door. We’ll go out together, so get the rope and don’t forget that we’ll need some pieces of wet cloth to cover our mouths and noses.”
- 204 “I won’t,” Annie said, as she quickly lifted the rope from its place on the shelf.
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252 She tied one end around her own waist and then wrapped the rope around her mother’s waist. Before they ventured outside, Annie and Ma wrapped thin, damp towels around their mouths and noses, then stepped outside and tied the other end of the rope to the doorknob.
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283 “I can still see somewhat,” Annie thought as they inched their way cautiously toward the fence. “But if Pa doesn’t hurry, the dust will be so thick he won’t be able to see a thing.”
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355 When Annie and Ma reached the fence that separated their field from the neighbor’s land, they took the rope from their waists and tied it to the fence post. Then they grabbed the rope and followed it back to the house, never losing hold for a moment, yet growing more and more fearful for Pa’s safety.

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Once safely back inside, Annie stared despondently into the inky darkness until Ma ordered her to bed. Annie couldn't sleep and tossed and turned, listening to the wind moan and the dust blow mercilessly against the outside of the house.

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When Annie finally heard the door handle jiggle and Pa cough, she bounded out of bed and rushed to greet him. She beamed with pride when he told her he never would have found the front door without the rope to guide him.

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Annie snuggled back into bed that night, thankful she'd thought of a way to ensure that Pa would safely find his way home.

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Annie would always remember those frightening nights during the 1930s, when their farm became part of an area of the country referred to as the Dust Bowl. The dust storms and the heavy winds remained vivid in her mind for the rest of her life, but so did the image of her father walking safely through the front door.

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Strangers
Lexile: 1310
Original Work

17 They boarded the plane as strangers—each in his or her own world, not concerned about the
 36 person sitting in the next seat. They didn’t want to chit chat or see pictures of grandkids; they only
 wanted to get through the two hour flight and get on with their lives.

50 The flight started out normally as the flight attendant showed everyone how to work the masks,
 66 pointed to the emergency exits, and talked about the flotation device underneath the seat. No one
 82 was really paying attention to her, but she talked anyway—having committed the obligatory words
 97 to memory.

99 A short time after takeoff, as drinks and snacks were being served to the sleepy-eyed passengers,
 116 the captain spoke over the intercom and said they would be going through turbulence, and that
 132 the fasten seatbelt sign would be put on. As the clicks of dozens of seatbelts were heard, the plane
 151 began to bounce—just a bit at first, and then quite roughly. Those who had been asleep awoke with
 170 a start, while those who were awake were suddenly attentive, knowing this was not the normal feel
 187 of turbulence.

189 Worried looks covered the faces of the passengers as they watched the flight attendants huddle
 204 together near the cockpit, speaking in hushed voices. Several curious passengers looked toward
 217 them, hoping to overhear a bit of the conversation. Meanwhile, the plane continued to bounce and
 233 jerk dreadfully—making several of the passengers reach for the little white bag tucked into the
 249 seats in front of them.

254 Following several minutes of violent shaking, the plane whined loudly, then suddenly grew
 267 quieter, and the flight attendants were called to the cockpit—leaving the passengers to talk among
 283 themselves in hushed and anxious voices. After what seemed like an eternity, the captain again
 298 addressed the passengers via the intercom and, in an eerily calm voice, explained that the left
 314 engine had failed and that they would be making an emergency landing at a small airport about 10
 332 minutes away. He urged the passengers to remain calm, assured everyone that their safety was of
 348 utmost concern, and ordered everyone to prepare for landing.

357 As a flight attendant took charge and reminded the passengers of the emergency procedures, a loud
 373 pop was heard and the plane suddenly dove toward the ground.

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The captain, now in a shaky voice, was heard telling everyone that the other engine had failed as well and that the plane would not make it to the airport. They were over a river, and would have to make an emergency water landing.

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The captain barely got the words out when the plane plunged into the water with a sickening crash. As water began to fill the plane, people started reaching out to each other, helping others find the exits, making sure no one left without the flotation device. Some people were too afraid to move out of their seats, so they were grabbed and taken out by complete strangers.

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In a fairly short amount of time, all of the passengers and crew were out of the plane and in the icy cold water. Shivering uncontrollably, some of the passengers linked arms for support or to help each other stay afloat, while others sobbed quietly as they waited for help. Many were injured, if only mildly, and were having problems staying above water; they were paired with those who were not injured and who could take care of them.

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Rescue vehicles and emergency crews began arriving, and passengers helped their new friends onto the boats and sat huddled together as they were examined by doctors. They began to introduce themselves—to hug and to befriend each other as they cried sobs of exhaustion and relief.

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Coincidence had put them together on that plane, a survival instinct helped them survive the crash, but it was compassion that kept them alive. They began the day as strangers, but ended the day forever bound.

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Exploring Mars on a Budget
TCLD Title: Exploring Mars on a Budget
Lexile: 1240
Source: TAAS 2000

Whether it's a thirst for knowledge or simple curiosity, people are fascinated with the red planet. We seem to be determined to learn more about Mars than any other cosmic body, with the possible exception of Earth's moon. That's why spirits soared in July 1997 when a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) spacecraft visited the Martian surface for the first time in more than 20 years.

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In the 1970s, unmanned Mars missions were fairly common, but because they were very expensive, NASA had to become more selective about how it spent its money on space exploration. In the 1980s, NASA introduced its new concept for space exploration—"faster, better, cheaper." The end result of this new way of thinking was the landing of the spacecraft Pathfinder on Mars on July 4, 1997. Pathfinder was constructed mostly from off-the-shelf parts and was just three feet tall, and it performed beyond anyone's expectations.

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A cluster of air bags protected Pathfinder during its bumpy parachute landing on Mars. Then Pathfinder unfolded its three metal panels to reveal a primitive six-wheeled robotic vehicle. What looked like nothing more than a bulky skateboard was the first planetary rover. Aptly named Sojourner, or traveler, its purpose was to conduct geological studies as it slowly moved across the Martian terrain. The little rover was equipped to help scientists examine the reddish soil and scattered rocks and boulders of Mars. Cameras mounted at its front and back provided both black-and-white and color images to be relayed back to Earth. Sojourner also carried an X-ray spectrometer, an instrument designed to identify the composition of rocks on the surface of Mars.

