

Pura Vida

by Judith Bauer Stamper • illustrated by Joe Bucco

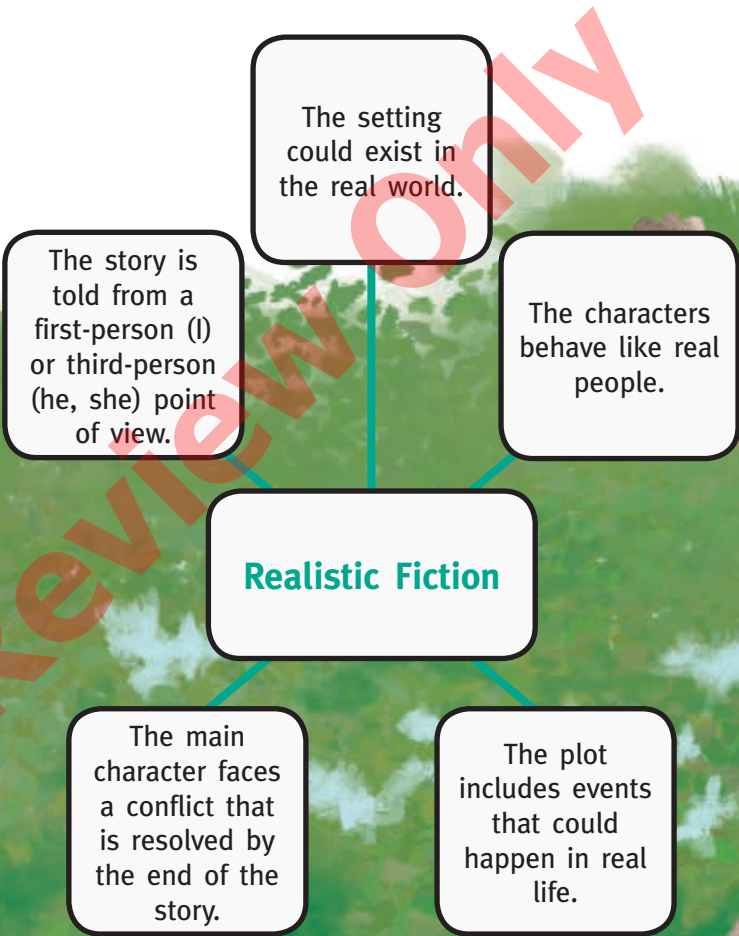


REALISTIC FICTION
LITERATURE

Level	U/50
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Realistic Fiction

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Dangerous and Deadly

James sat in the front seat of his father's jeep, bumping and bouncing along the rough road through the rain forest. He looked up in amazement. A dense canopy of trees hung over him like a huge green tent. From a branch overhead, a shaggy sloth dangled upside down, fast asleep. "Green algae grows all over sloths' fur because they are so sedentary. But it's great camouflage," Mom said. "They descend from one of the largest mammals—the giant ground sloth *Megatherium* was the size of an elephant."

“Hey, look!” James exclaimed. “It’s a scarlet macaw! You never see things like this in California!” A large red bird with yellow and blue markings squawked loudly as it swooped over the jeep and then vanished into the trees. James turned to the back seat and grinned at his younger sister, Tess. He wondered if they would get to see a toucan, an anteater, or even bats. James had read that bats were crucial to the ecosystem of the rain forest, because they spread seeds all over the forest.

Suddenly, the jeep jolted to a complete stop.

“End of the road, guys,” his father announced. “We have to walk the last mile to the house.”

James jumped out of the jeep and hoisted his heavy backpack onto his shoulders. He could hardly believe that, finally, he was standing in the Costa Rican rain forest. Just a day ago, he and Tess had flown from California to San José to meet up with their parents. This morning, they had taken a single-engine turboprop plane into Puerto Jiménez, where they picked up the jeep.

“Is it true we are going to live inside a park?” Tess asked.

“That’s right,” Mom answered. “For the next year, we will be living in Corcovado National Park.”

“We’re going to study a species of squirrel monkey and work on ways to protect and save its habitat,” Dad said.

Whenever James heard his parents say that they were going to save monkeys and their habitats, he pictured them as superheroes, not scientists. He and Tess were kind of like superheroes, too, because they would also live in Costa Rica for the next year and help their parent’s with their work.

