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Genre

Comprehension Skills and Strategy

Fiction

- Character and Setting
- Cause and Effect
- Monitor and Fix Up

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The Amazing, Incredible Idea Kit



by Vana Douglas
illustrated by Burgundy Beam

Vocabulary

duke

dungeon

furiously

genius

majesty

noble

peasant

porridge

Word count: 1,931

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Note: The total word count includes words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in chapter titles, captions, labels, diagrams, charts, graphs, sidebars, and extra features are not included.

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The annual fourth-grade science fair at Washington Elementary School was only one week away. Every day after school, Paul and his twin sister Beatrice brainstormed for an idea. It seemed there was nothing else they could talk about. "I don't have any brilliant ideas yet, do you?" Paul asked Beatrice. "At least not any ideas that might win us first prize!"

"Not yet," Beatrice said, "but I'm sure—at least, I *hope*—we can think of something!"



Illustrations Burgundy Beam

Photographs

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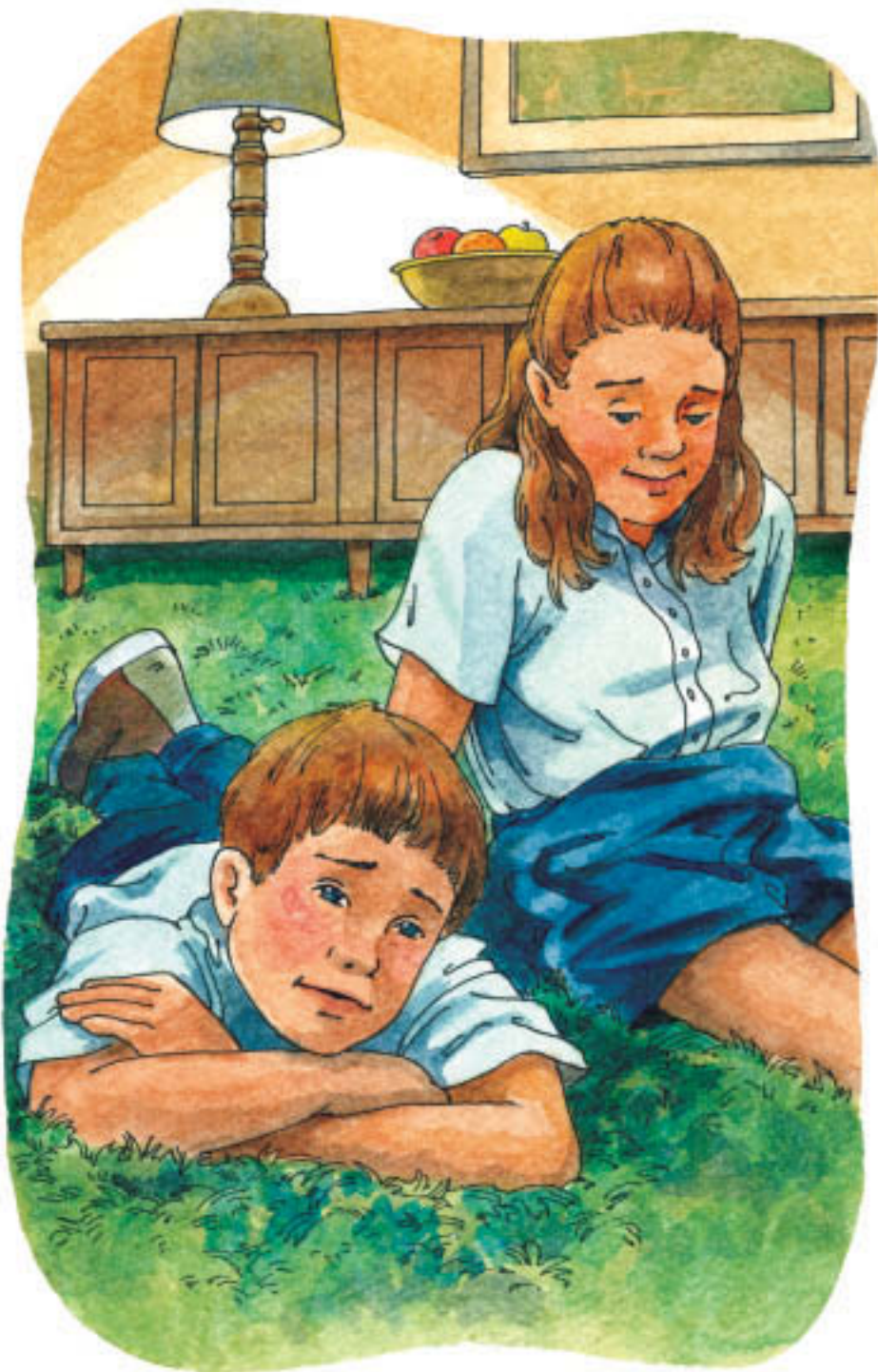
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Every day after school, the twins went up to their attic workshop. They each had a desk, but they liked stretching out on the floor to do their homework. That afternoon, their mom said, "Try to finish up soon because your grandmother is coming over."