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Although responsible for some of the mission's most important scientific studies, Sojourner's low-cost technology was surprisingly simple. During the day solar panels collected energy from the sun to power the vehicle. Batteries powered it at night. Serving as the rover's "brain" was an electronic processor containing only 6,500 transistors. This number is a tiny fraction of the millions found in even a modest personal-computer chip. As might be expected from such basic technology, Sojourner could not do much "thinking" for itself.

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Instead, a driver back on Earth controlled its painfully slow movement across Mars. Pictures of the rover and the land around it taken by a Pathfinder camera and relayed to Earth were used to guide Sojourner. NASA engineer Brian Cooper was behind the wheel of the rover. He found out that steering a vehicle 119 million miles away could be quite a challenge. One challenge was the fact that it took 11 minutes for each instruction to reach Sojourner.

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The Mars rover provided information that thrilled scientists. Its survey of a bumpy boulder that scientists called Barnacle Bill revealed that the rock was loaded with quartz, a common material also found in Earth rocks.

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The little robot was designed to endure the cold and harsh Martian climate for little more than a week. Yet Sojourner performed beyond the expected length of time. Scientists learned many lessons about Mars from the rover. Perhaps even more important to NASA scientists now working within a very limited budget, Pathfinder and Sojourner have proved that equipment that is more expensive isn't necessarily better.

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A Discovery
TCLD Title: Kartchner Caverns: An Underground Discovery
Lexile: 1240
Source: TAAS 2002

In 1974 Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen discovered an amazing underground wonderland while hiking near the base of the Whetstone Mountains in Arizona. They came upon a crack in the rocks through which cool air was seeping, and were immediately intrigued.

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Squeezing through the opening, the men found a colorful limestone cave that appeared to have been untouched by humans. The cave had three main rooms, each about the size of a football field, and more than twenty smaller rooms. As they explored further, they found that the cave's passageways totaled more than two miles in length. Tufts and Tenen made a pact to keep their discovery a secret and, for four years, they respected their promise to each other and explored the vast caverns without telling anyone.

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When Tufts and Tenen discovered the cave, they thought it was on public land. In 1978 they learned that the cave was on private property owned by James and Lois Kartchner. Tufts and Tenen contacted the Kartchners, who were both surprised and excited when they learned about the cave. After visiting the cave with Tufts and Tenen, the Kartchners also wanted to keep it a secret until they could decide how best to protect and preserve the discovery.

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The cave on the Kartchners' property is considered a living, or wet, cave. Water continuously trickles down into the cave, creating new formations such as stalactites and stalagmites. Stalactites hang from the cave ceiling like dripping icicles. One hollow stalactite in this cave is shaped like a straw; it is more than 21 feet long, while only about two inches in diameter. Stalagmites as tall as 30 feet tower up from the cave floor.

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Living caves are not usually found beneath a hot, dry desert, as this one is. If the cave were opened and the public allowed to visit, special care would need to be taken to maintain the cool 67°F temperature and high level of moisture—otherwise, the cave would dry out, and its formations would stop growing.

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The Kartchners, Tufts, and Tenen feared that if other people found out about the cave, its rare features might be damaged. With just the touch of a fingertip, the oil from a person's skin can stop the formation of a stalactite or a stalagmite. It would have been a tragedy if the cave's formations stopped growing, so the group decided the best solution was for the Kartchners to sell the land to the state of Arizona so that the cave could be protected by the state park system.

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In 1988 the state of Arizona purchased the 550 acres occupied by the cave, and park officials soon began plans to develop the area. The officials wanted to open the cave to visitors, but preserving the cave was of utmost importance. Preparing the cave took eleven years because the crews worked carefully, completing the work by hand instead of using heavy equipment so they would not damage the delicate limestone formations.

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In 1999 the cave was finally opened to the public and, since its opening, many families have enjoyed the beauty of Kartchner Caverns. Thanks to Arizona's state park system, generations of people will be able to tour the caverns in years to come.

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TAPS

Lexile: 1270

Original Work

15	The Atlantic Paranormal Society (TAPS) is not an ordinary group of people searching for, and hoping to find, ghosts. Based out of Warwick, Rhode Island, the main purpose of TAPS is to help people who feel they are experiencing paranormal activity. Paranormal activity is defined as anything outside of the range of scientific explanation or normal experiences—usually in the form of apparitions, strange noises, voices, or strange occurrences. TAPS investigators attempt to determine if what people hear or see is really something paranormal, or if it can be explained by a more logical answer.
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95	Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson, the founders, formed TAPS as a non-profit organization in the early 1990s. Jason and Grant both claim to have had separate paranormal experiences, and they wanted to methodically examine these phenomena to see if they could prove their existence.
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139	When TAPS conducts an investigation, the investigators listen to what the clients say about their experiences. TAPS investigators then bring in their equipment and usually stay in the residence or building for 8-12 hours—including the night hours.
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178	In a typical case, TAPS investigators first tour the house, then set up their equipment in the places where the most phenomena have been reported. They work in teams to observe, photograph, and talk to (and sometimes taunt, in order to get a reaction) any spirits that might be present.
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228	When investigating, TAPS uses high tech equipment to try to document ghost activity on audio tape, on video, or on a voice recording. TAPS also uses infrared and thermal technology to look for heat sources and variances in electromagnetic fields. This evidence is used to determine if a ghost is present in a house. Then the investigators must decide whether or not these changes are indicative of a presence.
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297	In addition, the investigators look for alternative explanations for noises, strange shadows, appearances, etc. Often, they do find that a noise or strange lights were made by something either outside the house or by a piece of machinery (a boiler or a furnace) inside. Sometimes, however, they cannot find a reason for why a door opened, why a lamp seemingly moved by itself, or for why a strange voice was caught on tape.
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370	After the inspection, the TAPS investigators examine the evidence and present the information that they gathered to the owners. At this time, they will give their opinion as to whether or not the house or building is haunted. There have been times when they have told the client that there
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seemed to be a presence involved, while other times they have been able to logically explain all that the client has been experiencing. And, yet, there are times when they can neither refute nor substantiate any claims that any paranormal activity is occurring. Regardless of the findings, the TAPS team will give an honest opinion as to the origin of the phenomena.

