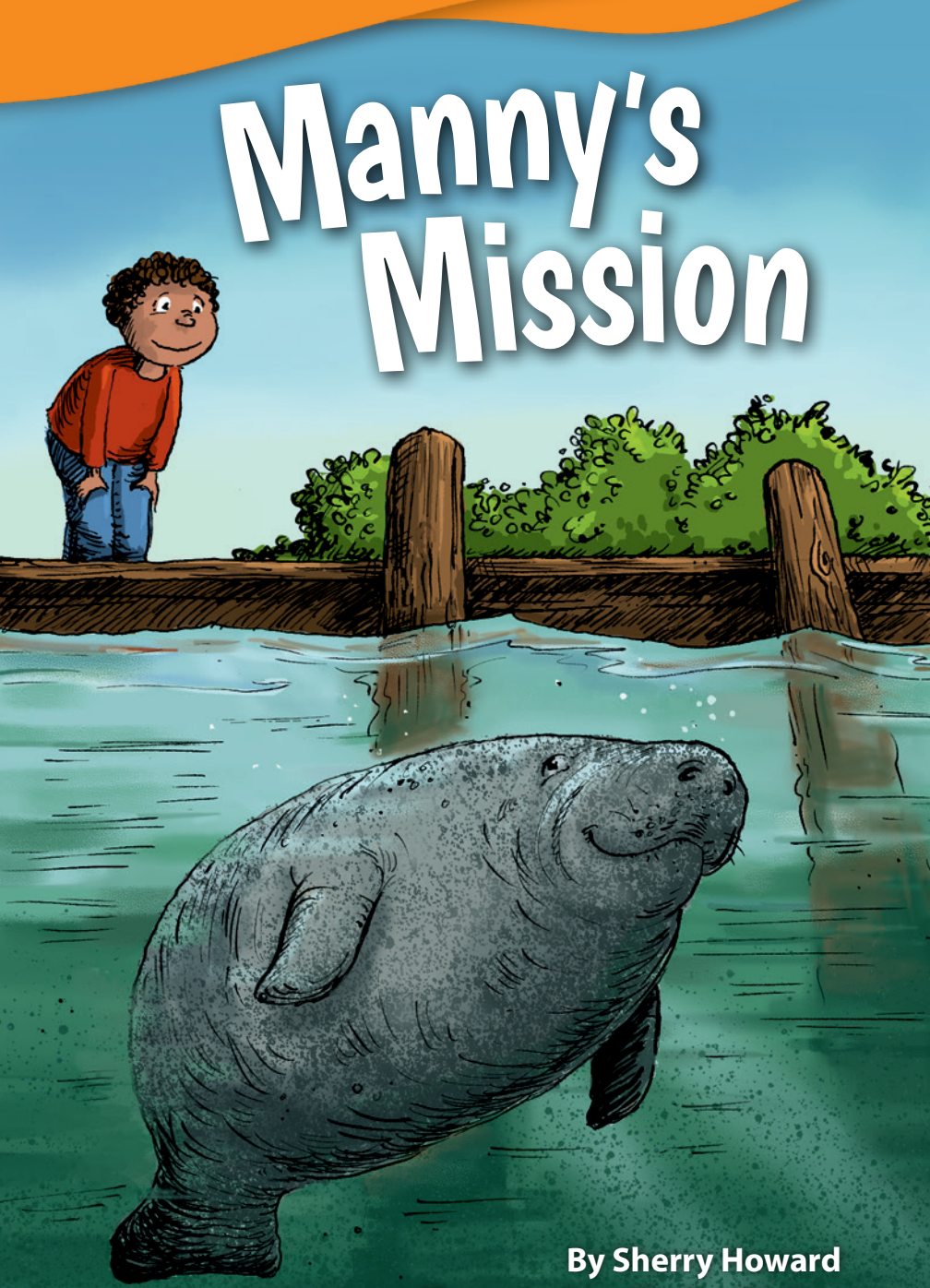
Manny's Mission



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TCM Teacher Created Materials

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CHAPTER ONE

Where's Gator?

The water barely rippled, as the manatees had been quiet today at Blue Spring State Park. Gran and I sat in comfortable silence after chatting all the way there. For as long as I could remember, we came here when I visited in the summer. Whenever I was there, I forgot all my problems and imagined

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myself swimming with the manatees.

"Manny, do you see any movement out there?" Gran asked. "Maybe Gator will poke his head up right in front of us today." She looked at me hopefully, knowing I was concerned.

"We haven't seen him for three days! If only we knew he was safe somewhere and not injured by a boat again."

I stared where a wave still wiggled on the surface of the water, but no snout broke the surface. We saw Gator there a lot of the time, but maybe he was playing with his friends today. We headed down the boardwalk, our eyes peeled for the familiar scars on Gator's back.

Scanning the surface of the clear spring water, I suddenly spotted the markings that could only belong to Gator. His dark skin showed three white stripes, one of the most distinct scars around there. He was wrestling with his friends. They rolled and twirled in the water. My heartbeat

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steadied as I took a relieved breath.

Whenever I didn't see him, I worried, and three days was a longer-than-usual wait. Gator was my favorite manatee, maybe even my favorite animal. Manatees were protected at the park, but some of those forgotten mermaids still got hurt or disappeared.

If only I could do something to help the manatees, especially Gator, I thought. *If people don't take action, soon they will become extinct. But how can a kid my age help?*

"Gran, will they let me volunteer here like you do?" I asked.

"No, you have to be a little older for most of the jobs. But you could help me." Gran taught classes and gave lectures now that she was too wobbly to work on the grounds. She loved the manatees as much as I did.

"Thanks. But I want to do something entirely on my own." I just needed to figure out what.

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CHAPTER TWO



Save Gator

I searched online for information about manatees and browsed ways to support their survival. I learned so much. Manatees used to flourish in the waters around Florida. But it was getting harder and harder for them to survive. Humans were to blame for much of the shrinking manatee

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population. Because manatees are slow-moving and swim close to the surface, they could be struck by boats. That kind of collision can leave telltale scars and sometimes even lead to death. If there weren't places like Blue Spring State Park, they might already be gone.

As I clicked on different websites, I found one site that listed manatees for people to sponsor. To my surprise, I found Gator there! For $100, I could "adopt" him! Some of the money would help rescue and heal injured manatees like Gator. What a wonderful way to show I cared. I ran upstairs to my bedroom to see how much money I had saved.

Grabbing my wallet, I counted the money I had earned this summer helping Gran's friends with jobs. I would have had more, but I spent it almost as fast as I made it. Gran said money burns a hole in my pocket. I had to admit that I did appreciate an ice cream on a hot summer day. I counted

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Book Club Questions

1. In the first chapter, why does Manny refer to the manatees as "forgotten mermaids"?
2. What does Manny learn about manatees during his research?
3. If you had been the main character, what would you have done to help the manatees?
4. What challenges does Manny face along the way to help Gator?
5. Why do you think a manatee is named "Gator"?
6. What special cause would you like to support? Explain why.

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