Paul and Beatrice looked forward to their grandmother's visits because Granny Mae always had fascinating stories to tell. Paul and Beatrice especially liked hearing about Granny Mae's life in England, where she was born and raised. She was the most interesting person they had ever met!

Paul and Beatrice ran downstairs. They had finished their homework, but they still didn't have any ideas for the science fair. "Maybe Granny can help," Beatrice said. Granny was always willing to help them solve problems. Many times in the past she had told them a story that would help make things clear. They both thought that Granny Mae was a very wise lady.



When the doorbell rang, Paul and Beatrice ran to the door to greet Granny Mae. Granny smiled when she saw how excited they were to see her.

"Granny Mae!" the twins cried. "We're so glad you're here. We really need your help."

"Well, kids, you know I'm here to help. But first, let's have a nice dinner together. And a nice dessert! I brought some of my special-recipe oatmeal cookies!"

Granny Mae was her usual cheerful self at dinner. Paul and Beatrice's mom and dad were happy to see her. Granny Mae told such funny stories about her daily life. Tonight, she told about how her cat had fallen in love with one of her sweaters and curled up to sleep in it! Granny Mae could make even the most ordinary events seem extraordinary.

"What are you reading, Granny Mae?" asked Paul, noticing the thick book with a bright gold cover that Granny Mae had brought.

"A lovely book about the ancient Egyptians. What a strange and wonderful place that must have been! Have you studied Egypt in school?"

Beatrice said, "We learned all about the kings, called pharaohs, and the pyramids. We even learned how to make our own hieroglyphics. That's language in pictures! Now we're studying ancient Greece and Rome. Sometimes I wish I could travel back in time."

"Me, too," said Granny. "Wouldn't it be fantastic to be able to learn about other times and other places through first-hand experiences!"



"Can you tell us more of your first-hand experiences from when you were growing up in England, Granny Mae?" asked Paul.

"All right, Paul. What would you like to hear about today?"

"Can you tell us more about the time you worked for the Gosling family? What was your job called again?"

Granny Mae closed her eyes and thought back to her days in England. "I was a governess. My job was to take care of and teach the two young Gosling children."

"What were their names?" asked Beatrice.

"James and Anastasia," Granny Mae answered. "They were smart children. Actually, they remind me rather a lot of you and your brother. They loved to read and to learn foreign languages. They also loved to study science, just like the two of you."

"The Goslings were so kind! I felt like I was part of their family!" Granny Mae smiled. "I met your grandfather at their house, you know. I told you that story, didn't I?"

"Tell us again! We love to hear stories about you and Grandpa Nigel," said Beatrice. "Hearing stories about him makes us feel like we actually knew him!"

"I do love to tell the story," said Granny Mae. "I was just twenty-two when I started working with the Goslings. I had just graduated from Oxford University."

"Mr. Gosling was my tutor at Oxford, where I went to school," said Granny Mae.

"Don't you mean that Mr. Gosling was your teacher?" asked Paul.

"Why, yes, Paul. It's just that in England, professors are called tutors, and classes are called tutorials. School in England is a little different from here." said Granny Mae.

"Oh, I understand," said Paul.