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Following the debriefing session, the investigators assure the clients that they will continue to be available if ever they are needed in the future. Many people are comforted by knowing this.

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TAPS has grown from a small organization into one that is well respected and revered among many people in the paranormal field. The investigators have fun and enjoy what they are doing, but they also take their work very seriously. They want the clients to know that they, too, will be taken seriously if they call on TAPS to help with a problem, and that TAPS will be there to listen if no one else will. This is one of the many reasons people trust them and rely on them—and why they have become so famous.

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Living Well

Lexile: 1330

Original Work

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Barry woke up late for school because he hadn't heard his alarm chime. He had been up late the night before studying for an exam for which he hadn't done enough previous reading. Still exhausted, he downed a quick caffeinated soda so he would be alert enough to take the test. But once at school he barely made it through the exam, and he became shaky by third period. For lunch, he had another soda and a piece of cheese pizza. After school, he and his friends decided to relax in front of the television and share a bag of Oreo cookies. His parents were working late that night and relied on Barry to make his own dinner, so he decided to go to a fast food restaurant for a hamburger and fries.

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This story of Barry is one that could be true of anyone, because unfortunately, everyone has days where they neglect sleep, eat junk food all day, and don't exercise at all. But, for many children and adolescents, this is not just an anomaly. It is a recurring story that is not only ruining their health, but is making them sick for life.

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The proper nutrition, alongside a good exercise regimen, is crucial to the general well-being of growing bodies. Girls who don't consume enough calcium are at a higher risk for osteoporosis—a disease in which the bones become brittle and succumb to breaks more often—later in life. Diets high in caloric intake, especially the empty calories from junk food and sodas, can lead to gains in weight, and are responsible for an increase in the obesity rate among America's children. These weight gains, coupled with very little exercise and a poor diet, lead to a higher incidence of Type II Diabetes (a disease they will never outgrow) in children as well.

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It is increasingly evident that poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and obesity are becoming a significant problem in this country, but some people may feel that changing their eating and lifestyle habits is too difficult of a task to undertake. To help people understand nutrition, the government has provided a food pyramid for easy access to the knowledge of the types of food, and the quantities, an adult or child should eat in one day.

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The food pyramid is a guide, not a nutrition program, that outlines the types of food—and the quantities—to include in a daily diet. A healthy diet consists of varying portions of fruits, vegetables, proteins, and grains/breads. For a balanced diet, and to ensure that one's body will not become deficient in any one area, it is important to have foods from all of these groups daily.

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Exercise is extremely important to maintaining a healthy body as well. Healthy people should be physically active 30-60 minutes per day. Some people think that it's boring to exercise, but there

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are lots of fun ways to become active. Playing a pick-up football game, riding a bike, or playing a game of tag are all ways to have fun while exercising.

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Once people begin treating their bodies well, their bodies will treat them well. If people put junk into their bodies all day long, they will begin to get sick more often, and their bodies won't perform properly. A tired body, full of junk food, will make a person feel sluggish and irritable.

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However, with regular exercise, a proper amount of sleep, and enough healthy foods, the body will thrive.

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The Leaning Tower of Pisa

Lexile: 1340

Original Work

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The city of Pisa, Italy is known for one of the most famous structures in the world—a structure that many people also think of as one of the most famous construction blunders in history. What we commonly refer to today as the Leaning Tower of Pisa took centuries to complete and has had a fascinating history.

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The Leaning Tower of Pisa was originally built as a freestanding bell tower for the cathedral of Pisa, and it stands behind the cathedral in what is known as the Field of Miracles, or Campo dei Miracoli.

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Construction on the bell tower began in 1173 and, like most buildings, was originally intended to stand vertically. However, due to a poorly laid foundation and loose layers of ground that allowed the foundation to shift, the tower began to lean soon after construction commenced.

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In 1178, five years after the building of the bell tower began, a third floor was constructed. It was at this time that the tower first began to lean. Due to wars with neighboring cities, construction on the tower was halted for nearly a century. When construction was finally resumed, in 1272, another four floors were built—and were built at an angle to compensate for the existing tilt. It was only twelve short years later, in 1284, when construction was once more halted, as Pisa again went to war with a neighboring city.

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Nearly another 100 years passed before the bell-chamber was added—in 1372. The bell chamber was built by architect Tommaso di Andrea Pisano, who worked diligently in blending the existing Romanesque style architecture of the tower with a modern Gothic style. The result was more beautiful than anyone could have imagined.

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The Tower of Pisa continued to lean for several more centuries and, in 1838, an architect attempted to create a walkway around the tower so that the base could be more visible to sightseers. Disaster struck when the base flooded and the tilt of the tower increased.

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When Benito Mussolini was prime minister of Italy in the early 1900s, he ordered that the tower be returned to a vertical position—so concrete was poured into the foundation in an attempt to straighten it. This attempt to correct the tower’s lean backfired, and it continued to sink further into the ground.

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The fear of losing this treasured monument led the Italian government, in 1964, to request assistance in preventing the tower from toppling. However, because the tower was such an enormous tourist attraction, and because of the volume of visitors it brought to Pisa, the government did not want the tilt corrected. Mathematicians, engineers, and historians gathered together to deliberate on ways to maintain the tilt of the tower, yet they had to do this while ensuring the safety of visitors.

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It took over two decades of deliberation and work on this issue until finally, in January of 1990, the tower was closed to the public for renovations. The seven bells in the bell tower were removed to relieve some weight, cables were cinched around the third level and anchored several hundred yards away, and living spaces in the path of the tower were evacuated to maintain the safety of the inhabitants.

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The experts found that the lean was increasing because of the stonework's expansion and contraction that occurred due to the intense heat from the sunlight. Not only was this happening, but they found that the foundation on the lower side of the tower was softer and more conducive to enabling the tower to sink.

