

Comprehension

Genre

Realistic Fiction tells an invented story that could have happened in real life.

Evaluate

Author's Purpose

As you read, use your Author's Purpose Chart.

Clues	Author's Purpose

Read to Find Out

What is the author's purpose for writing a story about Carlos?

Main Selection

Carlos and the Skunk

Award
Winning
Selection

written by
Jan Romero Stevens

illustrated by
Jeanne Arnold

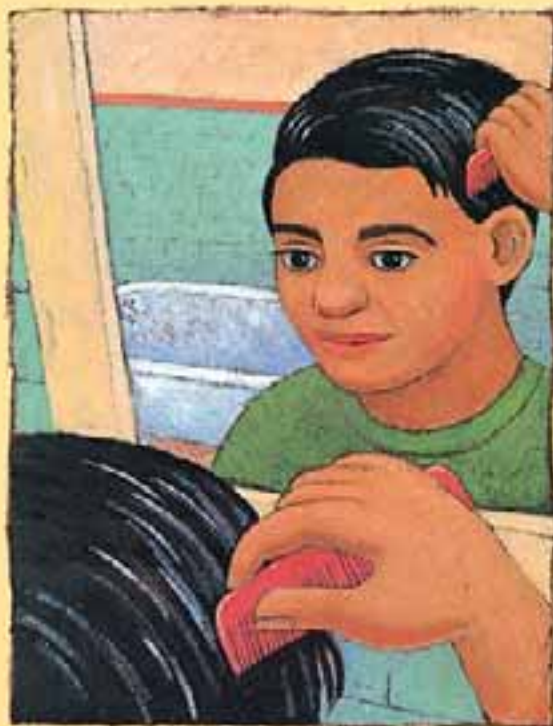


Carlos could not remember how long he and Gloria had been best friends.

When they were little, Gloria's mother would prop them up on old catalogs at the kitchen table while she strung red chiles together or rolled the dough for tortillas. If they were at Carlos's house, his mother would let them play in the garden while she sorted through the shiny green chiles, ripe red tomatoes, and sweet corn.

It seemed as if Carlos and Gloria were always together, but as they grew older, Carlos's feelings toward his friend started to change. He began gazing at himself in the mirror, combing his hair this way and that to see which looked better. He started showing off for Gloria, wanting her to notice how brave and smart he was becoming.

Carlos and Gloria lived in the fertile Española Valley **nestled** in the mountains of northern New Mexico. Their thick-walled adobe homes, with high tin roofs and matching gardens, were within walking distance from one another.



After school each day, Gloria and Carlos did their chores— weeding the garden, feeding the chickens, and doing their homework. After dinner, they were allowed to play.

One fall evening, when they were running through the cornfield playing hide and seek, they caught a **glimpse** of a striped skunk slinking through the shadows of the garden. The children had seen the skunk many times before. It had only two toes on its right front paw, and they had nicknamed it Dos Dedos (Two Toes).

Gloria feared the chance of **arousing** the skunk's anger and kept far away from it. But one afternoon, Carlos, wanting to impress Gloria, moved closer and closer until he could clearly see the narrow, single white stripe running from its head onto its tail.

“Carlos, you'd better be careful,” whispered Gloria as Carlos inched along on his stomach toward the skunk.

“Gloria, don't worry. I know just how to catch a skunk,” Carlos boasted. “You know what I heard? If you pick a skunk up by its tail, it can't spray you.”

Gloria covered her mouth and giggled.

