

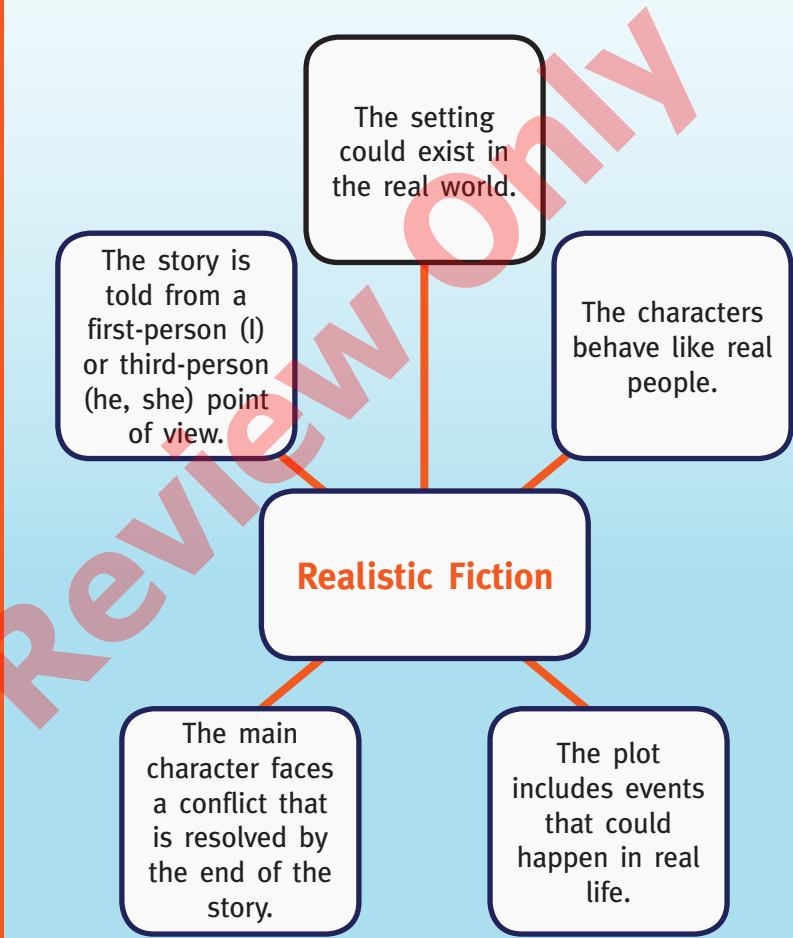
Solar-Powered Sammy

by Todd Gernert • illustrated by Lisa Manuzak Wiley



Realistic Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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The Missing Lizard



“You are not going to climb it again, are you?” Hazel asked.

Oscar stared up at the huge tree, then glanced down at the scar on his knee. He looked back up at the tree. Finally, he turned to Hazel and said, “Well, I like to think of myself as **arboreal**. That means ...”

“You are not arboreal!” Hazel said. “You don’t live in trees. You just like falling out of them!”

Oscar reached down and felt his knee. The scar was an embarrassing reminder of the last time he climbed the tree, looking for insects for Sammy, the classroom’s lizard.

Oscar didn't have any pets of his own at home, so he really enjoyed having Sammy as a class pet. He took special pride in always being the one to gather the most insects, but his last tree climb had been a bust. And he'd gotten in a lot of trouble with his teacher, Ms. Gonzalez, for being so reckless and endangering himself.

"I guess you're right," Oscar said.

"Besides," Hazel said, "if we want to find insects for Sammy, there are plenty in the grass."

Just then, a grasshopper hopped past Hazel, so she and Oscar leaped after it in hot pursuit. All of their classmates were outside, too, enjoying Florida's warm spring sun, as they tended the class garden and searched for insects.

By the time Ms. Gonzalez called them in, they had finished watering and weeding the vegetable beds and had collected enough insects to feed a reptile of Sammy's size for three days.

The students dashed across the grassy area, past the raised garden beds, through the door, and into the school. Oscar and Hazel were the first back inside the classroom. Oscar carried the ventilated plastic container with all the insects he'd gathered with Hazel.

"Look how many we caught!" Oscar said.

