

Springboard^{into} Comprehension 6

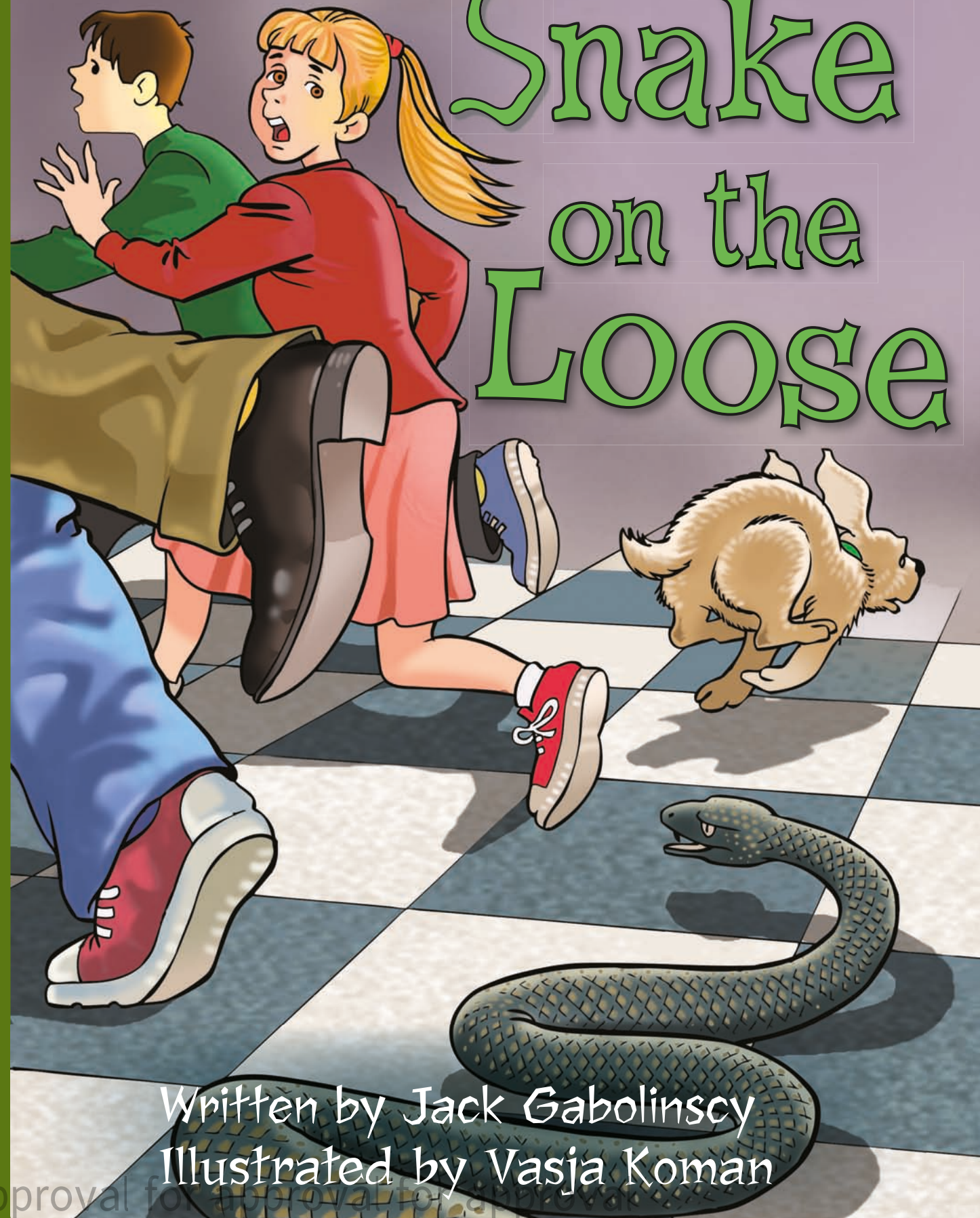
Main Idea	Letters from the Goldfields The History of Looking Cool
Compare and Contrast	In the Public Eye Two Mines, Two Rescues
Fact and Opinion	Snake on the Loose Let There Be Rock!
Cause and Effect	Rainforests at Risk The Gallipoli Campaign
Bias and Prejudice	Women's Rights Animal Issues
Figurative Language	Your Health Smythe's Department Store

RA 12.5+



Literary Recount

Snake on the Loose



Written by Jack Gabolinsey
Illustrated by Vasja Koman

Snake on the Loose

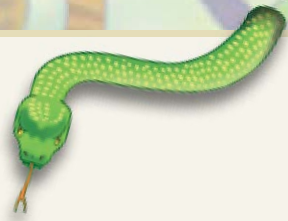


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Mouse Attack



The trouble started at assembly a month ago when the principal, accompanied by the mayor, stepped on the stage. The mayor made the announcement. "This year's citywide Pet Show will be held in the Town Hall on August 12." He paused, mid-announcement, glared around the assembly until he located me, then continued. "All pets must be caged appropriately. I don't want a repetition of last year's catastrophe."

