

# Comprehension

## Genre

**Realistic Fiction** uses settings, characters, and events that could actually exist.



## Story Structure

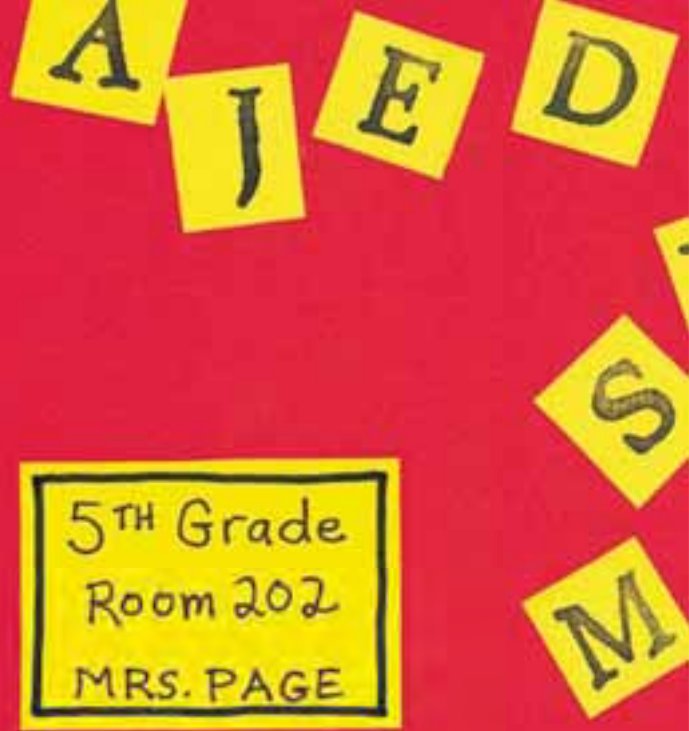
### Character and Plot

As you read, use your Character and Plot Chart.

| Character | Plot |
|-----------|------|
|           |      |

## Read to Find Out

How does the kind of person Sage is affect the plot?



# Miss Alaineus

**A VOCABULARY DISASTER**

written and illustrated by  
Debra Frasier





**N**one of this would have happened if it wasn't for Forest. Forest is not a *thicket of trees*. Forest is a boy. A sick boy. A boy sneezing and coughing all over my desk and pencils.

I caught Forest's cold and had to stay home from school on Tuesday. Tuesday is Vocabulary Day at Webster School. Follow my advice: Never get sick on Vocabulary Day.

On Tuesday afternoon I called my best friend, Starr, who is not a **luminous** celestial object seen as a point of light in the sky, but a very smart girl who listens perfectly on Vocabulary Day. She was late for baseball practice, so she spelled the first fourteen vocabulary words as fast as she could.

I had to scribble them quickly because her mom was calling her to the car. "This last one's 'Miss Alaineus'!" Starr yelled. "I gotta go. I hope you feel better tomorrow, Sage." And she hung up the phone with a crash.



I didn't feel much better on Wednesday, so my mom called Mrs. Page, who is not a *single side of a printed sheet of paper usually found bound in a book*. She's my teacher, and actually Mrs. Page is a good name for her because she reads to us every day. My mom told her yes, I had my math problems and vocabulary words, and yes, I would get better soon.



### Plot

How do you think Starr's rush to give Sage the vocabulary words will affect what happens next?

### VOCABULARY WORDS

1. dinosaur
2. snake
3. museum
4. reptile
5. constrictor
6. herpetologist
7. fossil
8. carnivore
9. herbivore
10. nest
11. species
12. theory
13. hypothesis
14. category
15. Miss Alaineus

Every week Mrs. Page gives us a list of words with a theme, like Story Writing or Musical Performance or Electricity. We're supposed to look up each word in the dictionary, but sometimes I already know the words, so I try to make the definitions sound like I looked them up.



tree:

a large leafy plant with a tall wooden trunk that pushes roots into the ground and branches into the sky

automobile:



a vehicle, used to transport humans, usually consisting of four wheels, a steering wheel, and a radio

I thought I was pretty good at definitions until this week.

My mom says, "Pride goeth before a fall."