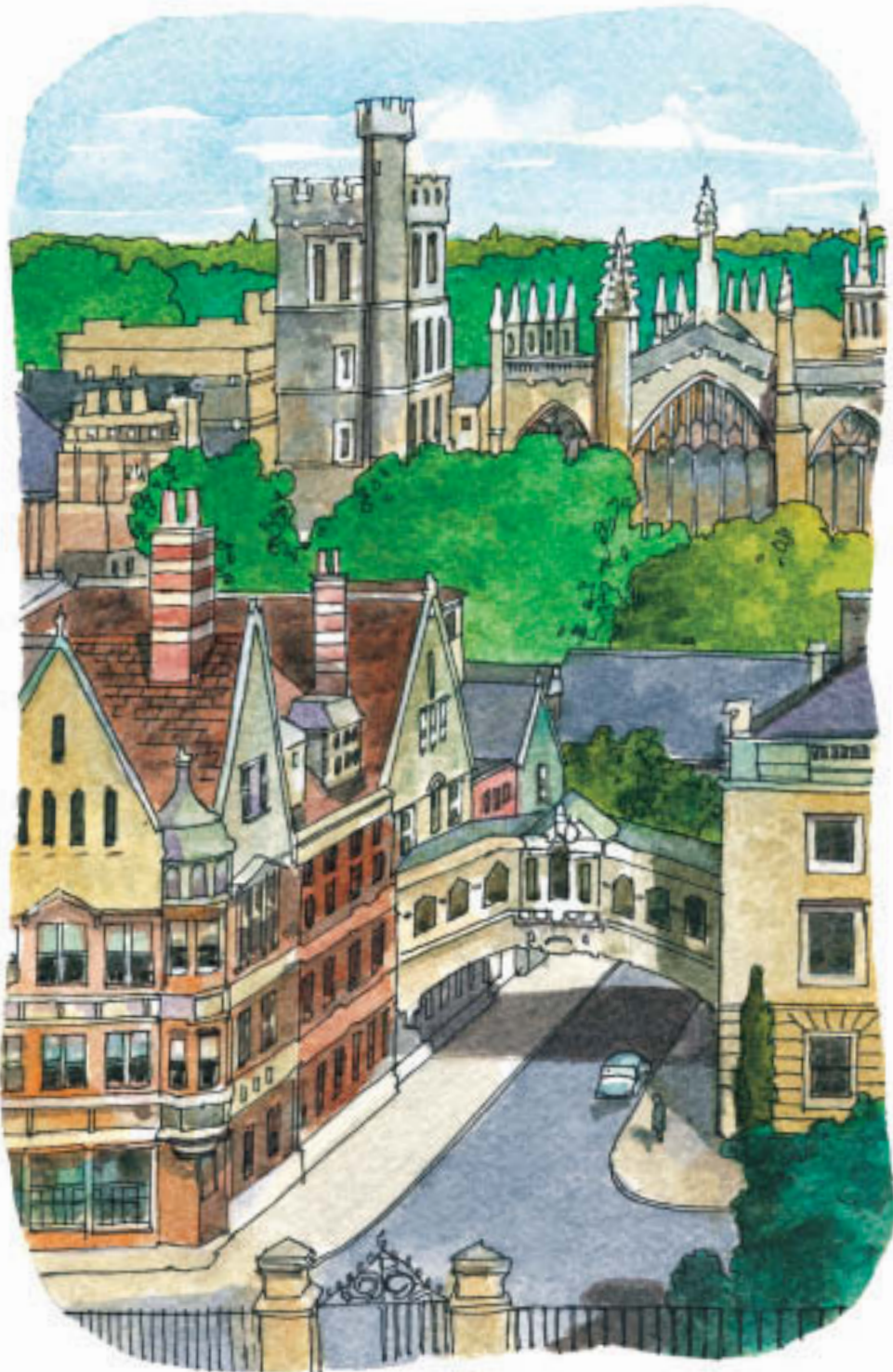
"Any time you don't understand something, always ask," said Granny Mae. "Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes. When the time came for me to graduate, Mr. Gosling asked if I had any plans for the future. I told him I wanted to look for a job as a teacher. I wanted to keep studying for the rest of my life. 'Well,' said Mr. Gosling, 'You're just the kind of person I would love to have teaching my own children. Would you like to come to work as a governess here?' he asked me."

"What did you mean, you wanted to keep studying?" interrupted Beatrice. "Wouldn't a teacher have learned everything?"

Granny Mae gave Beatrice a mock frown. "No one learns everything!" she answered sternly.



"Well, children, I was so thrilled Mr. Gosling had asked," continued Granny Mae. "I had met the children once before at a garden party, and I found both James and Anastasia to be very sweet and kind."



"After a few days of thinking it over, I decided that I would become a governess for the Goslings. It ended up being one of the most important choices I ever made in my entire life!" Granny Mae said.

"Why was it so important, Granny Mae?" Paul asked.

"Well, Paul, working as a governess for the Gosling family brought many joys into my life. While I was working there, I realized how much I loved learning and how much I loved to share my learning with others. I knew from then on that I wanted to be a teacher. Spending time with the children made me realize I wanted something else as well."

"What was that something else, Granny Mae?" asked Beatrice, in a hushed voice.

"What I wanted, and what I knew I would achieve," answered Granny Mae, "was this . . .," and she waved her hand at all of them sitting there—"a family of my own."

"You really realized all of those things just from that one experience as a governess?" asked Beatrice.

"I really did," Granny Mae replied with a smile. "Later that year, I met your grandfather. In the springtime, Mr. Gosling had a party for some of his students. It was at that party that I was introduced to a young man named Nigel. That was your grandfather! Nigel was a science student and an inventor. He liked to read as much as I did. We realized that we loved many of the same things!"

"So Grandpa Nigel was really an inventor?" asked Paul excitedly. "I wish we could have known him!"