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Several methods were proposed to stabilize the tower, but the optimum solution was to slightly straighten the tower to a safer angle by removing over 1300 cubic feet of soil from underneath the raised end. Engineers accomplished this and, with this adjustment, the tower has been declared stable and safe for at least another 300 years.

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The tower was reopened to the public in December of 2001. Today, the Leaning Tower of Pisa stands at just over 183 feet on the low side and just over 186 feet on the highest side. The 294 steps to the bell-chamber take visitors each day to a breathtaking view of the country and inside one of the most famous monuments in Italian history.

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The Cabin
Lexile: 1350
Original Work

The idea of a stepfather and stepsisters was repulsive to me when I was younger, for the grief was still too fresh. My father died when I was seven and my brother, Andre, was nine and, while my mother did a superb job of raising us on her own, I could always see the anguish in her eyes.

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James and his daughters came into our lives when I was 12—his daughter, Sasha, was 11 and his daughter, Angie, was 13. Mom never told us much about her relationship with James—probably because she didn't want to trouble us or hurt our feelings but, as the months wore on, we could tell things were getting more serious.

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One day Mom informed us that we were all going to have a barbecue together and that she and James had something they wanted to discuss. Understanding what she meant, my brother and I retreated to our rooms to sulk. James seemed okay, but he was not our dad, nor would he ever be our dad, and we didn't want him to even attempt to take Dad's place.

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The news that night was even more shocking than we had expected, and Andre and I sat dumbfounded and unable to move upon hearing it. Mom and James did tell us that they had fallen in love and were going to get married, but they also said we would be moving, because James had gotten a job transfer that would take us all to a new city in the summer.

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A new dad, new sisters, and a new city—it didn't seem like things could get much worse, until they told us that we were all going to spend a week at a cabin getting to know each other better.

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Reluctantly, we promised our mom that we would make the best of the trip and, when we arrived, we were actually pleasantly surprised by the cabin. It turned out to be in a beautiful area surrounded by both a lake and a mountain—and Andre and I loved to fish and hike.

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We spent the first two days there in awkward silence, but finally we began to talk and disclose things about ourselves—and we began to have fun. We realized that the girls were scared too, but found that they were really nice, and we observed how well James treated our mother.

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On the fifth day, during a five mile hike up a steep mountain trail, my mom stumbled and, had it not been for the quick thinking of James, she would have fallen down a 10 foot ravine. James was able to save her from falling, but was not able to regain his balance enough to keep himself from tumbling over the edge.

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Screaming, my mom and the girls watched as he rolled to the ground below and hit with a thud.

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Dazed, James was able to tell us that he wasn't badly hurt, but he said he thought he had broken his

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leg—a feeling that was confirmed by my brother after he scrambled down the ravine after James.

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Having no way to transport James back to the cabin, Angie, my mom, and I went in search of a

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ranger's station, while my brother and Sasha stayed with him. After walking for nearly two hours,

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we finally found the ranger, explained what had happened, and brought help.

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Things turned out fine, other than James being confined to a cast for 8 weeks, but we discovered

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that we worked together extremely well as a family, and we realized how much we all cared about

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each other.

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Mom and James got married a few months later and, although James will never replace my father,

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he is a good dad and a good husband.

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Watching my mom and James take their vows, I perceived a difference in my mother—the grief

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that had been so apparent in her eyes had been replaced by a sparkle. It was then that I realized that

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having a stepfather and stepsisters was no longer repulsive, and I am now proud to call James and

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his daughters part of my family.

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Creatures
Lexile: 1360
Original Work

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Shawna never understood what her Poetry teacher was saying. When the class studied Shakespeare, Shawna found his sonnets indecipherable. When they studied Wordsworth, Shawna found him wearisome. And when they talked about the very essence of a good poet, Shawna just wasn't interested. Poetry was not her subject and she cringed every time she had to read, analyze, or memorize a poem.

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But the class suddenly became interesting the day the students found that they were having a substitute for an indefinite period of time. No one knew where their poetry-reciting teacher, Ms. Jackson, was. It was almost as if she vanished out of thin air.

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Then, one morning, about five days after she went missing, Ms. Jackson was waiting happily for the students in the classroom. Questions from the stunned students abounded as to where she was, why she didn't call anyone, and what had happened.

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Ms. Jackson moved swiftly to the door, closed it, and told the class that she had a secret to tell them—and that they must promise not to tell anyone until the time was right. Ms. Jackson began by saying that she told the principal that she had gotten so sick that she couldn't move, was near delirious with fever, and was unaware that so many days had passed.

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Ms. Jackson then proceeded to tell the class the true story—the most outlandish tale they had ever heard, and one that only Shawna would believe. Ms. Jackson claimed that she had been picked up by beings from another planet and taken to their planet in the Whirlpool galaxy over twenty million light years away.

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Her statement was met with many chuckles, a few scoffs, and several strange looks, as most of the kids thought that she was either telling a joke or still delirious.

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Ms. Jackson continued her story by stating that she had been on a walk late one night, when suddenly the sky brightened, and an object landed in a field about two hundred yards away.

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Moving closer, Ms. Jackson could only describe what exited the craft as creatures, for they weren't human, but stood erect, as humans do, and they spoke to her in a language she had never heard—yet she found herself understanding.

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The creatures made it clear that they were not there to hurt her, or anyone else, but said they were on a crucial mission—to show people their planet, M27, and hope that they would learn something from what they saw.

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Agreeing, although uncertain why, Ms. Jackson boarded the craft and was taken to M27, where she was awestruck by the way it looked and felt. There was an abundance of grass and trees, with no litter to blemish it, and the air smelled fresh. Their vehicles hovered over the ground, but didn't seem to emit any gas or pollution. A guide proudly explained that crime was almost nonexistent on M27, and they had worked hard to maintain that status.

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Ms. Jackson looked at the faces in her classroom, most of which remained skeptical, yet quiet, and finished her story by saying that the creatures of M27 lead an exemplary life and it would behoove people of Earth to examine them.

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She paused for a few moments before informing the class that the craft would be returning Saturday night to take people to M27.

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Shawna felt alive at the idea of going to M27, yet she had a sinking feeling that the story could not possibly be true. Nevertheless, on Saturday night, she stood next to Ms. Jackson in nervous silence.

