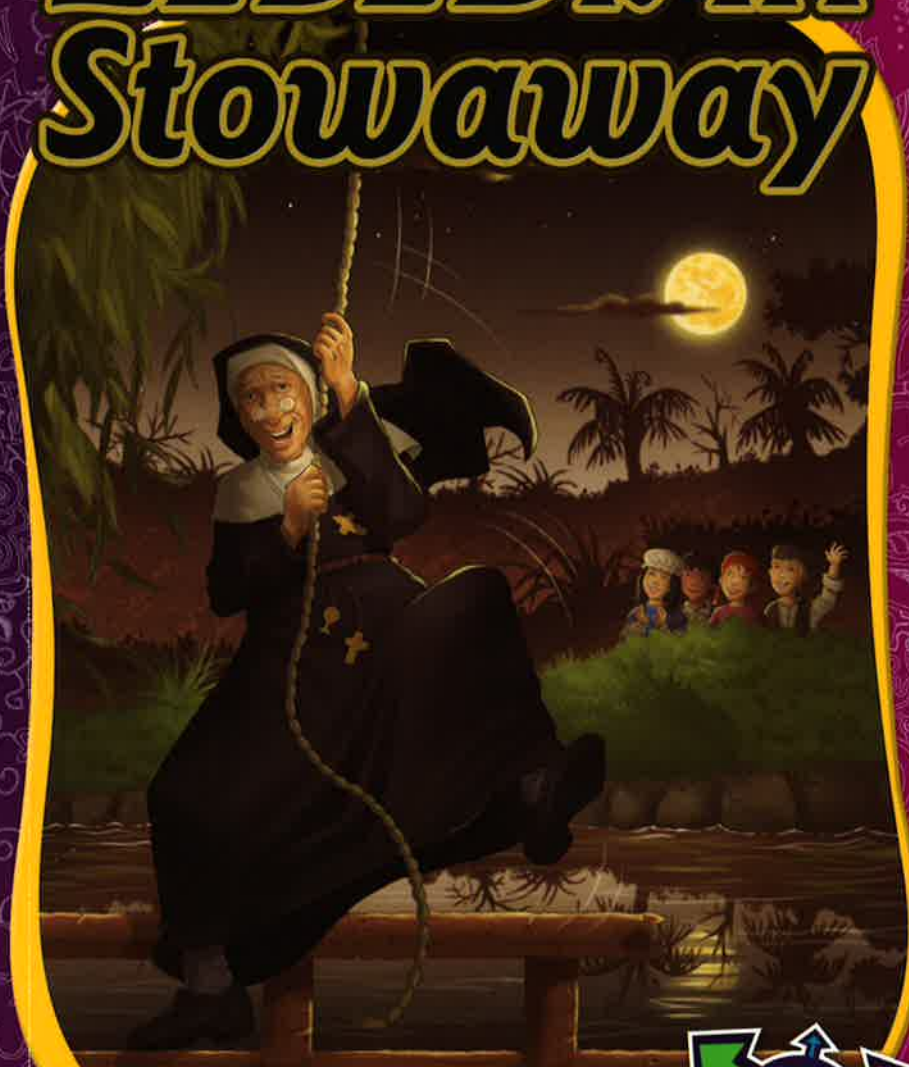
The ZEBEDIAH Stowaway



John Parsons

Richard Hoit

Nelson Literacy Directions

For teachers' inspection ONLY

The Zebediah Stowaway

Written by John Parsons
Illustrated by Richard Hoit

Contents

1	Suspended!	4
2	A Terrible Dilemma	11
3	A Daring Escape	17
4	A New Crew Member	22
5	A Reverse Escape	29
6	Captured!	35
7	Epilogue	43

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Meet the Characters

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Jeremiah

A boy who finds he has a conscience.



Abby

A girl who often gets the others out of trouble.



Nathan

A boy who loves plans involving escapes and catfish.



Suzette

A girl who sees the best in people.



Mother Hildegard

A nun at the orphanage.



Father Cicatrice

Inspector-General of Irregularities.