"Oh, your grandfather was much more than just an inventor," exclaimed Granny Mae. "Your grandfather Nigel was a genius!"

Paul and Beatrice looked at each other delightedly. Granny Mae's stories about their grandfather always helped the children feel like they knew him.



“And I’ll tell you something else, children,” said Granny Mae. “Your grandfather loved science very much. Many of his inventions happened when he was just having fun exploring a new idea. I think you both take after him.”

“Granny Mae, is it true that Grandpa Nigel also wrote books for children?” asked Paul.

“It is true! Your grandfather liked to write stories about children who traveled through time! When he learned that your mother was going to give birth to twins, he wrote a story for you. It was about a twin brother and sister—just like you—who travel back to medieval England. Writing that story was your grandfather’s way of letting you both know how much he already cared for you.” A tear came to Granny Mae’s eye.

“Don’t tell us if it makes you sad,” Beatrice almost whispered.”

Granny Mae wiped the tear from her eye. “I miss him very much,” she said simply. Then she smiled at the children. “I wonder why I never told you this story before,” she said. “Maybe I was just waiting until you were both old enough to understand it.”



“We’re old enough now,” said Paul.

“Yes, tell us,” Beatrice added.

“The story your grandfather wrote about the twins who travel back in time is just the sort of story you would both enjoy,” said Granny Mae. “Especially Beatrice, I think.”

Beatrice was very excited to hear that the story took place in medieval times. Beatrice loved to hear any story that involved a duke or a duchess, kings or queens, a noble or a peasant. She loved the majesty of those tales.

Beatrice dreamed of visiting old castles. She loved to imagine what might have happened in them many years ago. She loved reading about a hero imprisoned in a dungeon or a noble duke and his duchess. She wondered what her life would have been like if she had been born during that time. Instead of breakfast cereal, would she and her brother eat porridge every morning? Would they still go to school? Or would they ride through the countryside helping knights slay beasts and rescuing fair maidens from dark, musty rooms in tall towers?

Just then, the children's mother came into the living room. "It's way past your bedtime!"

"Yes, children," said Granny Mae. "Sleep is extremely important, especially for young scholars like yourselves. I'll tell you more about your grandfather's story on my next visit. Better yet, I'll bring it with me, and we can read it together!"

They said goodnight and thanked Granny again for all of the stories she had told them. As Paul and Beatrice walked up to bed, they agreed that they would work extra hard the next day to come up with an idea for the science fair. Their grandfather had been a great inventor. They could be inventors too!



The next day after school, Paul and Beatrice were up in the attic, thinking furiously about an invention for the science fair.

Suddenly, Beatrice said, "Do you remember what Granny Mae told us? She said that many of Grandpa Nigel's inventions were created when he was just having fun exploring a new idea!"

“Well, what if we invented something called an idea kit? You could use it to keep all of the ideas that you didn’t know what to do with! Later, you could dip into the idea kit and use those ideas to experiment, solve problems, and invent new things.”

“That’s a great idea!” said Paul. “Let’s get started!”

Paul and Beatrice worked on their idea kit every day after school. They put together a brightly colored exhibit that explained all of the parts. There were strips of paper to write down ideas. There was a red box to hold the ideas. There was even space to hold interesting objects that might lead to ideas later on.



On the day of the science fair, the principal, Mr. O’Hara, judged everyone’s exhibits. Later, at the awards ceremony, Paul and Beatrice looked into the audience and saw Granny Mae smiling at them.

“And the winners of this year’s science fair,” announced Mr. O’Hara, “are Paul and Beatrice!”

“We’re inventors!” Paul said happily. “Just like our grandfather was!”



The University of Oxford

A university is a place where students go to study a subject. There are colleges and universities all over the world, and many of these places have existed for hundreds of years.

The University of Oxford in the city of Oxford, England, is one of the oldest universities in the world. People have been studying at Oxford for nearly nine centuries! Some of the world's most famous people have studied at the University of Oxford, including writers, scientists, and politicians.



Reader Response

1. You can learn about a character in a story from his or her thoughts, words, and actions and from what other characters think or say about him or her. Use a chart like the one below to take notes on Granny Mae's character.

Character: Granny Mae
Thoughts
Words
Actions
Other characters' reactions

2. Sometimes following the action of a story can be hard. Did you have any questions about what was happening in the story while you were reading? What did you do to find answers to your questions?
3. Use a dictionary to find as many meanings for the word *fair* as you can. Try to write one sentence in which you use two or three of those meanings.
4. Imagine that you are taking part in a science fair at your school. Can you think of any ideas for a science project or invention that you would like to create? List your ideas and think about the steps you would take to make your idea into a reality.