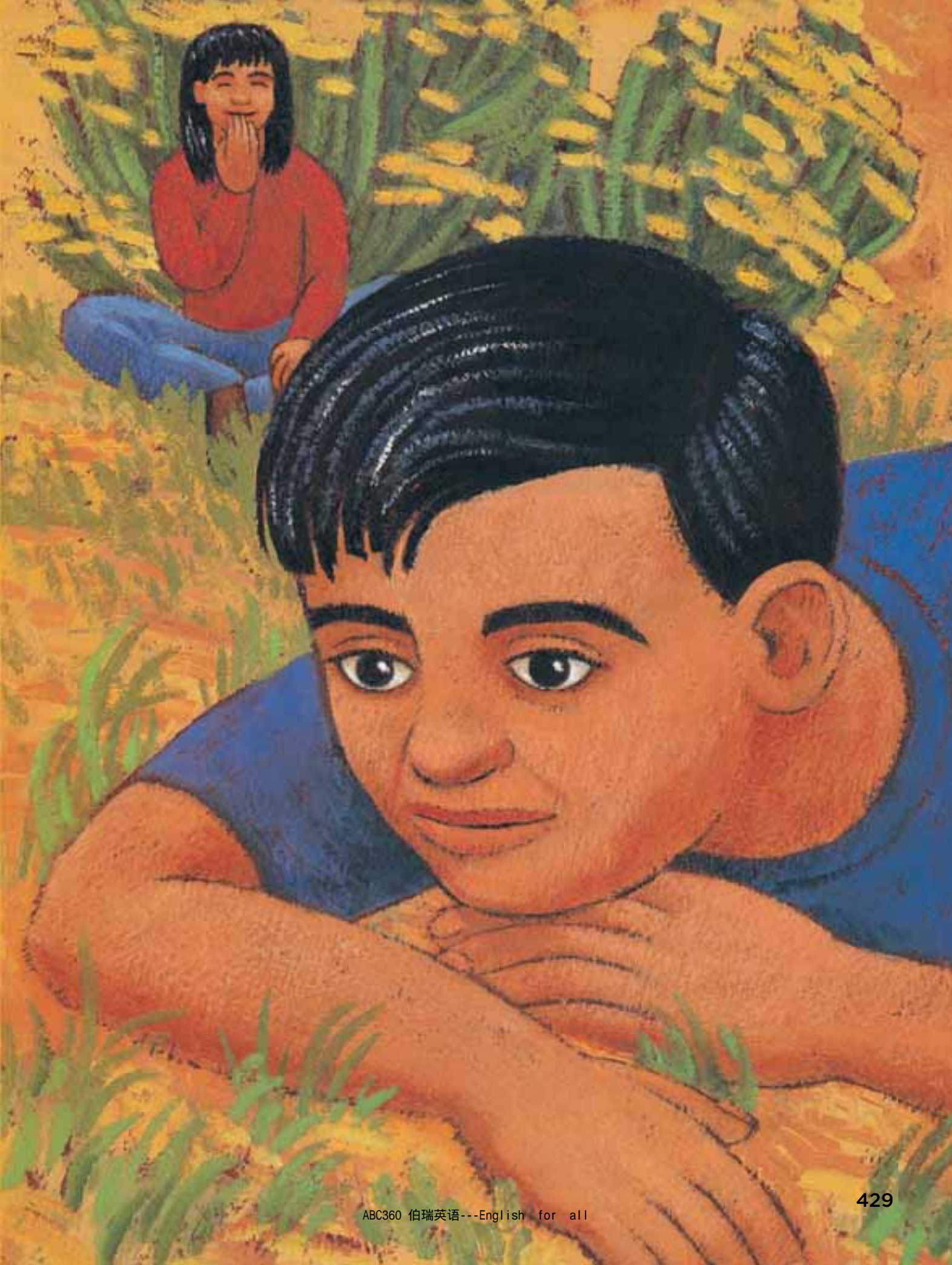
“Oh, Carlos,” she said. “*No puedes creer todo lo que te dicen*— you can't believe everything you hear.”

