

Exploring Your World

The Boat Ride





Charlotte and Terrence have been waiting for this day since they found out they would be spending the summer at their grandparents' house in South Florida. Their grandpa works at the information center at Everglades National Park. He promised to teach them how to drive the airboats when they visited this summer.

“Airboats are the easiest way to get around the Everglades,” Grandpa told them before they arrived. “The wind from a large fan powers the boat and makes it glide across the marsh.”



Today's finally the big day. Grandpa is going to teach the children how to drive the airboat.

“Terrence, wake up,” Charlotte squeals as she turns on his light. “The sooner we eat breakfast, the sooner we can start our adventure.”

Terrence smiles under his blanket. He has been awake for hours, too excited to sleep. He throws off his blanket and laughs. “I am dressed and ready! You are the slow one this morning.”

At breakfast, Grandpa and Charlotte talk about their plans for the day, but Terrence is lost in thought.

“All I care about is learning to drive,” states Terrence as he pictures himself driving through the swamp in the airboat.

“Me too,” Charlotte agrees.

“I promise that I will teach you how to drive the airboat,” Grandpa responds patiently, “but we have something else to do first.”

“I think it is important that you learn a bit about the Everglades,” Grandpa starts to say.

“We already know,” Charlotte interrupts. “The Everglades is a wetland caused by a slow-moving river. We learned about it in second grade, Grandpa.”

“But today you’re going to learn a little more from a local friend of mine,” Grandpa responds. “It won’t hurt to review your information.”

Charlotte and Terrence exchange disappointed looks. “Okay, Grandpa,” Terrence says. “Let’s hurry up and go, so we can get to the good stuff.”

Grandpa winks at the children. “I think you’re going to enjoy this more than you realize,” he says. “Come on, let’s get going.”



After they board the airboat, Grandpa gives each of the children a set of earplugs and starts up the engine. There's a loud roar as the fan begins to twirl.

"I see why we need earplugs," Charlotte shouts over the fan.

Charlotte and Terrence can't believe how beautiful the Everglades is. They keep their eyes wide open to look for any wildlife.



As they cruise along, Terrence screams, “Look!” Grandpa slows the boat and turns off the fan. Right next to the boat is a giant crocodile lying in the mud.

“Be very quiet,” Grandpa whispers. “We don’t want to frighten it.”

The three watch the crocodile for several moments before Grandpa starts to prepare the boat to leave.



“Grandpa, do both crocodiles and alligators live in the Everglades?” Charlotte asks.

“I thought you knew everything there is to know.”

“Well, there might be some things that I could learn today,” Charlotte laughs.

“Luckily, we’re going to visit a good friend of mine. He knows a lot about the Everglades because his people settled here hundreds of years ago. Billy is a member of the Seminole tribe, some of the first people to settle here.”



Charlotte and Terrence can't believe their eyes when they turn the corner. They see a house that looks like it is sitting in the middle of the water! There are tall grasses all around it and an older man sitting on the front porch. He waves from his rocking chair.

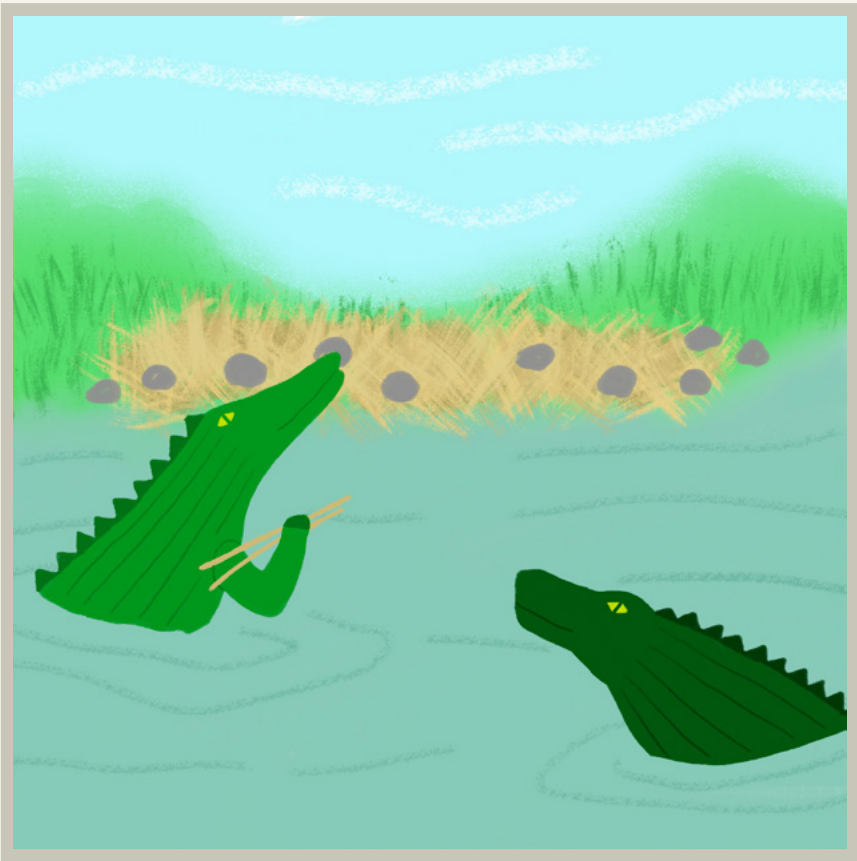
"Hey Billy," Grandpa calls out as the roar of the airboat slowly quiets. "These are my grandchildren, Charlotte and Terrence."

