

Springboard

into
Comprehension

6

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RA 11.5–12.5



Narrative

Gold in the Hills



Written by Jack Gabolinscy
Illustrated by Link Choi

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Gold in the Hills



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An Unexpected Adventure

It was springtime, and overnight, the valley where the McMillans lived had burst into life, with myriads of flowers blossoming, birds chirping, and cotton-tailed rabbits dashing around. William, his older sister Annabelle, and Snuffles, their dog, climbed higher up the valley than ever before. They waded up the shallow side of the river, threaded their way through tangled trees, then clambered up a bank into a clearing.

The children paused to catch their breath and wipe the sweat from their brows, as Snuffles, tail wagging, nose glued to a scent on the ground, zigzagged across the clearing. He was heading for a dark cave opening in the bank. Looking at the cave, Annabelle and William felt a chill. The entrance yawned, black and quiet, like the throat of some awful beast.

Suddenly, Snuffles yelped and the hair on his back bristled like a scrubbing brush. He jumped backwards, turned, and ran, as the biggest grizzly bear in the world burst from the cave with a roar like thunder.

William and Annabelle, terror-stricken, followed Snuffles as he dived down the bank, crashed through the trees, and plunged into the river. The water, still cold from winter, stung like a thousand needles. The snarling of the bear faded as the river swept them away.

As the water grew deeper and faster, an ominous booming noise came from ahead and, with horror, they remembered the waterfall. Desperately, they tried to struggle ashore, but the angry river did not want to let them go. The waterfall roared in fury, eager to drag them down.



Just as it seemed that they would be swept over like floating logs, William and Annabelle saw a sheltered pool with a stony shelf on the left-hand side of the gorge, behind a giant boulder.

“Swim!” cried Annabelle above the roar of the rapids.

William, his arms flailing like a windmill, did not need to be told twice. “Go, Snuffles, go, go!” he howled as he fought his way desperately through the choppy water. Then, the swirling current that eddied around the boulder grabbed him and tossed him carelessly into the pool. Annabelle followed, with Snuffles, his eyes as wide as saucers, clutched in her arms. Coughing and spluttering, they rolled onto the shelf, crawled up under the overhanging cliff, and lay gasping for air.

Snuffles was the first to recover. By the time William and Annabelle recovered sufficiently to climb to their feet, he had disappeared. Soon, steady barks began to echo from deep under the overhang.

Curious, William and Annabelle followed the hollow barking and found themselves in another cave. There was no growling grizzly in this one though – instead, in the distance they could see a light, like a miner’s lamp in a tunnel. They stumbled upwards through the darkness and emerged into warm, friendly sunshine.

When William and Annabelle arrived home, bruised and battered, they recounted their adventure to their parents and heaped praise on the hero of the day – Snuffles the canine cave explorer!

“Don’t go near that part of the river again,” warned their mother. “That grizzly obviously doesn’t like receiving guests!”



An Exciting Discovery

“What a good thing you had your snuffly saviour with you!” exclaimed Annabelle and William’s father, bending down to give Snuffles a pat.

All of a sudden, something in the dog’s shaggy hair caught his attention. He shifted Snuffles into the sunlight and examined him more closely, then looked at the hand that he had used to pat the “snuffly saviour.” His family, now consumed with curiosity, stared at his hand, trying to see what he had found – and something glinted in the light.

“Do you know what this is?” said Father, his voice as hoarse and croaky as a frog’s. “It’s gold – this is gold dust!”

He turned to the family, whose jaws had dropped to the dusty cabin floor. Father’s eyes bulged until they almost burst.

“Back to the cave!” he said, his voice trembling – he seemed to have forgotten all about the belligerent bear. “Take us back to that cave!”

Cautiously – because they certainly hadn’t forgotten the grizzly – William and Annabelle led the way back through the tunnel and out to the edge of the swirling pool. His hands shaky, Father dipped a pan in the water and swished it around.

Everyone waited as Father inspected the pan with eagle eyes. Slowly, he lifted his head, and a big grin split his face in half.

“We’re rich!” he yelled.