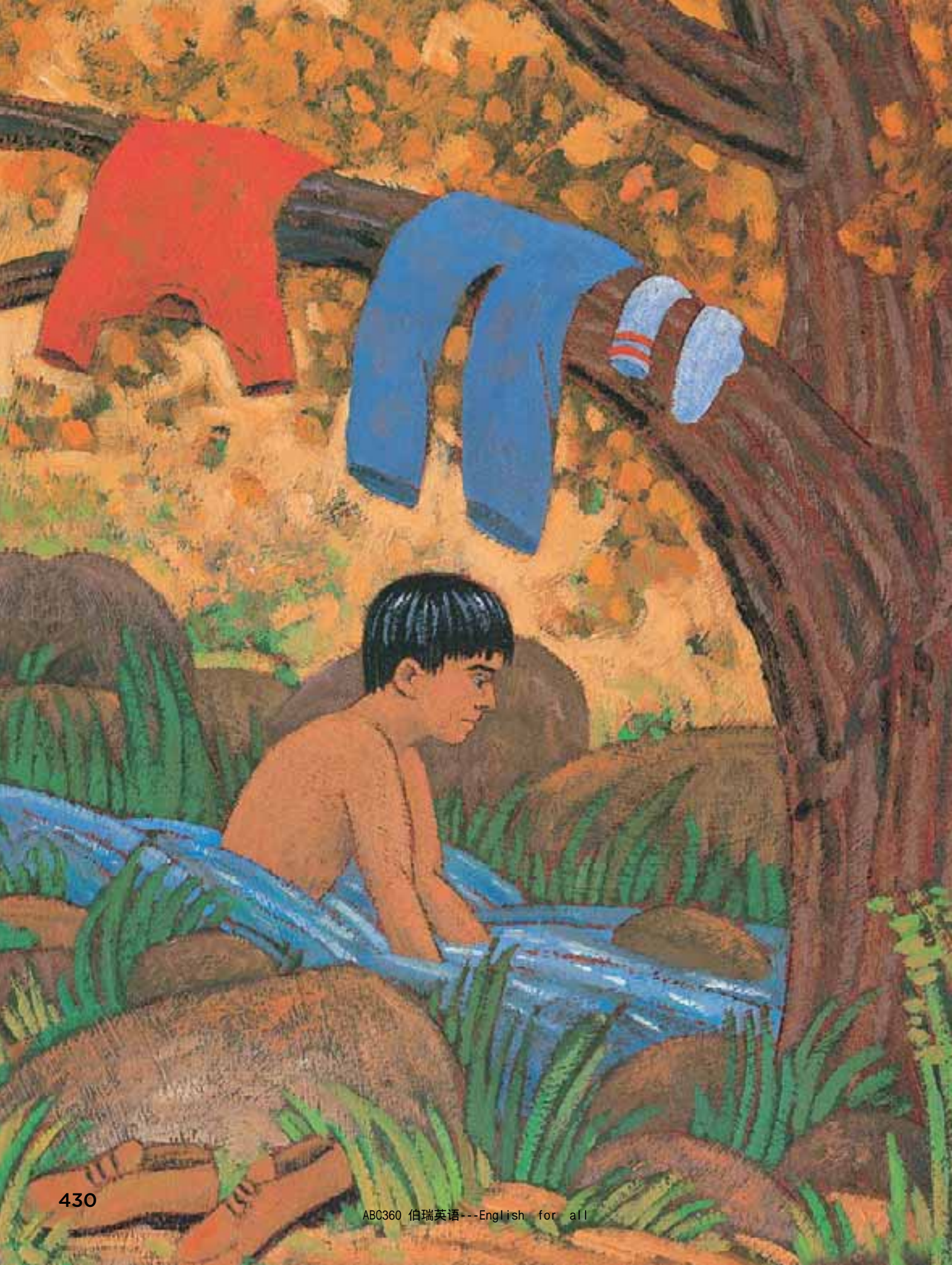
“But it's true,” Carlos insisted to his doubting friend, and he became more determined than ever to prove himself right. He went to sleep that night still pondering over how to catch the skunk.



Author's Purpose

What do you think is the purpose in writing this scene? Why?





The next day, Carlos had planned to take Gloria fishing so he awoke early and got dressed. His mother prepared warm flour tortillas, fried eggs, and fresh salsa for breakfast. Salsa was a family tradition in Carlos's home. Made from tomatoes and green chiles grown in the garden, the salsa was spicy and tasty. Carlos spooned it on just about everything—from breakfast to dinner.