The children wave shyly, as they climb out of the boat and walk toward the house.

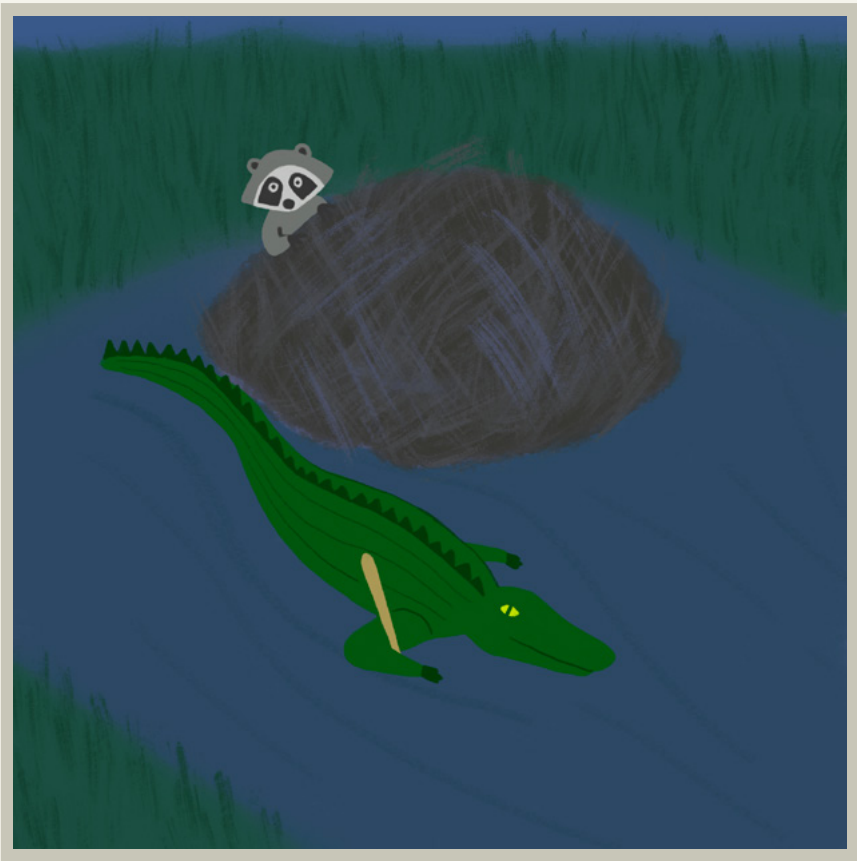


“Billy, I was hoping you might tell them a little bit about the swamp,” Grandpa continues.

“I’d love to,” Billy responds. “Why don’t you have a seat right there on the steps? The story starts thousands of years ago when animals ruled the land,” Billy begins.



Two strong reptiles, Alligator and Crocodile, fought over who was in control of the area. The two reptiles constantly disagreed about everything. Crocodile was clever and decided to build a dam to stop the river from flowing, so all the animals would have to ask him for water. He would be the most powerful reptile in all the land.