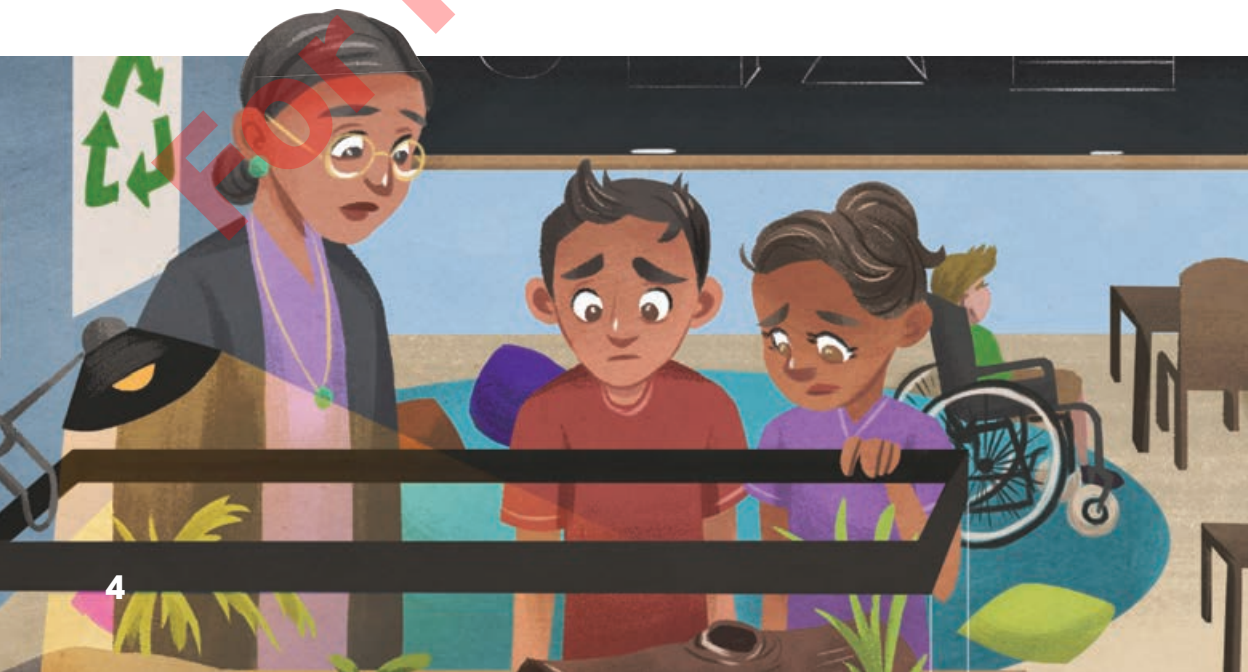
He and Hazel darted straight for Sammy's terrarium. It was a large glass tank, like an aquarium. But instead of being filled with water and fish, it contained sand, a heat lamp, a water bowl, plastic trees, and a ceramic log—everything a lizard needed to live comfortably away from its natural habitat.

But when Oscar and Hazel reached the terrarium, they saw that the screened lid of the tank was slightly askew and knew something was wrong.

"Why is the top open?" Hazel asked.

Oscar shook his head, removed the lid, and examined the terrarium. Sammy was not perched on any of the plastic trees or relaxing beneath the heat lamp. So Oscar peered into the hollow ceramic log, which was Sammy's favorite place to sleep. He was not there, either.

"He's gone, Ms. Gonzalez!" Oscar exclaimed.



Ms. Gonzalez sensed the alarm in Oscar's voice. "The door was closed while we were out, so I'm sure he couldn't have gone far," Ms. Gonzalez said calmly as she walked toward the terrarium. "It will be okay. Let's see if we can find him. The important thing is to remain calm."

Ms. Gonzalez assigned different groups of students to search different areas in the classroom. They carefully scoured the classroom, looking under desks, in cubbies, and behind bookcases.

"We can't find him anywhere," Hazel said, sighing, after what seemed like an eternity. She gazed out the stretch of windows that lined one wall of the classroom looking out over the class garden. Just then, she saw that one of the windows was open a crack—just enough for Sammy to slip through.

"Ms. Gonzalez! Look! The door was locked, but this window leading to the garden is open." Hazel exclaimed. "If he is not in here, then he must be outside!"

"He will be scared!" said Oscar, looking worried. "He's never lived in the wild. He could be anywhere!" Oscar asked Ms. Gonzalez, "Can we please go back outside to look for him? Please?"

Ms. Gonzalez glanced at the clock and thought for a moment before agreeing to let the students go outside to continue their search. "Okay," she said. "Let's see if we can find Sammy."

Then Ms. Gonzalez cautioned the students about getting too excited. “Remember, it may be very difficult to find him out there. So remain calm, be safe, and work together in your teams.”

When the class got back outside, Oscar couldn't help but feel somewhat overwhelmed. “Finding him out here may be impossible!” Oscar said, looking around. “There are so many more natural places to hide outside than in the classroom.”

“And remember, Sammy has excellent **camouflage**. Typically, he is orange or light brown when he's in the terrarium because he blends in with the bright orange gravel that lines the bottom of the tank or the light brown ceramic log. But he won't necessarily be orange or brown out there. His scales will change colors, depending where he is,” Hazel said.

Ms. Gonzalez nodded her head. “Excellent point.”