After breakfast, Carlos rushed outside to get his fishing pole and a can for worms. Rounding the corner of his house, he saw Gloria waiting for him by the gate. As they began walking down the road together, they saw Dos Dedos in the garden.

Qué suerte! (What luck!) thought Carlos. "I will catch Dos Dedos this time!"

Carlos gave no thought to what he might do with the skunk if he did catch it, but instead began creeping up behind it. He got closer and closer until he was inches away. For just a moment, Carlos hesitated, then winked at Gloria before he reached out and grabbed the tail. In an instant, the skunk's tail arched, and Carlos was sprayed from head to toe.

With a gasp, Carlos fell backward onto the ground. He was so **stunned** he hardly realized what had happened. He had never smelled such a strong odor. His eyes itched. He coughed and snorted and blew his nose. He did his best not to cry in front of Gloria.

Quite unconcerned, Dos Dedos disappeared down the side of an **arroyo**. And Carlos ran off to the river—leaving both Gloria and his fishing pole far behind.

Carlos chose a **secluded** spot and pulled off all his clothes as fast as he could. The smell of them was unbearable. He jumped into the stream and washed out his clothing, laying it out on a branch to dry in the sun. By afternoon his shirt and pants were dry, but the strong odor still lingered, especially on his shoes. He dressed and walked the long way home, climbing up and down the sides of the arroyos and stopping to gather piñon nuts. When he finally reached his house, he carefully took off his shoes and left them by the back door.

When his mother came into the kitchen, she noticed a strange smell, but before she could question Carlos, he slipped out the door and into the garden.

Carlos had heard that tomato juice helped to get rid of the smell of skunk, so he picked every ripe tomato he could find and sneaked into the bathroom. He squeezed the tomatoes into the bathtub and all over his hair, scrubbing himself as hard as he could with a washrag.

Beginning to think he smelled better, he crawled into bed and fell asleep quickly after his very **unpleasant** day.