One night, Alligator decided to sneak out to destroy the dam with a big stick he found in the woods. Raccoon, a predator to baby alligators, had been watching the whole time. Raccoon was waiting for Alligator to leave the nest, so he could eat the babies.



“Oh no,” whispers Charlotte. “Does Raccoon get the babies?”

“Does Alligator break the dam?” Terrence asks.

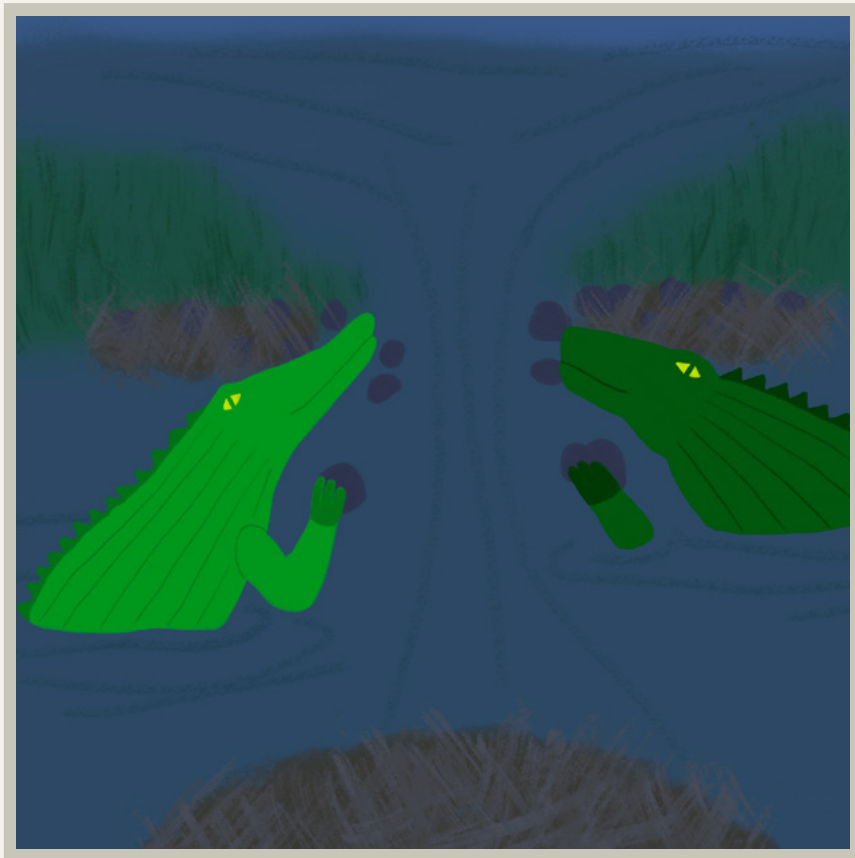
“This is where the story gets good,” Billy replies.



Just as Alligator was sneaking up to Crocodile's dam, his friend Osprey flew overhead.

"Alligator!" Osprey yelled. "Raccoon is planning to attack your nest and eat your babies!"

The loud yelling woke Crocodile from his sleep. "Crocodile, please help me," Alligator begged.



Crocodile thought quickly. "Let's take a few rocks from my dam," he said. "That will cause just enough of a leak to flood the area. Hopefully, the water will scare Raccoon away."

The two reptiles got to work and watched as the water slowly flowed around the rocks. Alligator rushed back to the nest just in time to see Raccoon as he ran away from the flowing water.

"Crocodile, you're a good leader and deserve to rule this land," Alligator said.

"No," Crocodile replied. "A good leader wouldn't keep all the water for himself. We'll lead this land together."



“And that is how the Everglades came to be,” Billy says with a smile. “The slow-moving river created a wetland that is now home to over 700 kinds of plants and animals.”

“So what happened to Alligator and Crocodile?” Charlotte asks.

“They ruled the land until humans began to take over,” Billy responds. “To this day, the Everglades is the only place where the American Crocodile and the American Alligator live together.”

“Do alligators and crocodiles get along now?” asks Terrence.



“I think that might be a story for another day,” Grandpa responds. “We need to get back to our airboat ride if you want to learn how to drive,” he says.


Charlotte and Terrence look at one another in agreement.

“Maybe we should learn a little more about the Everglades first,” Charlotte says.


With a smile, Billy begins his next story.

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