**Pride:** *an unduly high opinion of oneself.*

**Goeth:** *Old English for "to go."*

**Fall:** *what happened on Monday, Vocabulary Test Day.*



By Thursday afternoon my head felt like it was stuffed with cotton and my throat felt swollen shut. I finished defining my vocabulary words while propped up in bed with a box of tissues on one side and a **gigantic** red dictionary on the other. It's hard to look up words in a huge book while you're in bed blowing your nose, so I made my own dictionary language for as many of them as I could.

13. hypothesis: what you guess will happen in your science experiment
14. category: a bunch of things that are alike
15. Miss Alaineus:

The last word seemed a little odd to me because I couldn't figure out what she had to do with snakes or **categories** or theories. Mrs. Page rarely gives us people's names on our vocabulary lists, but we have had a few that turned into words, like Louis Pasteur for **pasteurization** and George Washington for **Washington, D.C.**, so I decided she must have been included for a reason.

You should know that for years I had wondered who Miss Alaineus was. When I was little I figured out that she had something to do with the kitchen, because the Miss Alaineus drawer held the spoons too big to fit anywhere else, the sharp corn holders shaped like tiny cobs, and the spaghetti spork, that weird cross between a spoon and a fork that perfectly lifts slippery spaghetti out of the bowl. I thought maybe she was an **ancestor: an ancient relative long dead**, who left us all these odd things in the drawer.

Then just last year my mom and I were at the grocery store and it all fell into place. We were in one of those Very Big Hurries when she said, "You go get some of that long Italian bread and two sticks of butter. I'll get Miss Alaineus' things and meet you here at the cash register."



I found the bread and butter, and my mom came back with spaghetti sauce, a can of Parmesan cheese, a can of corn, and a big green box of spaghetti with a beautiful woman on the front. She was drawn so that her hair tumbled perfectly across the box and ended in a little plastic window, making the spaghetti look just like the ends of the **strands** of her hair.

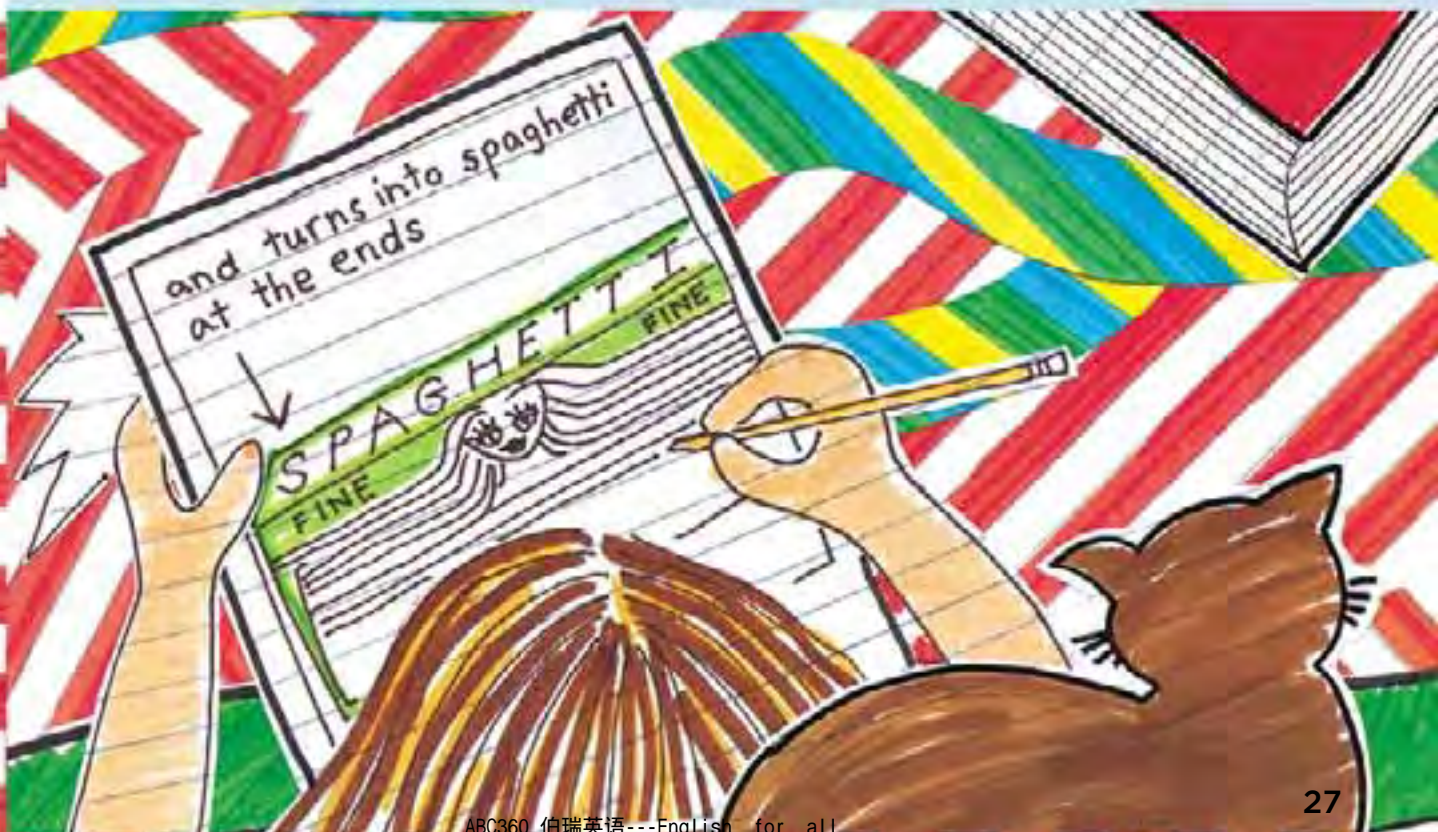
There she was—Miss Alaineus.