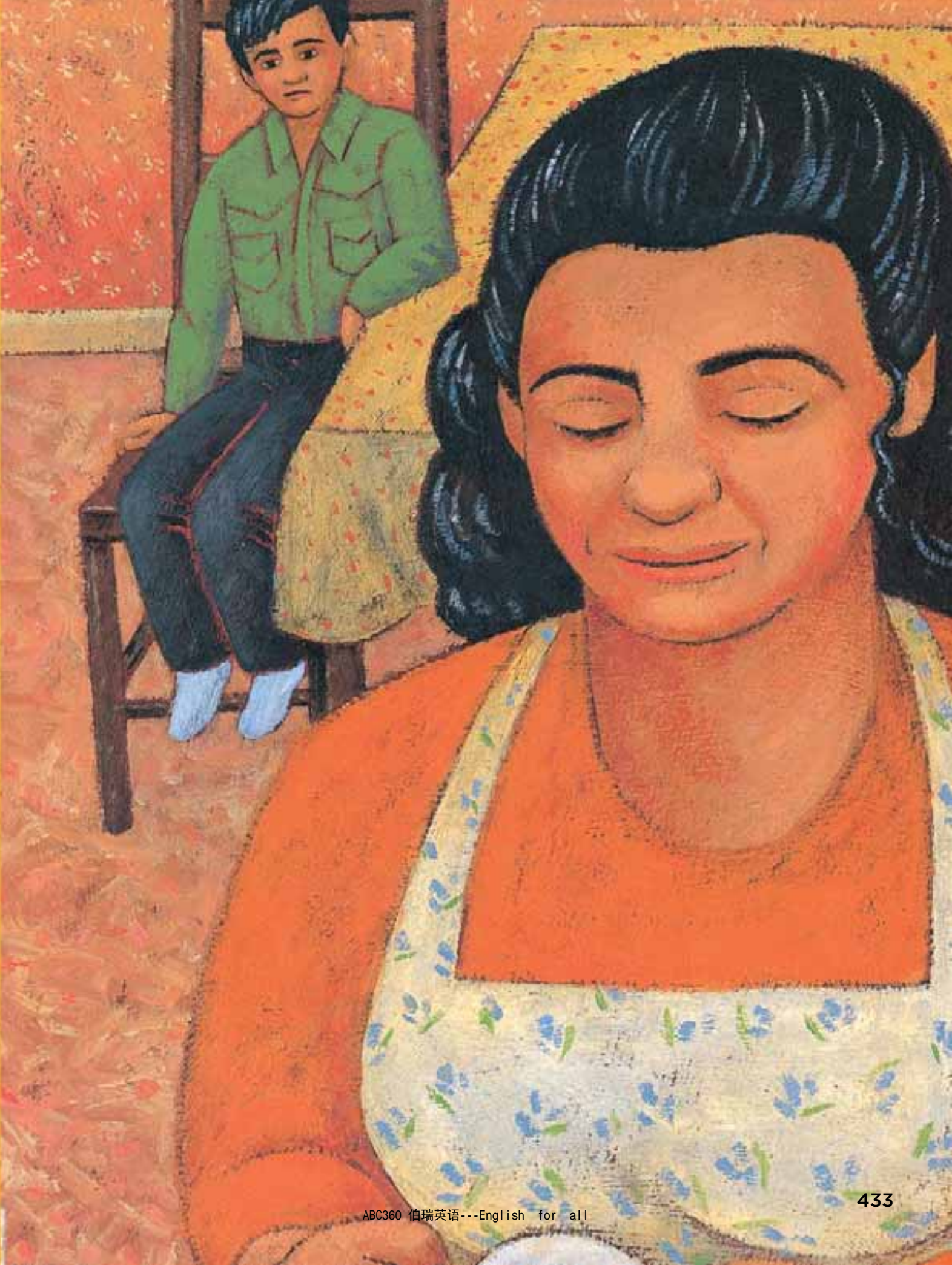
The next morning was Sunday, and Mamá was up early, patting and shaping the dough for tortillas.