“*Vámonos!* Let’s go,” James said, practicing his Spanish.

“*Muy bien!* Very good!” Mom said with a smile.

Mom started off down the narrow path that led to their new home and research station. James walked behind her, followed by Tess and then Dad, who whistled long and low.

James felt as though he was a million miles from civilization. Monkeys howled, grunted, and chattered. Birds screeched from the treetops. Insects buzzed and chirped everywhere. It was a lot different from being in the mall last week with his grandparents, while his parents were here getting things set up.

“It looks so green and wild,” James said. “It’s hard to believe that this area is losing plants and animals.”

“It’s happening at an alarming rate,” Dad said. “Because loggers are cutting down so much of the Costa Rican rain forest, it threatens not just the trees but also the animals who live in them.”

“Like the squirrel monkey,” James said.

“*Es cierto*. That’s right. There are only about twelve hundred left in Costa Rica,” Mom said.

“Oww!” Tess yelled, as she tripped over a huge root snaking along the rain forest floor.

“You have to watch where you step,” Dad reminded them, as he helped Tess up. “There are roots everywhere.”

James hurried to Mom’s side.

“Mom, what’s the house we’re staying in like?” he asked.

“You’ll see,” his mother said. With a mysterious smile, she walked on.

A few minutes later, Mom pointed to a tree a short distance away. “Do you see them, James?” she said in an excited whisper.

James's eyes searched the tree, unsure of what his mother pointed at. Finally, he saw a family of squirrel monkeys sitting together on a limb. Their small bodies were covered with orange-brown fur with long black tails circling the tree branch. Their faces—black-and-white masks. The two bigger ones, the adults, were perched with their tails twined together while they groomed the little ones.

“Hey, wait up!” Tess yelled from behind them. The frightened squirrel monkey family scampered off out of sight.

“I think Tess just became the loudest animal in the rain forest,” Mom said with a sigh before heading down the path again.



James started to walk toward the tree with the monkeys when his mom grabbed his arm.

“James, stop. Viper,” she said in a calm whisper. “Right in front of us.”

Tess and Dad halted behind them.

“Where?” James whispered, his eyes scanning the path.

Then, one of the tree roots seemed to come alive, raising a triangular-shaped head and darting a forked tongue at them.

“It’s a fer-de-lance,” Mom explained in a guarded voice. “A very dangerous and deadly snake.”

James watched as the viper slithered off into the thick undergrowth. James let out a breath. His body felt weak and he clenched his fists to regain his composure. Then he met Tess’s eyes. James knew they were both thinking the same thing.

Would they survive the next year, living in the middle of a rain forest full of deadly and dangerous animals?

Monkeys in the Kitchen

After another half hour of walking, James looked up from the path to see a small clearing. A huge tree dominated the open space. Perched high in its branches was a house that stretched up for three levels, each connected by an outdoor staircase that wound around the tree's trunk. Sunshine glinted off the solar panels that lined the tree house's sloping roofs.

"Awesome!" James exclaimed.



“Welcome home,” their father said proudly, as he and Tess caught up to him. “We’ll live just like the Swiss Family Robinson—only with plumbing, electricity, and Wi-Fi.”

“Can I go first?” James asked. He had forgotten all about the snake and didn’t wait for an answer as he scrambled up the rope ladder that hung down from the house.

He pushed open a trap door and emerged into the family’s kitchen. A wooden railing surrounded the room, but there were no windows—just an open-air view of the rain forest. A monkey with a white face and beard sat on the railing. It stared at James as if asking what he was doing in its house.

“Cool, we have monkeys in the kitchen!” James said, laughing, as his father entered the room.

“It’s a capuchin monkey,” Dad said. “Did you know they only weigh about two pounds fully grown? And they eat almost everything, from fruit to insects and their larvae ...”

“Where’s my bedroom?” James interrupted, eagerly.

“Next floor up,” Dad said, laughing.

The larger second level of the house contained a living room and three bedrooms that spread out from the center of the tree.

James found a door with his nameplate from home on it. His mother must have brought it with them. He went into the room and tossed his backpack onto his new bed, which was built into the wall. He pulled out his phone and snapped a photo to send to his friends back home.