So, propped up on pillows in my bed, with a tissue in one hand and a pencil in the other, I wrote:

15. Miss Alaineus: the woman  
on green spaghetti boxes  
whose hair is the color  
of uncooked pasta.

and turns into spaghetti  
at the ends

And then I fell asleep.





a Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh

Copy these problems:

$$15 \overline{) 20,365}$$

$$63 \overline{) 405,329}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 237 \\ \times 45 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 3,639 \\ \times 99 \\ \hline \end{array}$$



I finally got better over the weekend and felt great on Monday. I turned in my homework to Mrs. Page and sat down at my desk, glad to be back at school with my friends. I was even glad to see Forest at our morning circle meeting.

“First, I want to remind you of the Tenth Annual Vocabulary Parade on Friday,” said Mrs. Page. “I hope you are all working on your word costumes. Second, please remember to bring your bus money and permission slips for our science museum field trip tomorrow. And third, instead of our usual Monday test, we are going to have a Vocabulary Bee today.”

h Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo

TODAY

Homework

Circle Time: 8:40  
Vocabulary Bee: 8:55  
Math: 9:30  
Reading: 10:05  
Recess: 11:00  
Lunch: 11:45  
Dismissal: 12:15



“Everyone line up here by the chalkboard, and I’ll choose a word from our list. After I pronounce the word, please spell and define it. If you are correct, go to the end of the line. If you miss the word, please sit down at your desk and look it up in the dictionary. Write the word five times and define it once.”

Starr was first with **museum**: “**M-U-S-E-U-M**: a building for exhibiting objects about art or history or science,” she said, and went to the back of the line.

Cliff, not a *high, steep face of rock*, but one very tall boy, answered to the word **dinosaur**: “**D-I-N-O-S-A-U-R**: a prehistoric, extinct reptile, often huge,” and he went to the back of the line.

I was tenth, and when Mrs. Page called out my word, I spelled: “Capital M-I-S-S, capital A-L-A-I-N-E-U-S,” and added, *“the woman on green spaghetti boxes whose hair is the color of uncooked pasta and turns into spaghetti at the ends.”*

There was a moment of silence in the room. I smiled at Mrs. Page. She waited to see if I would add anything else, and when I didn’t, she grinned. Not smiled—**grinned**: *to draw back the lips and bare the teeth, as in a very wide smile*—and the entire class burst into one huge giggling, laughing, falling-down mass of kids. Forest was doubled over. Starr, my best friend, was laughing so hard tears came to her eyes. By now, even Mrs. Page was laughing.