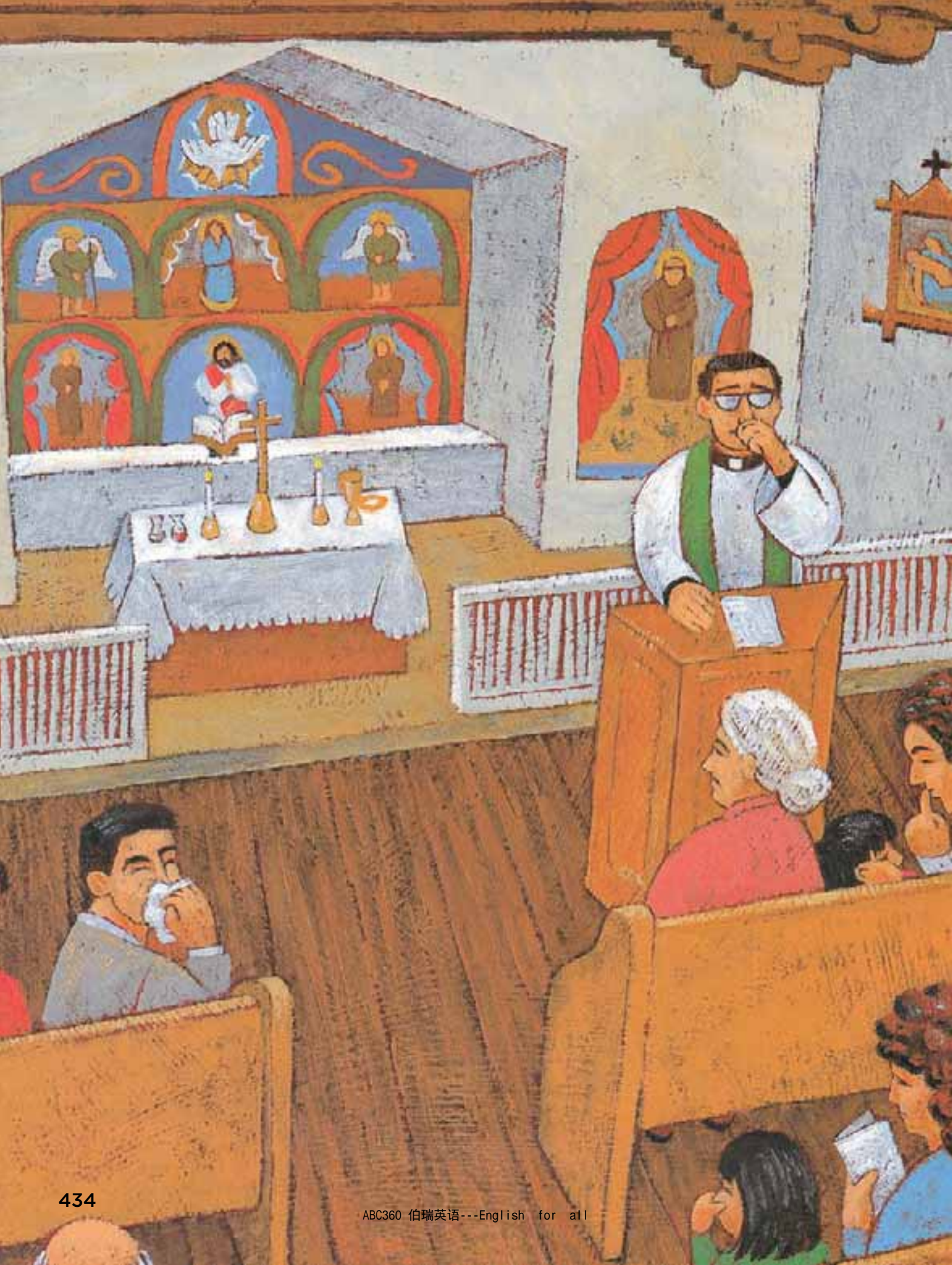
Dressed in his best shirt and pants, Carlos sat down at the table.

“Carlos, you look very nice for church this morning,” said Mamá as she untied her flowered apron. “Where are your shoes?”

“They’re outside, Mamá. I will get them when we leave,” said Carlos, feeling uneasy.







Carlos's family walked to the church near their home. When they arrived, they squeezed into a bench near the back. Carlos was pleased that he was able to sit next to Gloria.

But a most peculiar thing happened in church that day.

As the choir began a hymn, some of the singers began to make strange faces and cover their noses with handkerchiefs. The priest, as he walked to the altar, sneezed loudly and cleared his throat.

The people in the first few rows of the congregation turned to each other with puzzled looks. The women began vigorously fanning their faces with their church programs. The children started squirming and pinched their noses. Little by little the strange **behavior** began working its way toward the back of the church.

Carlos couldn't figure out what was going on until he looked down at his feet. He was sitting next to an air vent for the church's heating system. The smell from his shoes, which he had forgotten to clean after being sprayed by Dos Dedos, was spreading through the heating ducts to the entire church.

"Papá, I think we better go home," whispered Carlos, hoping no one would realize he was the source of the terrible smell.

Several families began heading for the door. The priest dismissed the service early.

Embarrassed, Carlos pushed his way out of the church. He heard Gloria calling to him, but he bolted through the door, and ran all the way home. He untied his shoes, pulled them off, and left them on the back doorstep. Then he hurried to his room and shut the door.



Troubled over how he might rid himself of the strong-smelling shoes, Carlos stayed in his bedroom until his mother called him for dinner. While they were eating, his parents noticed he was unusually quiet but said nothing to him.

Finally, when dinner was over, Papá turned to Carlos.

“Carlos, I’ve noticed your shoes are looking a little small,” said Papá, with a glance toward Mamá. “Isn’t it time for a new pair?”