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When a bright light descended on the field, Shawna felt her spirits lift and her hopes soar. As she watched the craft descend toward them, she thought of a line from a Henry Taylor poem that Ms. Jackson used to recite... “Such souls, whose sudden visitations daze the world, vanish like lightning, but they leave behind a voice that in the distance far away awakens the slumbering ages.”

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With new direction in life, Shawna stepped onto the craft.

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Voices
Lexile: 1380
Original Work

17 “Catch Andre!” was the frantic voice Cheryl heard from inside her own head, and she dropped the
 36 plate she was drying as she sprinted to where she had last seen her little brother—the bottom of
 55 the stairs. As she reached the stairs, she heard her mother’s scream and saw her 1-year-old brother
 72 tumble from the top. She rushed towards him and grabbed him as he was falling—saving him
 from the stairs and the hard tile at the bottom.

82 Andre was unhurt, but was crying uncontrollably; Cheryl could only sit and cradle him—
 96 wondering if and how she could explain her sudden appearance at the stairs to her mother.

112 When Andre stopped crying, their mother looked at Cheryl, smiled affectionately, and thanked
 125 her for saving him. Her mother didn’t ask why she had suddenly rushed to the stairs, or why she
 144 seemed to know what was going to happen; and Cheryl was relieved.

156 Cheryl didn’t want to answer questions about the premonitions she had that dreadful things were
 171 looming—her mother might look at her as if she were crazy or demented. Most of all, she didn’t
 190 want her mother to think she was lying or fabricating a story just for attention.

205 Cheryl knew she had to keep the voices a secret, yet she longed to discuss them with someone who
 224 would understand, and she was dismayed by the idea that she might never find that person. So, she
 242 kept that part of her life secret and learned to trust herself and her instincts—hoping that someday
 260 she would understand this phenomenon better and be able to exchange stories with a confidant.

275 Weeks passed and nothing extraordinary occurred in Cheryl’s life until one day when she was
 290 listening to her chemistry teacher discuss a new project and instruct on the interaction of some
 306 new chemicals. Cheryl had been daydreaming and looking out the window when she noticed the
 321 teacher distributing some chemicals as he repeated the importance of taking extreme precaution
 334 with this project.

337 Puzzled, Cheryl searched her memory for the specifics for why they must be careful, but she
 353 couldn’t remember what the teacher had said, and she decided he was probably just cautioning
 368 them in his customary, overprotective manner. Not wanting to admit that she hadn’t been paying
 383 close attention, she attempted to decipher the assignment from the notes on the board, and she
 399 thought she understood.

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Carefully picking up a vile, Cheryl was about to pour its contents into a beaker of existing solution when she was suddenly struck from behind and knocked to the ground.

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Astounded, she looked at the person lying on top of her and saw that it was Jasmine—a boisterous girl who sat in the back of the class. Cheryl couldn't understand why this girl had suddenly tackled her, as they had barely ever spoken.

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The teacher demanded an explanation and Jasmine said that she had been watching Cheryl, who was about to mix two chemicals that would have produced a minor explosion—but bad enough to burn her—when she decided to do the only thing she could think of to make sure Cheryl didn't mix the chemicals.

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After class, Cheryl approached Jasmine to thank her for her assistance, when the question suddenly burst out of her mouth as to how Jasmine could have possibly seen her from the back of the class.

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Sounding both poised and confident, and unconcerned about holding back a secret, Jasmine responded that she had not seen her at all, but that she had heard a voice command, "Stop Cheryl!"

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Drawing a sudden breath, Cheryl could only stare at Jasmine, her mind racing with thoughts.

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Cheryl's heart abounded with excitement as she thought to herself, "Finally I have met someone like I, someone with whom I can share my secret, someone who will understand."

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Staying Friends

Lexile: 1430

Original Work

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Alicia and Marta had been best friends since they met on the playground in 3rd grade and, through their five years of friendship, they had been through fun times, happy times, tribulations—even a loss. Now, as they prepared to enter high school, they again looked to each other as confidants and promised to be there to support each other. Both were nervous about beginning high school and meeting new people, but they knew they would always have each other.

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The first few weeks went smoothly, even though it was difficult to spend time together in school. The girls had only one class together, and didn't even have lunch at the same time—so each began to feel isolated. Sometimes after school they would meet at one of their houses—but they always had so much homework to do that they had trouble finding time for that as well.

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Alicia then began to notice that Marta was spending time with some girls who were known to cause trouble, and who were often very hostile and aggressive toward the teachers and other students. Trying to be the friend she promised to be, Alicia discussed this with Marta one afternoon, and Marta became very defensive.

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“I like my new friends,” Marta blurted furiously. “You’re just jealous because you haven’t met anyone new yet and you’re not good at making friends. You know you can’t hang out with me the rest of your life, so you better learn to meet people and stop relying on me all the time!”

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Alicia was startled and outraged by her friend’s offensive outburst. Unable to comprehend Marta’s words and, not knowing how to respond, Alicia just turned and walked away from her friend, thinking shameful thoughts and vowing to never speak to her again.

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The pain Marta caused Alicia by her abusive tone and cutting words fueled an anger within Alicia that she had never before known. She was sure that it was the influence of Marta’s new “friends” that drove her to speak so spitefully, but she didn’t know how to handle it.

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Wishing her mother were still alive to counsel her, Alicia plopped down on the couch that evening beside her grandmother—whom she had lived with for the past three years since her mother had died. Immediately, her grandmother knew Alicia was troubled and, in a kind, yet direct, way told her to talk about her problem.

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Familiar with her grandmother’s normally gruff demeanor, Alicia knew that helpful speeches, consoling hugs, and words imparted with wisdom would not be forthcoming, but she slowly

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described what had transpired between herself and Marta that afternoon, hoping it would help just to talk about it. Surprising Alicia, and maybe even herself, Grandma drew Alicia close and embraced her, saying, “Sometimes you remind me so much of your mother that it scares me.”