Pride goeth before a fall. I was **Sage**: *one who shows wisdom, experience, judgment*. Why were they laughing? “Wise-girl-with-words” my dad always called me. What had I said? I was beginning to turn red. **Red**: *the color of embarrassment*.



Finally the room quieted. Mrs. Page opened her dictionary and wrote on the chalkboard:

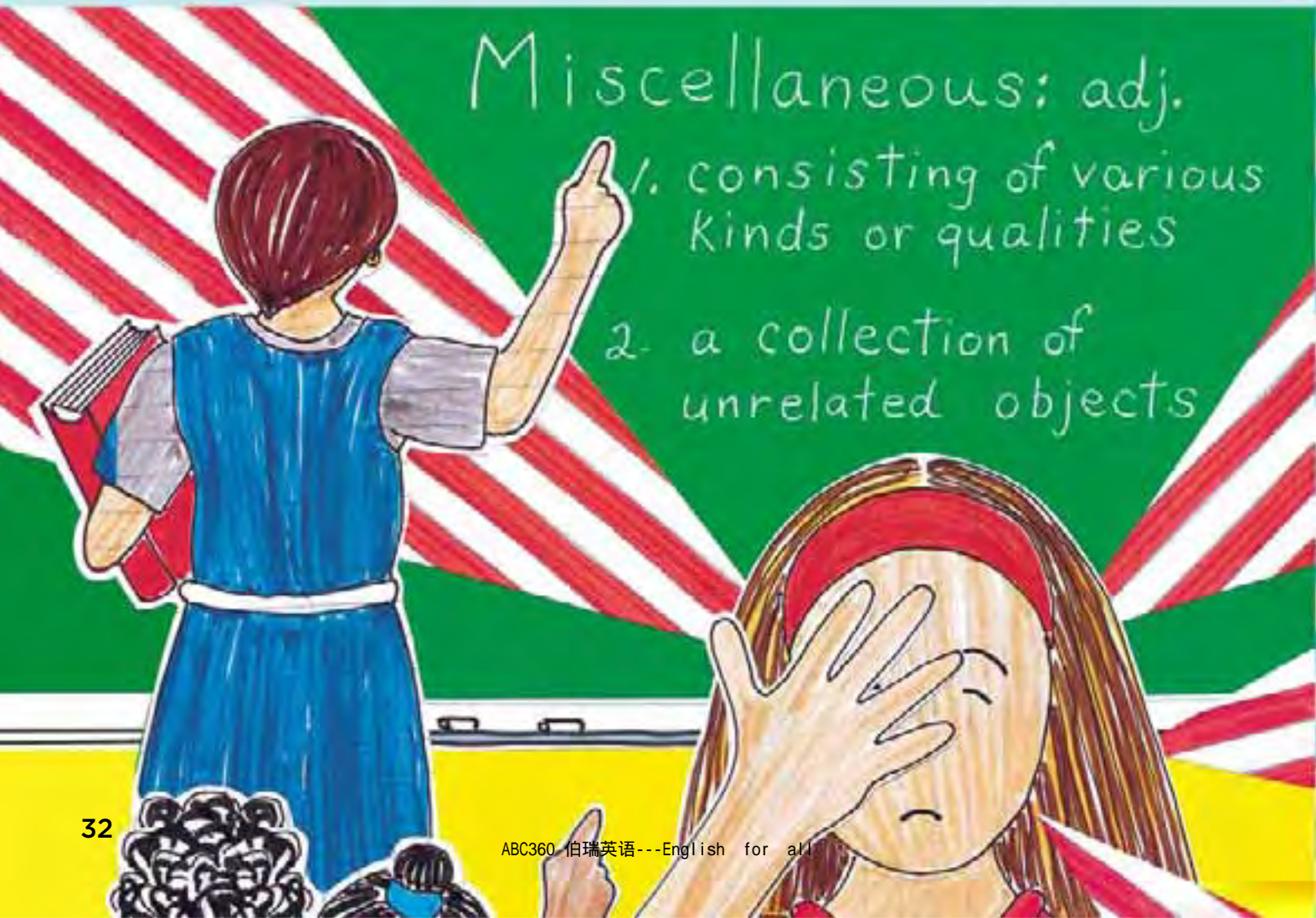
**Miscellaneous:** *adj. 1. consisting of various kinds or qualities 2. a collection of unrelated objects*

My jaw dropped as I looked at the spelling. My eyes bulged as I read the definition. I didn't bother to tell anyone about my mom and the spaghetti spork and the grocery store. **Humbled:** *aware of my shortcomings, modest, meek,* I dragged back to my seat and wrote **miscellaneous** five times and defined it once. And that's when I remembered I had even drawn a picture of the spaghetti box for extra **credit**. I was **devastated:** *wasted, ravaged.* **Ruined:** *destroyed.* **Finished:** *brought to an end.*



#### Character

What does Sage's reaction to her mistake tell you about her character?