Carlos nodded, breathing a sigh of relief.

“Oh, *sí, sí*, Papá,” he stammered. “My feet are getting too big for those shoes now.”

The next day, Carlos and Papá drove to town. After trying on several pairs of shoes, Carlos chose a pair of heeled cowboy boots that made him appear much taller.

A few weeks passed and Carlos forgot about his encounter with the skunk. One evening, after a big dinner of pinto beans, rice, tortillas, and his favorite salsa, he decided to visit Gloria. He put on his new boots and took a good look at his hair in the mirror. As he was getting ready to leave, his father called him outside.

“I need your help,” said Papá, and he pointed beneath the bushes alongside the house.

Carlos could just make out the shape of a small, black-and-white animal with three little ones that had made their home under the leaves.

“*Dios mío!*” (“Oh my goodness!”) said Carlos. “What will we do?”

“It’s no problem, Carlos,” said Papá. “You know what I hear? You can catch a skunk if you pick it up by its tail. You go first.”

Carlos’s nose and eyes began to water just with the thought of it.

“Oh, Papá, *no puedes creer todo lo que te dicen*—you know you can’t believe everything you hear,” Carlos said, and he drew himself up a little taller, smoothed back his hair, and headed for Gloria’s house.



Author’s Purpose

What was the author’s purpose in writing this story? Did the author write with a second purpose in mind?



Fresh Tomato Salsa

3 tomatoes, diced

¼ white or yellow onion, diced

2-3 scallions with green tops, chopped

1 medium clove garlic, minced

2 teaspoons vinegar

1 teaspoon vegetable or olive oil

3-4 sprigs of cilantro, chopped

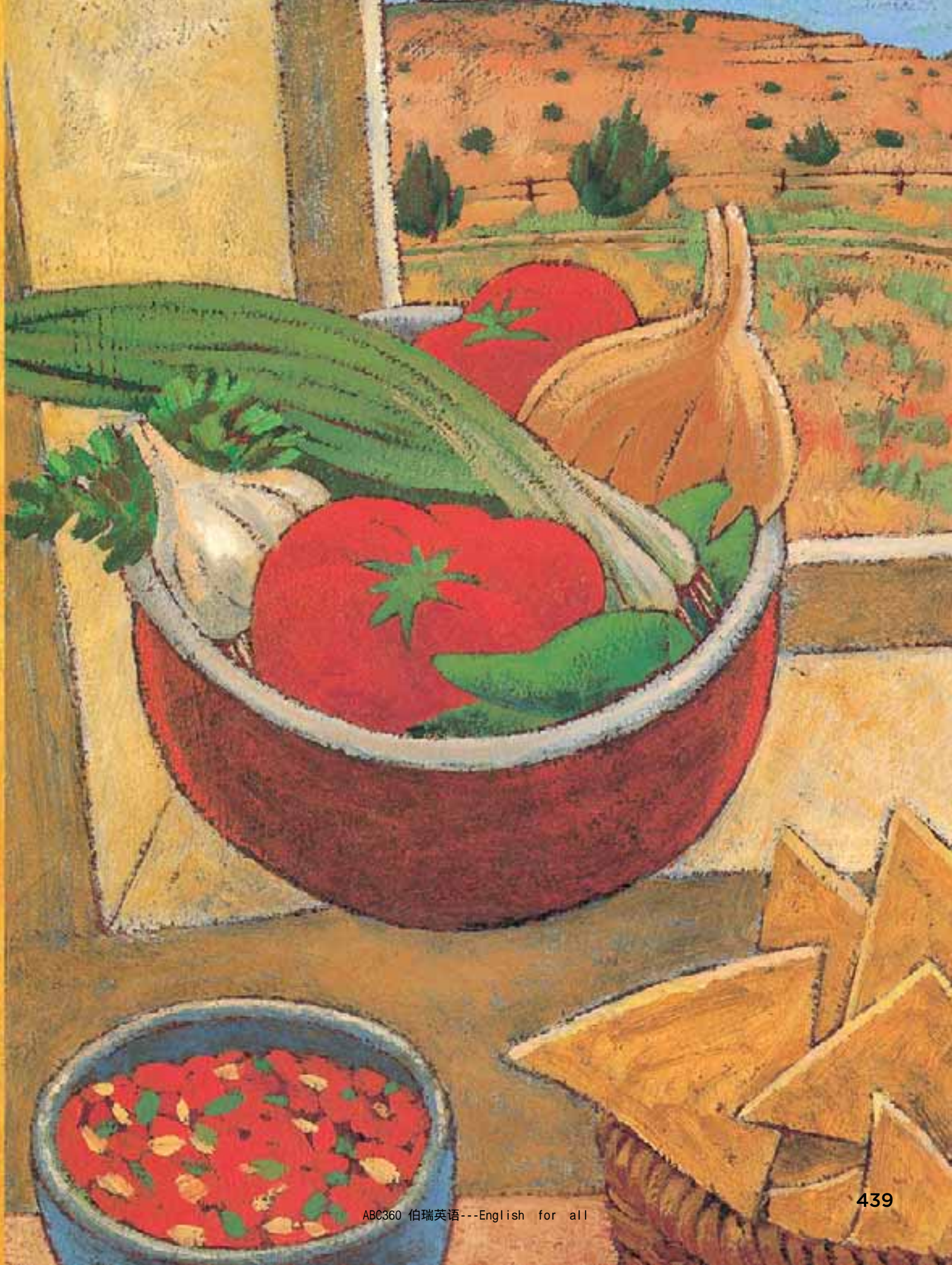
1 roasted green chile or 2 serrano chiles, diced
(or 2 tablespoons canned green chile)

