CROCODILE ESCAPE



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Nelson Literacy Directions

Crocodile Escape

For teachers' inspection ONLY

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Meet the Characters

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Jimmy

A crocodile hunter and crocodile farmer.



Gebbo

Jimmy's assistant and "spotter".



Old Whitey

A rogue saltwater crocodile.

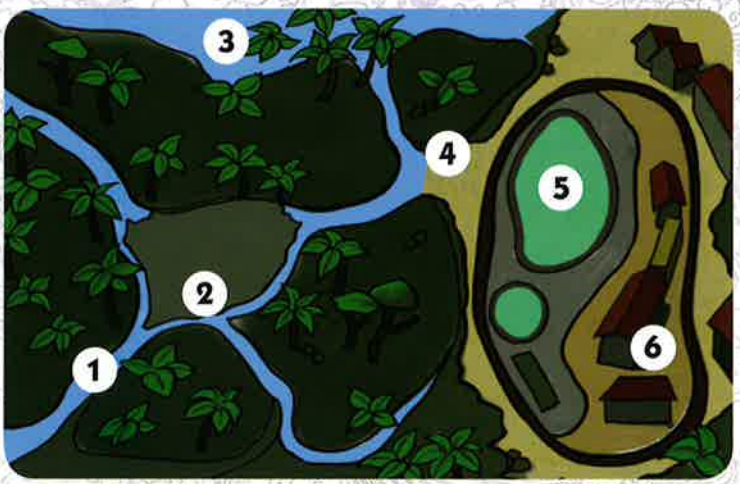
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Dear Reader

Here's an adventure set in the lush coastal region of Far North Queensland. It's a beautiful place, but when a tropical flood ravages the landscape, there's an old danger lurking beneath the surface of the rivers and creeks. This particular danger has been waiting a long time for its opportunity to strike!

Frank Pedersen
Author

Old Whitey's Environment



1. Bullock Creek
2. Old Whitey's bend
3. The estuary
4. The mudflats
5. The saltie enclosure
6. The crocodile farm

1 Old Whitey

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If you're lucky, you'll realise that isn't driftwood submerged in the brown, murky waters. If you're lucky, your torch will catch a flash of eye shine, an eerie yellow reflection just above the waterline. If you're lucky, you'll avoid being slowed down by the thick mud or the twisted mangrove roots as you move backwards, eyes never leaving the water. If you're lucky, you'll make it back up the banks of the sluggish, silent river, heart pounding, adrenaline coursing through your body, cold sweat on your skin.

If you're not, you'll die. In his natural habitat, encounters with Old Whitey only end in one of two ways.



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From the shallow water, he'll launch all five metres of his 900-kilogram body towards you with terrifying speed. His powerful jaws will close on you with a crushing force of more than 300 kilograms per square centimetre. He'll drag you back into the foaming water, thrashing around and around in a death roll. He'll pulverise your bones with his massive teeth. He'll tear you to pieces.



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"Jimmy," my father had said, when he first took me crocodile hunting years ago. "I don't need to run faster than a crocodile. I just need to run faster than you." It had been my father's attempt at lightening the situation with humour. Hunting killer crocodiles was dangerous work, and you needed to release the tension. If tension grew into fear, you'd start making deadly mistakes. You'd miss a surreptitious ripple disturbing the surface of the water. You'd be momentarily distracted by an innocent sound in the mangroves nearby. You'd stare at a bird taking flight, instead of watching to see what had disturbed it.

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Since before dinosaurs walked the earth, saltwater crocodiles hadn't changed their hunting methods. Salties were brutal. They were terrifying.

"Never, never bait the trap until you're ready for anything," was my father's other piece of advice. He was right. Once a crocodile sensed a thirty-kilogram lump of wild boar meat, you'd want to be finished with your trap and standing at least twenty metres away. You'd better be ready, any second, for a tonne of thrashing, angry reptile.

When my father had started the farm twenty years ago, it had been the first commercial crocodile farm in the region. You couldn't just buy crocodiles, like you could purchase sheep or cattle – so he started with a single rogue saltie, captured from the wild. When a saltwater

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crocodile started shadowing the fishing boats, it was never a good sign. For some months, the authorities had been keeping a wary eye on one particular saltie. Usually, a couple of warning shots from a rifle scared a crocodile away, but this rogue crocodile was growing bolder and bolder with each incident. Intensely territorial, this one had claimed a murky, brackish stretch of Bullock Creek. The authorities decided it should be trapped before the inevitable happened, and they called in my father.

It was almost impossible to judge the size and weight of a submerged saltwater crocodile – but when my father got this particular individual back to his fledgling farm, he could tell it was already about forty years old. It had a couple of old, healed bullet wounds

in its powerful tail, and at some stage, it had been in a vicious altercation with another crocodile, probably over territory. That fight had resulted in a deep, jagged gash down its side, which had healed into a long, white scar.

"Old Whitey," my father had decided. "That's what we'll call you." That first crocodile had been the longest resident of our farm ever since.



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