They called me Miss Alaineus for the rest of the day. Sometimes a person couldn't even get the words out before bending over with laughter. The day took a week to end. When I got off the bus I **slumped** home—devastated, ruined, finished.

I told my mom the whole story, from the kitchen drawer to the grocery store to the Vocabulary Bee. Even my own mother laughed a little at the part about the drawing for extra credit, but at least she stopped fast and said, “You know what I always say . . . There's gold in every mistake.”

**Gold?** *A bright yellow precious metal of great value?*

**Mistake?** *Something done, said, or thought in the wrong way?*

“Impossible,” I told her. **Impossible: not **capable** of happening.**

I couldn't believe I *ever* had to go back to school. But the next day we went to the science museum, and everyone forgot all about Miss Alaineus at the snake exhibit and the dinosaur bone lab. Then the guide said, "The field of bone archaeology has been influenced by a wide and unusual array of miscellaneous discoveries around the world." The class burst out laughing, and the guide was pleased with herself for entertaining us so easily. And I **knew**: *to apprehend with certainty*, that my mistake was still alive and well, and nothing like gold.

After school I lay on my bed and stared at the wall. How could I have been so stupid?





My mom came in and said it was time to work on my costume for the Vocabulary Parade. We had finished the cape for **Capable**, but I still needed to make the lettering down the back.

“Mom,” I said, “I could only be a mistake this year. **Miss Stake.**”

Suddenly I sat up.

I looked at my mom. She looked at me.

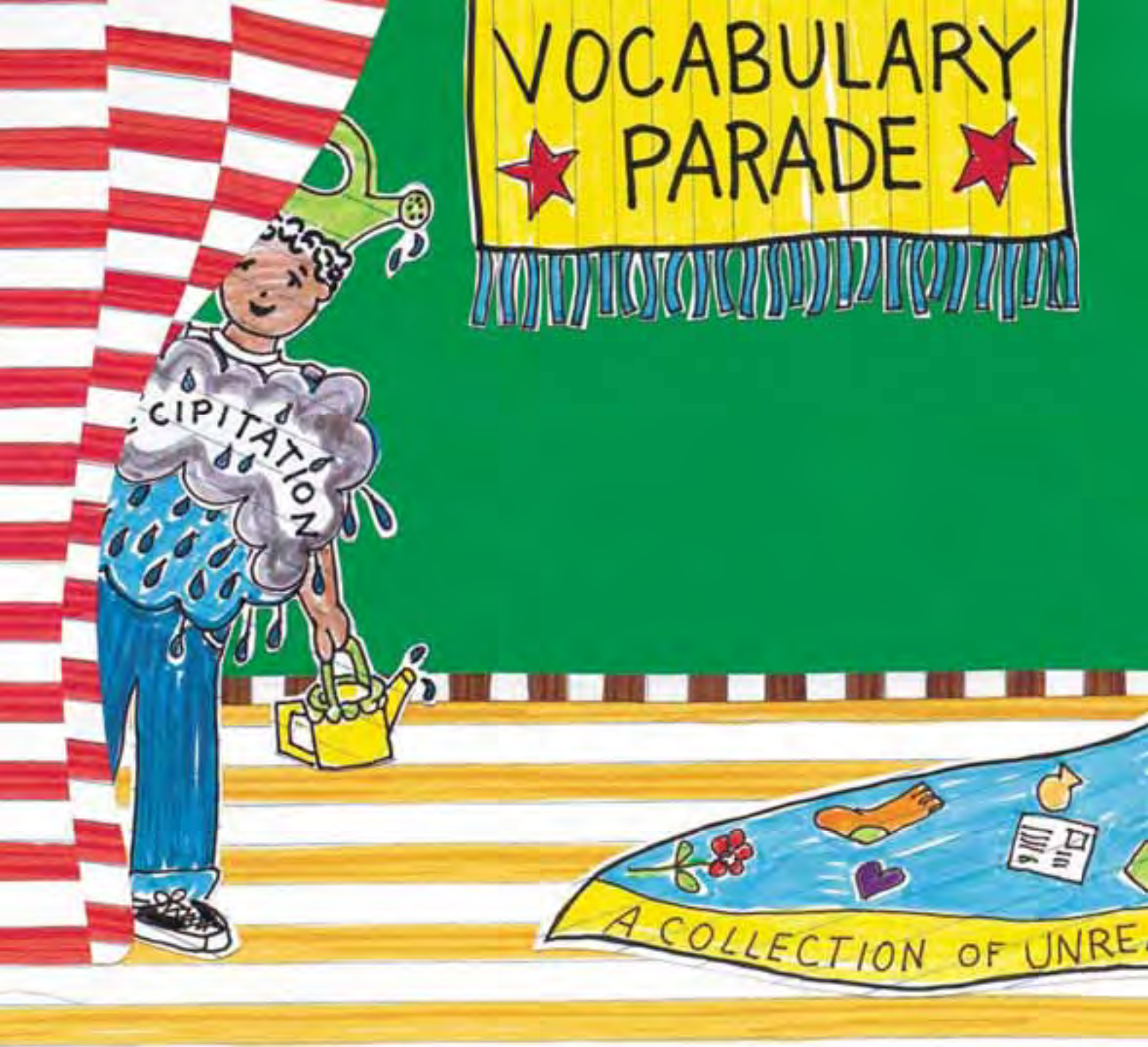
I smiled.