“So, outside, it's likely that his scales will change to whatever color he happens to be standing on. He could be a light sandy color on the courtyard. Or a greenish color to blend in with the grass,” Oscar added. “This **adaptation** will help keep him safe by hiding him from animals that want to eat him. But it will also make finding him more challenging for us!”

“That's right,” Ms. Gonzalez chimed in. “We are not his natural **predators**. We just want to keep him safe. However, there are hawks and other—”

Just then, a classmate yelled from across the courtyard. “I found him!”

Oscar and Hazel looked at each other and ran over to their classmate with excitement. But when they got to the other side of the courtyard, they saw that their classmate was arguing with three students from another class.

“He’s ours! Give him back!” Oscar and Hazel’s classmate said.

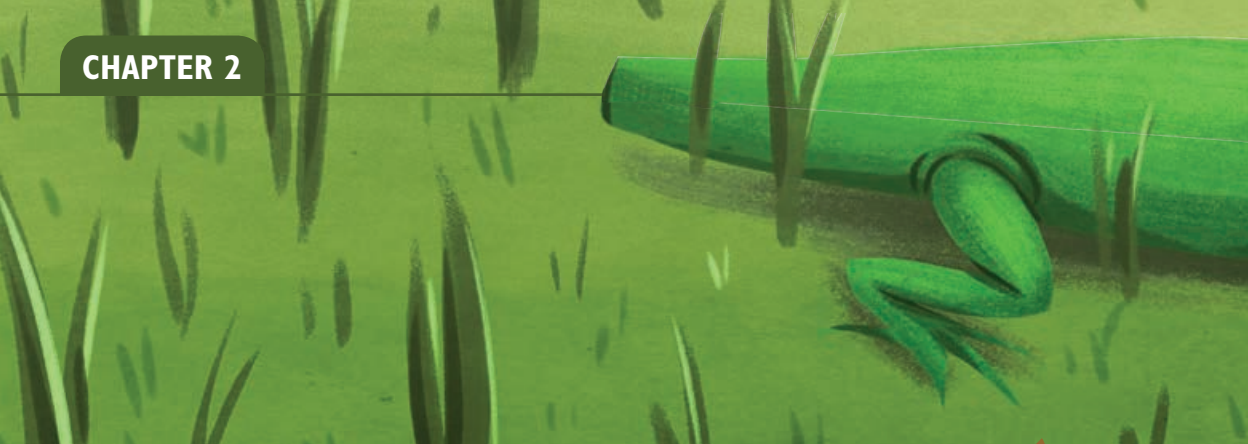
“No, this is our lizard,” one of the students said. The other students’ teacher, Mr. Reese, heard the commotion and came over. “What seems to be the problem?” Mr. Reese asked in his ever-calm voice.



“They have our lizard,” Oscar explained.

“It’s not. See?” the other student said. This time she gently lifted up the lizard for Oscar and Hazel to examine. It looked just like Sammy, except ...

“It’s not him,” Hazel said. “The **dewlap** beneath Sammy’s mouth is pink because he’s a male. This dewlap is not pink. This lizard is a female.”



Over Here!

“If I were Sammy, where would I be?” Oscar asked himself aloud.

Hazel thought for a moment, then suddenly her face lit up with a new idea.

“I know!” Hazel said. “Sammy is an **anole** lizard. That means he’s arboreal. So if you were Sammy, you would be in a tree. Right?”

Oscar nodded. “That’s brilliant!” he said.

Oscar and Hazel led the students as they began running across the courtyard toward a row of trees.

Suddenly, Oscar stopped and threw his arms out to his sides, causing Hazel and a few other students to bump into him before they could stop.

Oscar pointed to a spot a few feet ahead of them and whispered loudly, “Look! Over here!”

Something was wiggling through the grass in the shade of a grove of palm trees.



“It’s Sammy!” Oscar reported.

Ms. Gonzalez quietly told the students to slowly form a circle around the lizard. “We don’t want to startle him,” she said. Then Oscar stepped closer to Sammy and carefully picked him up. Sammy slithered softly in Oscar’s gentle grasp but appeared to be relieved to have been rescued from the wilderness of the elementary school courtyard.

Ms. Gonzalez’s class was also visibly relieved until Oscar held him up, and they all gasped as they noticed something frightfully different about their class lizard. Sammy’s tail was missing!

“Where did it go?” a student asked.

“It’s called autotomy. It’s a **defense mechanism** a lot of lizards like Sammy have,” Hazel explained. “If a predator tries to grab him by the tail, he can just let his tail fall off so he can escape.”

“That’s right, Hazel,” Ms. Gonzalez said. “I assure you, Oscar, there is no need to worry. Let’s take Sammy inside and make sure he is comfortable.”