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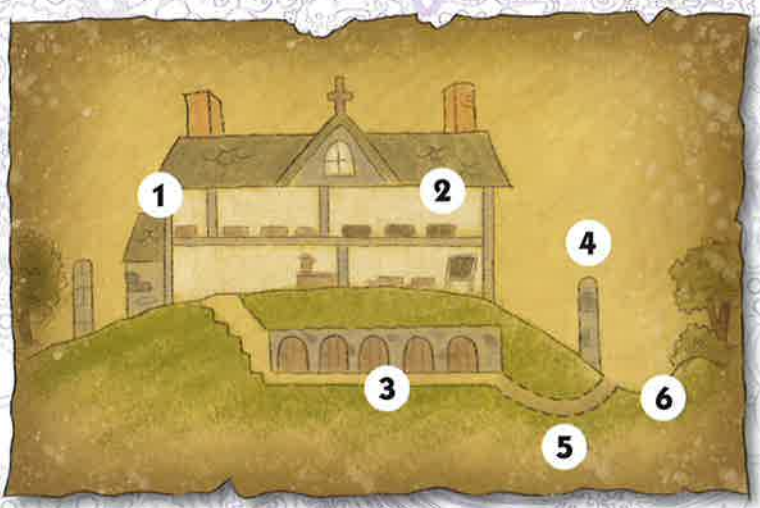
POST CARD

Dear Reader

Life at the orphanage becomes very strange for Jeremiah, Abby, Nathan and Suzette when someone gets suspended – and it isn't one of them! But things get even more peculiar when a fugitive stowaway joins them aboard the Zebediah. Things they thought they'd never see start to happen all over the place!

John Parsons
Author

The Orphanage



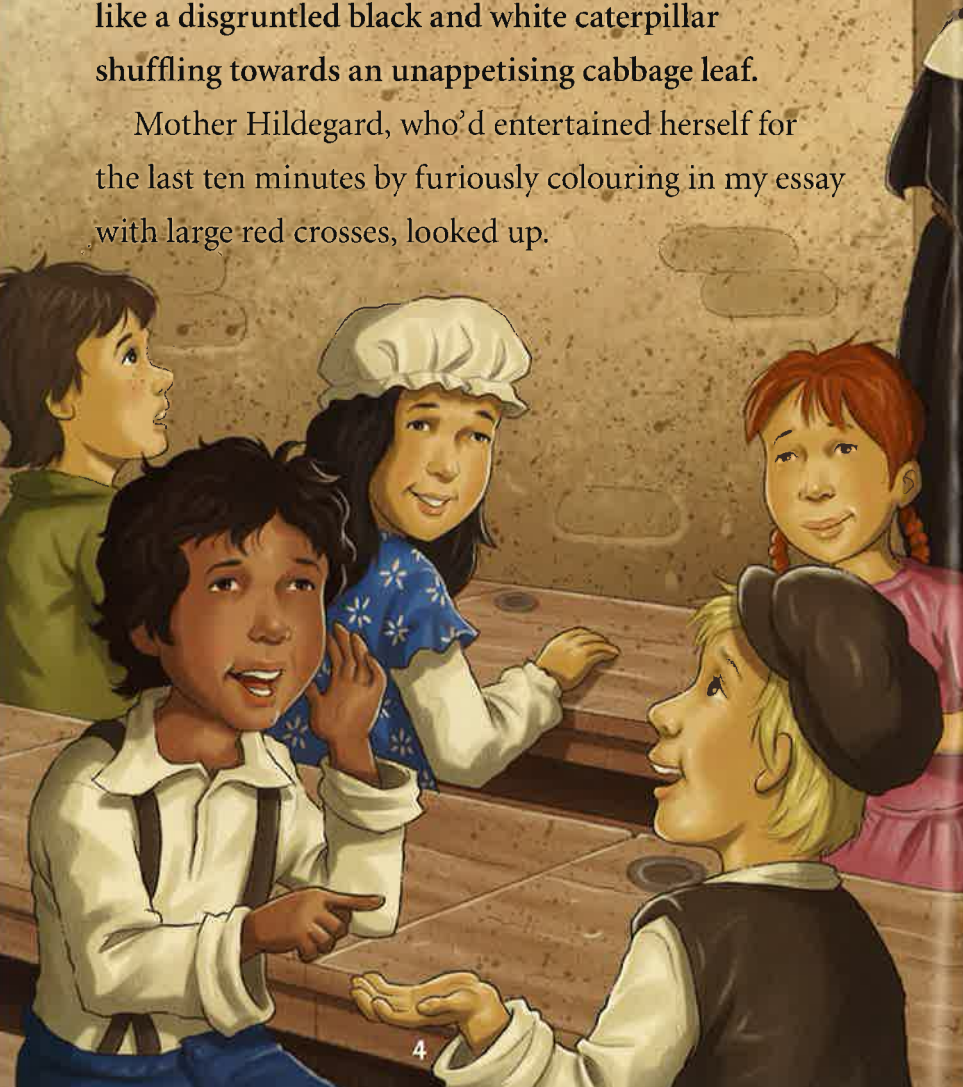
1. Mother Hildegard's office
2. The nuns' dormitory
3. The underground cellars
4. The orphanage wall
5. The secret tunnel
6. The grassy ditch