A murmur of comment greeted the announcement. Titters of amusement competed with groans of dread and gasps of fear as everybody recalled the previous year's Pet Show with differing emotional reactions. Personally, I remembered it with considerable satisfaction. I mean, it's not every day you witness the escape of a hundred scurrying, squeaking, tail-flicking white mice into a Town Hall full of screaming kids, terrified teachers, and panicking parents, complete with plenty of petrified pets. In all honesty, I have to say it was the funniest and the most entertaining spectacle I've ever witnessed.

Not everyone shared my opinion. The local newspaper described it as "the madness of a million marauding mice." It published a photo of hysterical people scattering in all directions and quoted the principal as saying, "It was the most terrible and embarrassing experience of my teaching career. I am profoundly sorry and I apologize profusely that a student from my school was responsible for such a frightening incident."

The breakfast-show host on the local radio station was beside herself. "I thought it was revolting! The beastly little critters were scampering and scurrying all over the Town Hall. One repulsive monster ran right up my leg. Ooooooh! It was nauseating!"

Mum and Dad weren't especially enthralled, either. "You should be ashamed of yourself!" Mum raged. "You are grounded, plus no pocket money. I sincerely trust that will teach you to think twice about such pranks in future." Throughout Mum's tirade, Dad didn't say a word in my support. He just sat there, nodding and voicing agreement. "Yes! I think so, too! That's right!"



Later, when Mum's anger subsided, Dad said, "I'm sure he intended it only as harmless fun. It's the sort of stunt I might have engineered when I was young...but I really don't think it was a good idea."

My sister Samantha was totally treacherous. She nodded her head vigorously, agreeing with every word that Mum uttered. "Yes, Mum... You're absolutely right, Mum... It was abominable...disgusting... inexcusable...totally inappropriate...only three weeks? Two months, Mum...at least two months."

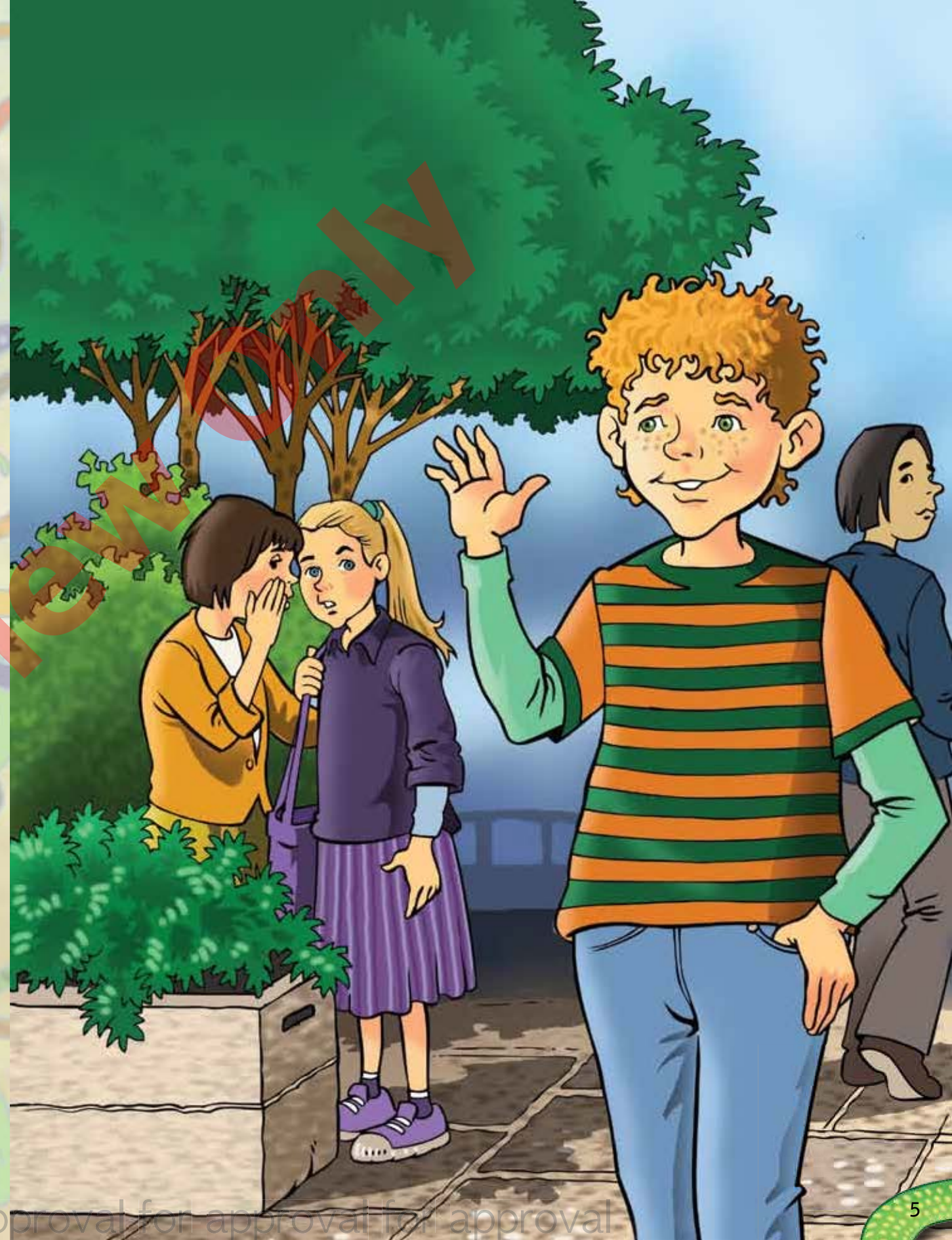
Ten minutes later, in the security of my bedroom, she was rolling about on the floor in uncontrolled glee, bouncing and cavorting like a lunatic monkey. "It was brilliant," she whooped. "Hilarious! Stupendous! I've never seen so many people get so out-of-control excited over a few harmless little rodents."