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Taking a deep breath, she continued, “There will always be people in this world who hurt you, but you can’t pass that hurt along or carry it within your heart. You try your best to stay friends with Marta—you’ve been through too much together to give up a friendship over a few cruel words, and life is too short to carry grudges. Sometimes people change, and we can’t make them stay the way they used to be, so you let her know that you are there for her and, if she comes to you, you know you have a very special friend. If she doesn’t, you know you were being a very special friend.”

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Grandma’s words made sense, but Alicia still felt the sick pangs of possibly losing her best friend.

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“Perhaps,” Alicia thought to herself that night before bed, “Marta was only having a bad day and will apologize if I make a friendly gesture and show I can forgive.” Falling asleep, she pondered her grandmother’s words and knew what she should do.

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The next day in class, Alicia passed a note to Marta that read simply, “Ice cream at my house after school?”

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With a sigh of relief, Alicia saw Marta look up and smile.

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The Pamphlet

Lexile: 1450

Original Work

I am truly ashamed to say that I did nothing of value with the first 29 years of my life. My lackadaisical attitude in middle school and high school carried over to a brief stint at a community college after graduation. When I failed out of college, I moved in with my older brother, Andy, and, much to his chagrin, I continued that lazy lifestyle for the next several years. Andy dutifully supported me, and I eventually found a decent job—as an electrician—but my selfish ways kept me from really succeeding in life, until about two years ago when things began to change for the better after I decided to read a pamphlet.

As I was leaving work one day, my boss handed me a pamphlet with the words “Habitat for Humanity” emblazoned on the front and told me I should read it. Rolling my eyes at the theme of humanity, I briefly scanned the paper and observed a picture of a group of people holding construction tools. With no desire to read any further, I held onto the pamphlet until I got to my car—only because I had nothing else to do with it—then I tossed it to the passenger’s side, where it stayed, unnoticed and unread, for about three weeks.

After borrowing my car one day, Andy brought the pamphlet into the apartment and asked what it was—seeming to sense that it was important and that I hadn’t bothered to read it. When I told him I had intended to throw it away, he looked at me, baffled, and thrust it into my hands—ordering me to grow up and read it.

Conceding to his better judgment, and quite fearful of my older brother’s wrath, I sat down on the couch and, to my surprise, became immediately absorbed in the world that innocuous little paper drew me into. Habitat for Humanity, I learned, is an organization of people who build or fix up houses for others so that people don’t have to live in substandard housing. The organization relies on volunteers from neighborhoods or different local organizations to help with all aspects of building a house and making it livable.

I was astounded that groups of people would volunteer so much of their time and energy to do something so kind for strangers—and, strangely, I felt a yearning to be involved as well. Without hesitation, I picked up the phone, dialed the number listed on the front, and was immediately put through to the person in charge of a house they were building right in my neighborhood.

Not yet truly comprehending the spirit of what the day would be like, I woke before dawn the following Saturday morning and eagerly made my way to the construction site where I witnessed dozens of volunteers as they prepared to help build this remarkable house. We labored together all

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day long, not only doing what we had been trained to do, but assisting in any way we could. The work was grueling, but the feeling of community and compassion, and the friendships that were forged that day, all made the work worth the tremendous effort.

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We spent the next several weeks diligently building this house and, when it was completed, I realized what it meant to accomplish something good and, for the first time in my life, I felt like I had a sense of purpose—a sense that I was worth something and that I could do important work with my life. I helped build two more houses that year, then I decided that I needed to do more, so I took a position as a project coordinator at Habitat for Humanity. I know it sounds cliché, but I truly feel an inner strength as I help rebuild homes and lives—for it is not only the lives of strangers that have been rebuilt, it is mine as well.

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My life has been forever touched by the work I have done and the people I have met, but it was, unquestionably, my brother who changed the direction of my life—and for that I will be eternally grateful.

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Clouds

Lexile: 1350

Original Work

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Clouds of some form, whether long and flat, large or small, or wispy or puffy, are visible on most days throughout the year. Whether you are a weatherman who uses clouds as predictors of weather, or a person who just likes to sit and gaze at the different formations, clouds are an integral and fascinating part of nature.

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Clouds are created from accumulations of water droplets or solid ice crystals that float in the Earth's troposphere—the lowest part of the Earth's atmosphere—and move with the wind. They are visible to the naked eye and have been the source of great interest and much scientific study.

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Clouds form when water that has evaporated from the surface of the Earth, called water vapor, condenses into microscopic dust particles that float in the air. Clouds form under several different circumstances: when cold and warm air meet; when warm air rises up the side of a mountain and cools as it rises; or when warm air flows over a colder area, like a body of water that is cool. This occurs because the cool air can hold less water vapor than warm air, leaving the excess water to condense into either liquid or ice.

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There are several different classifications of clouds, and they are defined by the way they look and how high they are in the atmosphere. In general, there are three common cloud types (stratus, cumulus, and cirrus), although many clouds are a combination, or variation, of these.

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One of the main classifications of clouds is called stratus, a word that is derived from the Latin word meaning “to spread out,” and signifies clouds that are horizontal and layered, and that stretch out across the sky. Stratus clouds form at the boundary of a layer of warm, moist air that has passed over a layer of cool air. At the area where these layers meet, the warm air is cooled and, if the warm air is cooled below its dew point, the excess water vapor condenses to form a blanket-like layer of stratus clouds. If the layers of air are very large, the stratus clouds may extend for several miles across the sky.

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Stratus clouds look like flat sheets of clouds and often accompany an overcast day or indicate the coming of steady rain. These clouds may stay in one place for several days.

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Cumulus clouds are another common type of cloud, with the word cumulus deriving from the Latin word for a “heap” or a “pile.” Cumulus clouds usually form when warm, moist air is forced upward, thus cooling as it rises, and are puffy in appearance, usually appearing like large cotton balls. If the air is cooled below its dew-point temperature, condensation will occur.

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The size of a cumulus cloud depends on the force of the upward movement of air and the amount of moisture in the air. The largest cumulus clouds are caused by very strong upward movements of warm, moist air. The clouds that produce heavy thunderstorms in the summer are a form of cumulus cloud called cumulonimbus—which may extend upward for hundreds of feet and can bring strong winds, hail, and rain.