1 teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon pepper

Mix all ingredients in a food processor, leaving salsa chunky, or stir by hand. Chill. Spoon over anything—eggs, beans, tacos—or use as a dip for tortilla chips.





Trading Tales with Jan Romero Stevens and Jeanne Arnold



Jan Romero Stevens said there was nothing better than watching children enjoy her books, in both English and Spanish. Jan loved the Southwest and learned more about her Hispanic heritage by studying Spanish with her kids. To make the Carlos stories realistic, she based them on things that happened to her family and friends. Jan always enjoyed writing. Besides writing the “Carlos” series, Jan worked for newspapers and magazines as a reporter and editor.

Jeanne Arnold is an illustrator and a painter. Her work includes all three books in the “Carlos” series, as well as *When You Were Just a Little Girl* by B.G. Hennessy. Jeanne has spent time backpacking in the Southwest. This helps her capture the regional flavor of the “Carlos” books.



Other books by Jan Romero Stevens and Jeanne Arnold: *Carlos and the Carnival* and *Carlos Digs to China*



Author's Purpose

What clues help you to figure out the author's purpose for writing?
How well did Jan Romero Stevens succeed in her purpose? Explain.



Find out more about Jan Romero Stevens and Jeanne Arnold at
www.macmillanmh.com



Comprehension Check

Summarize

Summarize the events of *Carlos and the Skunk*. Be sure the summary includes the most important information from the story.

Think and Compare



1. What was the Author's Purpose for choosing a skunk as the animal Carlos wants to catch? Use your Author's Purpose Chart to help explain your answer. **Evaluate: Author's Purpose**
2. Reread page 436 of *Carlos and the Skunk*. Explain why Papá asked Carlos if his shoes were too small. **Analyze**
3. Would showing off for a friend be worth suffering **unpleasant** consequences, such as being sprayed by a skunk? **Explain**
4. Explain why you agree or disagree with the advice, "You can't believe everything you hear." Include specific examples in your answer. **Analyze**
5. Reread "Nosey and the Porcupine" on pages 422-423. What characteristics do Carlos and Nosey share? How are their experiences with animal defenses similar? Support your answer with evidence from each story. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**

Clues	Author's Purpose
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