"Yes," I agreed, "but I notice you didn't admit it was your idea."

"Hey," she chuckled, "my name's not Silly."

For weeks afterwards, it seemed as if everyone was avoiding me like the plague. When they spotted me coming, they crossed the street or suddenly remembered they had unfinished business back the way they had come from. They pointed accusingly and whispered about me to their friends. I always smiled broadly, flicked my hair back, and waved as if I was a famous celebrity greeting my adoring fans, but in reality, I knew I had earned myself the thorny crown of notoriety.

However, there were some who didn't think I was a potential threat to humanity. Members of this enlightened minority – endowed with balance and a sense of humour – rushed to shake my hand and to congratulate me for providing such original entertainment.



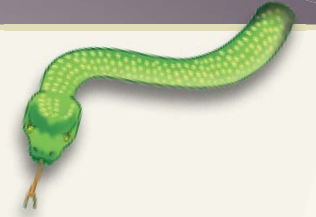
One boy approached me at a restaurant and whispered, "I consider the Great Mouse Escape the greatest prank ever." He checked over his shoulder, ensuring his mother wasn't watching. "Look!" From inside his windbreaker he produced two extremely fat tortoiseshell mice. "Patches and Puddles," he said. "I captured them during the evacuation. They live in my pockets. When I've accumulated a hundred, I'll release them at my 11th birthday party. Imagine the pandemonium – it'll be phenomenal!"

A spindly old lady with a walking stick and a snooty English accent wrapped her arms around me. "You darling boy!" she gushed. "That was riveting! Outrageously riotous! I haven't laughed so much since my pet peacocks leaped down from the rafters and attacked the mayor's official automobile. What are you planning next?"

I remembered her question when the mayor announced this year's Pet Show. "Yes," I wondered, "what am I going to do next?"



Which Pet?



The Pet Show is simple for most people. They don't have numerous pets to choose from. Frequently, they have only one, a Siamese cat with a dopey, sticky-out tongue, or a freaky-looking French poodle. Some might have a blue budgie, a tropical goldfish, or a pair of albino guinea pigs. That means getting ready for the Pet Show is pathetically easy. All they have to do is polish up an aquarium, clean out a birdcage, or purchase a shiny new collar and chain, and bingo, they're all prepared!

It's much more of a genuine challenge for me, however. Our house and garden are home to a menagerie of animals. They're in the bedrooms, the lounge, the kitchen, the backyard, and the garden shed. We've got cats and dogs, spiders and snakes, lizards, worms and centipedes, cockroaches and scorpions, Mexican walking fish and piranhas, just to mention a few.

You see, my father's an entomologist. He's a lecturer in the Zoology Department at the university. He's fascinated by all creatures, but especially the creepy-crawly, slithery, slimy, snappy, stingy bugs and critters that most people think are horrible. To complicate matters, my mother's a veterinary surgeon and equally fanatical about animals.