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Cirrus clouds are a third type of cloud, with the word cirrus originating from the Latin word for a “wisp” of hair. Cirrus clouds appear very wispy and feathery, and form only at high altitudes--about 4 miles above the earth’s surface. Cirrus clouds are composed of ice crystals and are so thin that sunlight passes right through them. These clouds are indicators of fair weather when they are scattered in a clear blue sky.

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Clouds can be both beautiful and breathtaking, and are continually the source of much amazement and significance. Furthermore, they are great predictors of impending weather and atmospheric conditions and help weathermen determine the type of weather to expect. Whether you are a scientist or merely a nature lover who delights in exploring the different facets of nature, clouds will both enlighten and inspire.

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The Great Fossil Feud
TCLD Title: The Great Fossil Feud
Lexile: 1370
Source: TAAS 2002

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In science, great advances are often made because of fierce competition. For example, the rivalry between Edward Cope and Othniel Marsh helped expand the field of paleontology—the study of fossils. Because of their work, 136 new species of dinosaurs and many species of mammals, fish, and birds were identified. The magnitude of their rivalry was so great, however, that it sometimes caused them to make mistakes in judgment.

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Born in 1840, Edward Cope showed an interest in science from an early age, and was only six years old when he made his first scientific observations. Cope studied science in both the United States and Europe before becoming a professor of zoology at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. He soon left teaching to devote himself full-time to the study of fossils.

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Othniel Marsh was nine years older than Cope and, although he was sometimes described as a difficult person, he was a very successful scholar. At Yale University in 1866, Marsh became the first professor of paleontology in North America, and later ran Yale’s Museum of Natural Sciences.

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Cope and Marsh were friendly when they first met, but they soon became bitter rivals in the hunt for new dinosaurs. According to Marsh, his feud with Cope began in 1869, when Cope assembled the skeleton of a long-necked marine animal called elasmosaurus. Cope mistakenly reversed the animal’s neck with its tail and, when Marsh pointed out Cope’s mistake, Cope took the criticism as an affront. A quarrel resulted, and any hope of a partnership between the two men was forever lost.

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At times, Cope and Marsh allowed their dislike of each other to interfere with their work. They tried to lure away each other’s best workers and sometimes even claimed credit for one another’s discoveries. For example, when Cope invented a way to prevent dinosaur fossils from breaking by covering them with a cloth soaked in a paste made of rice, Marsh claimed that he had developed the process.

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The two men also clashed whenever a rich fossil deposit was found because each wanted to claim the best digging sites for himself. Both men were compelled to seek the fame and glory that came with discovering a new species of dinosaur—the person who discovered a species had the great honor of naming it—and both greatly desired this honor.

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In 1877, a Colorado mining teacher named Arthur Lakes sent some fossils he had found to both Marsh and Cope and, since Lakes had sent Marsh the fossils first, Marsh felt that he should be

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allowed exclusive rights to the fossil site. Marsh even sent Lakes \$100 to secure the site for his own use, and succeeded in obtaining that particular site—much to the dismay of Cope.

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In their haste to outdo each other, Cope and Marsh often worked too quickly and would end up making mistakes. Sometimes they each dug up the same species and gave it different names, or they used names that had already been assigned to other animals.

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In spite of their feud, Cope and Marsh made some very important contributions to science, and their exciting discoveries greatly increased people's knowledge of dinosaurs, helped pave the way for modern paleontology, and filled museums with amazing fossils. Some of the dinosaurs they introduced to the world include the triceratops, allosaurus, diplodocus, and stegosaurus. Although Cope and Marsh might not have wanted their names to be linked together, they both deserve a tremendous amount of credit, for much of what we now know about dinosaurs and other extinct animals is a direct result of years of their hard work.

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Greenpeace

Lexile: 1400

Original Work

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Nearly a dozen men, outraged by U.S. nuclear testing off the coast of an Alaskan island, set sail from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada toward Alaska with one intent in mind—to stop the testing. The year was 1971 and these men, calling themselves the Don't Make a Wave Committee, boarded a small boat that would take them directly toward the nuclear testing site. They called their expedition the Greenpeace I.

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The men never made it to the island, as they were intercepted by the United States Coast Guard prior to arriving there. They were unable to stop the nuclear testing, but their audacity, bravery, and conviction led them to be noticed by people all over the world.

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A year later, as this group continued its mission to protect the environment, members officially changed the name to the Greenpeace Foundation. Its popularity soared, as did membership, and activists in several countries began to open their own satellite organizations.

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In 1979, the original Vancouver-based Greenpeace Foundation encountered financial difficulties, and disputes over fundraising and organizational direction divided the movement. One of the leaders, a man named David McTaggart, proposed that the Canadian Greenpeace Foundation accept a new structure which would bring the numerous independent Greenpeace offices worldwide under the direction of one single global organization—thus forming Greenpeace International.

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Greenpeace's official mission statement describes this group as an independent, campaigning organization which uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and to force solutions for a green and peaceful future. The goal of Greenpeace is to nurture and protect the Earth and her life in all ways. Activists will often put themselves in harm's way in order to stop activities—such as the dumping of harmful waste or the killing of whales—that are harmful to nature or the environment.

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What was once a small group of activists has now become an international organization with offices in almost 40 countries. With the increasing destruction of life and the environment, activists are vehement in their assertion that we must make changes now to help save the planet. Some of the more important issues that Greenpeace is currently involved in include the preservation of forests; the restoration of health to the oceans and ocean life; the reduction of the impact of global warming; the presence of toxic chemicals in our land, air, and oceans; the use of nuclear power; and the use of genetic engineering.

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Greenpeace has been successful at making several positive changes in the environment, including an end to the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. The organization has also been able to get a permanent moratorium, or stop, on international commercial whaling, and has had Antarctica declared a global park—making the entire continent and its wildlife off limits to both commercial exploitation and pollution.

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Greenpeace International relies on individual contributions and grants from charitable foundations to support its causes, and will not accept funding from governments or from corporations because it wants to ensure independence and impartiality. There are an estimated 2.8 million financial supporters who contribute to Greenpeace and help maintain its daily workings and agendas.