She smiled.

“Sweetheart,” she said, “let’s take another look at that cape.”







It took the most courage I've ever had to walk out on that stage as **Miss Alaineus, Queen of All Miscellaneous Things**. But when Mr. Bell read my word and definition, everyone applauded and laughed **wildly**: *in a manner lacking all restraint*, and I grinned at my mom across the auditorium.



Forest came right after me. When he bowed, his **Precipitation** watering-can hat rained on Mr. Bell's new suit, and the entire audience gasped, then cheered when Mr. Bell smiled at his **soggy** clothes.

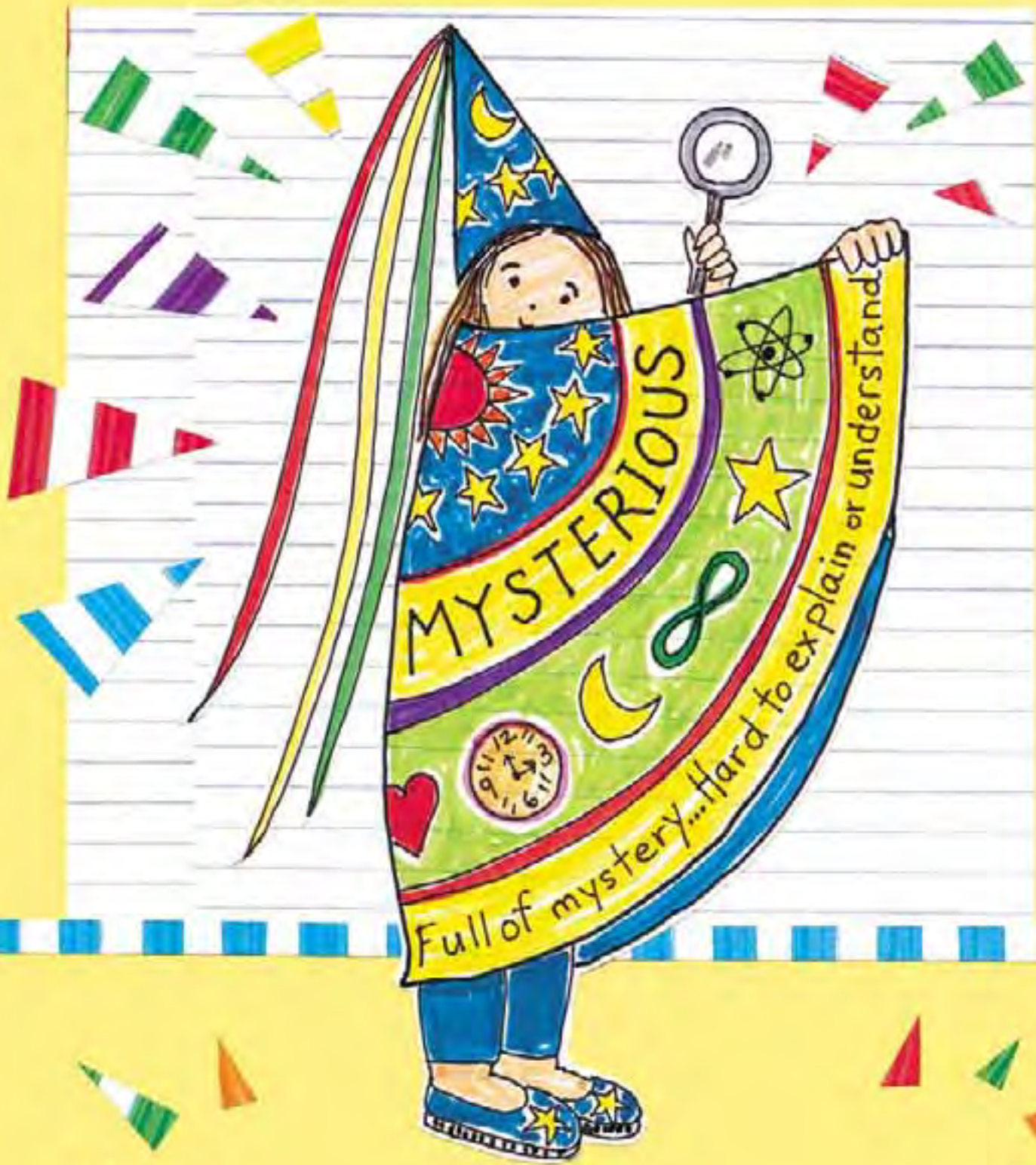




To my **astonishment**: *great shock and amazement*, I won a gold trophy for The Most Original Use of a Word in the Tenth Annual Vocabulary Parade.

So this time Mom was right. There was gold in this mistake.

And next year I think I'm going to be . . .



**Miss Sterious,  
*Investigator of All Things Mysterious!***



## A Few Words About Debra Frasier

**Debra Frasier's** fifth-grade daughter said to her one day, "Mom, today I figured out that *miscellaneous* is not a person." Her daughter's new wisdom gave Debra two gifts: a good laugh and the idea to write *Miss Alaineus*. Debra says her books take a long time because she loves the creative process. Being creative is nothing new for Debra. As a child in Florida, she used to make collages with old wood she found on the beach and miles of tape.

For the illustrations, Debra again turned to her daughter for inspiration. Papers, glue, scissors, and pencils that were crammed in her daughter's desk gave her the idea for the story's school setting. At last Debra had completed a fun adventure about the usually tame world of vocabulary.

**Another book** by Debra Frasier:  
*Out of the Ocean*



### Author's Purpose

Authors of fiction usually write to entertain, but they may have another purpose. What clues can help you figure out if Debra Frasier had more than one purpose for writing *Miss Alaineus*?



For more information about Debra Frasier visit  
[www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)



# Comprehension Check



## Summarize

Use your Character and Plot Chart to help you summarize only the most important events that lead to Sage's creative solution to her problem.

| Character | Plot |
|-----------|------|
|           |      |



## Think and Compare

1. *Miss Alaineus* is written from Sage's point of view. How does this help you know what she is like? What words or phrases would you use to describe her? Use story details in your answer. **Story Structure: Character and Plot**
2. Reread page 38. What does Sage mean when she says, "there was gold in this mistake"? Use details from the story to support your answer. **Analyze**
3. Even the most **capable** people make mistakes. How do you feel when you make a mistake? Compare your feelings to Sage's feelings. **Analyze**
4. Why might it be helpful to have a sense of humor when you are trying to solve a problem? **Evaluate**

5. Look back at "The Talent Contest" on pages 18-19. How is Danny's experience similar to Sage's? Use details from each selection. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**