1 Suspended!

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I knew something was up the moment a line of sombre nuns threaded their way into the classroom, eyes downcast, looking for all the world like a disgruntled black and white caterpillar shuffling towards an unappetising cabbage leaf.

Mother Hildegard, who'd entertained herself for the last ten minutes by furiously colouring in my essay with large red crosses, looked up.





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The nun at the head of the caterpillar leant over and whispered surreptitiously. Mother Hildegard's eyebrows quivered even more furiously than when she'd read the title of my excellently researched essay: "Why Children Shouldn't Be Expected to Have Baths More Than Once a Month".

I sighed resignedly and looked over at Nathan, Abby and Suzette. Nathan leant over towards my desk and cupped his hand around his mouth.

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"What have you been caught doing this time, Jeremiah?" he whispered.

With nuns, it always pays to be one step ahead, so I immediately started racking my brain. What heinous misdemeanour had I committed in the last three days and, more importantly, what was my plausible excuse going to be? Unusually, my conscience was relatively clear. If you didn't count sneaking up to the nuns' dormitory and swapping glasses of false teeth around, which I'd managed to accomplish last Tuesday night, I was about as innocent as a runaway orphan could ever be. And, let's face it, everyone agreed that watching twenty nuns trying to chew lumpy porridge with oversized, undersized and crooked false teeth on Wednesday morning had certainly been worth it.

"What are you grinning at, Master Jeremiah?" thundered Mother Hildegard. "Didn't you hear me?"

She was standing framed in the classroom doorway, ready to join the tail of the rapidly disappearing caterpillar of nuns.

"Twelve!" I said, using my standard answer to questions posed when I hadn't been listening. It worked





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for all kinds of things: how many months were in a year, how many things were in a dozen or how many times I'd been told to do something that I still hadn't done.

"Class is dismissed," hissed Abby from behind me.

"I'm sorry, Mother Hildegaard," I said. "I was thinking about my magnificent essay. Twelve. A perfectly acceptable number of baths to have a year."

Snorting, Mother Hildegard joined the winding caterpillar of nuns disappearing out into the corridor.

I looked at Nathan, Abby and Suzette in bewilderment. What was going on? Not only had class been dismissed, but the unthinkable had happened. I'd actually managed to use the "twelve" answer without having to duck a piece of Mother Hildegard's well-aimed chalk!

Within an hour, the day grew stranger. An assembly was called. Assemblies were never good news, usually being called to announce orphanage rules about wearing socks of the same colour, or earwax and fingernail inspections. Nathan, Abby, Suzette and I took our usual places at the back of the assembly, and I stared glumly at my feet, waiting for the unpleasant news.



The hall fell silent as the nuns entered in single file.

"Who's that?" whispered Suzette. To my surprise, Mother Hildegard was nowhere to be seen. Instead, a stern-looking priest led the solemn procession to the front of the hall, where he turned to speak.

"My name is Father Volto Cicatrice," he boomed theatrically, staring ominously at the assembly. "Father Volto Cicatrice, Inspector-General of Irregularities at Orphanages. Unfortunately, I must inform you that some grave irregularities have been discovered at this orphanage. Grave, indeed!"

The nuns who stood like a zipper to one side of Father Cicatrice clucked mournfully. I stared at Nathan.

"Finally!" I said. "They're going to stop forcing us to eat vegetables, do schoolwork and take more than twelve baths a year!"

"I somehow doubt that," said Nathan, shaking his head. "He's only a father, and I reckon you'd need to be at least a bishop to stop those things."

"SILENCE!" bellowed Father Cicatrice, pointing a crooked finger in our direction. He fixed us with an angry glare, then returned to his speech.

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"It has come to my attention that a considerable number of valuables have gone missing from this orphanage," he rumbled. "Until I discover who is responsible, Mother Hildegard has been suspended! She is being accommodated somewhere secure until my inspections are completed."

There was an audible gasp from the assembled children.

"From this moment," continued Father Cicatrice, "I am in charge!"