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During its history, Greenpeace has endured criticism from both government and industries and, on occasion, from other environmental groups. Because members are often arrested for offenses such as trespassing, and some people consider these actions to be illegal acts of civil disobedience, controversy has often arisen. Even though Greenpeace espouses the non-violent manner in which to attempt to make changes, there are always groups who are unhappy with how the organization conducts itself. But, despite the criticisms, members are undaunted and continue their quest to promote global and environmental changes so that we can all live in peace in a flourishing, green planet.

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Disney World

Lexile: 1450

Original Work

Children from all over the world know the name Disney World and long to visit the land where anything can happen when you wish upon a star. Millions of people each year visit the magical world created by Walt Disney, but not many people are aware of the rich history behind the largest theme park in the world.

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In 1959, the Walt Disney Company, under the leadership of Walt Disney, began searching the country for land for a second resort to supplement California's Disneyland. Walt Disney desired a much larger area of land than what he had in California and, under a veil of secrecy, sent out scouting teams that looked for the perfect place for this new resort. When the decision was made to locate his new park in Florida, Disney's men used false company names to buy thousands of acres of land. In October of 1965, after most of the land had been bought, the truth of the property's owner was divulged. Altogether, Disney had bought 27,443 acres, about 43 square miles, with the total cost at a little over \$5 million—a price he thought was phenomenal.

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In November of 1965, Walt Disney held a press conference in which he described his plans for Disney World as a city of the future that featured theme parks, golf courses, and resort hotels and dining. Unfortunately, Walt passed away in late 1966 before any construction even began, but his brother, Roy Disney, stepped in to oversee construction of the resort.

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Construction began in 1967, and Disney World opened on October 1, 1971, as the Magic Kingdom and has since added EPCOT, Disney-MGM Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom. In addition to these four main theme parks, Disney World is home to six golf courses, a huge sports complex, two water parks, an auto race track, twenty resort hotels and countless shopping, dining, and entertainment opportunities.

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To maintain and support such a vast expanse of buildings and entertainment, many logistics had to be carefully planned. First of all, no food distribution center in the area was large enough to support the volume of Disney's guests, so Disney took on the monumental task of building and maintaining its own. In addition, Disney created its own laundry facility, the largest in the world, which cleans all the costumes, towels, napkins, and sheets used by staff members and guests—an estimated 100,000 pounds of linen each day. To control the mechanics of the park, and to house storage and office space, a nine acre tunnel system was created underneath the Magic Kingdom. This also serves as a backstage passage to work locations.

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In 1982, the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) opened to the public.

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EPCOT was part of Disney’s dream to be a place where people could learn about themselves

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and the world around them—where the past and future could be explored in an atmosphere of

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understanding that would promote communication and peace between cultures.

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During the opening ceremony, young adults from 23 nations each poured a gallon of their

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country’s water into a large fountain. Symbolizing unity and world friendship, water was brought

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from such places as the Arctic Ocean, the Nile River in Africa, the Yangtze River in China, and the

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Mississippi.

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The third major theme park, Disney-MGM Studios, opened in 1989 and held not only rides and

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entertainment, but allowed guests to watch movies being made on the studio lot.

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Disney’s Animal Kingdom, the fourth theme park, opened in 1998 and became the first park to be

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centered entirely around animal conservation, a philosophy that was important to Walt Disney.

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Even though Walt Disney was unable to see his dream come alive, his family is sure that he would

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have been proud of Walt Disney World and how it has grown throughout the years. More of a

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success than Disney could have ever imagined, Disney World has brought magic and treasured

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memories to the lives of both the young and old.

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George Walker

Lexile: 1460

Original Work

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Music and piano playing was an integral part of the Walker family—something they cherished and shared together. When a baby boy, named George, was born into the family in 1922, he was immediately immersed in classical music. With his love for music fostered by his parents, George began his first piano lessons at the age of five. His parents were accomplished pianists and could tell right away that he was not only talented, but gifted. For years, George studied and practiced while his parents watched his gift grow—not yet realizing the full extent of his abilities or how accomplished he would soon become.

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At the age of 15, George was admitted on a scholarship to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he studied piano. He began to compose his own music at the age of 18, and his teachers knew that he would be great.

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In 1945, George attended the Philadelphia Youth Auditions, where he won the right to play the 3rd Piano Concerto of Rachmaninoff with the Philadelphia Orchestra. This was an extremely distinguishing accomplishment, as he was the first African American instrumentalist to appear with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

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George Walker continued to compose and play music with numerous orchestras throughout the country, and his popularity grew. In 1946 he composed his String Quartet no. 1; the second movement of this work, entitled Lyric for Strings, has become the most frequently performed orchestral work by a living American composer.

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George entered the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree Program at the Eastman School of Music in 1955 and, only a year later, became the first African American recipient of a doctoral degree from Eastman. In conjunction with the doctoral degree, George also earned an Artist Diploma in Piano.

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In 1959, George embarked on a tour of Europe, playing concerts in France, Holland and Italy alongside some of the most famous musicians of the day. When he returned to America, he joined the faculty of Smith College and became the first African American tenured faculty member.

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To add to, and surpass, what was on his long list of accomplishments, in 1996, George Walker became the first African American composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize in Music. He won the prize for his work, Lilacs for Voice and Orchestra, which is a 16 minute composition of four songs for voice and orchestra based on stanzas from a Walt Whitman poem entitled, “When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom’d.”

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George Walker is a humble man, as portrayed in the many interviews and writings on his successful life. He was determined to write beautiful music and share it with the world, with pieces that would speak directly to the listener. Growing up in an era of increasing civil rights, Walker chose to highlight the importance of civil rights in a unique way. It was his belief that equality came through the culture that African Americans acquired and exhibited. Walker says that he fought for equality by following a path of “cultural equality,” and emphasized that one should look at the artist as an individual and not at the color of his skin.

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Looking back on a life full of accomplishments and firsts, George has proven that skin color has no bearing on musical prowess and what a person can accomplish in life. His accomplishments helped pave the way for other African Americans to succeed in the world of classical composition, and have inspired and encouraged us all to further our enjoyment of music.

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