

Comprehension

Genre

Science Fiction is a fantasy in which an invention involving science or technology affects historic or imaginary characters.



Analyze Story Structure

Cause and Effect

As you read, fill in your Cause and Effect Diagram.

Cause → Effect
→
→
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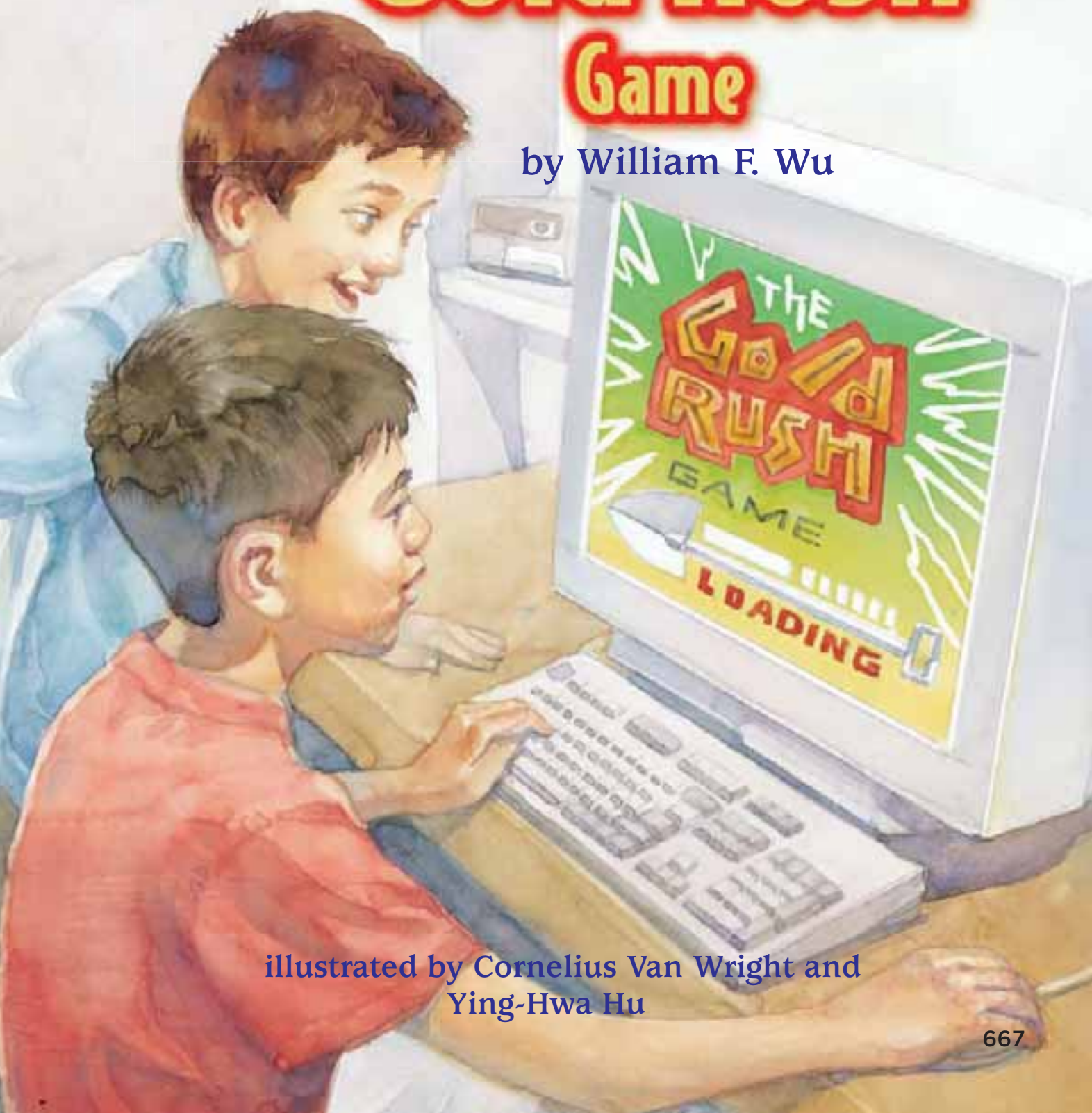
Read to Find Out

Which part of this story is science and which part is fiction?



The Gold Rush Game

by William F. Wu



illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and
Ying-Hwa Hu



Eric Wong looked at his new game on the computer screen. “Let’s play.” He clicked the button to start.

“The Gold Rush,” his friend Matt O’Brien read out loud, as he rolled his chair closer. “What’s that mean? I want to see it! Come on, I’m going first.”

“I’m older,” said Eric. “Besides, it’s my game.”

“Be nice.” Eric’s mom came up behind them. “We bought the game so Eric could learn more about the Gold Rush,” she said to Matt. “His dad and I are tracing our family tree. Eric’s great-great-great grandfather on his dad’s side came to California from China during the Gold Rush, but we don’t know much about him.”

“Hey, look at the game,” said Eric. On the screen, he saw steep, mountain slopes covered with tall, green trees. Some men wearing broad-brimmed hats rode horses along a muddy path, leading mules with bundles on their backs. Picks and shovels were tied to the bundles. Chinese men, with long, braided queues down their backs, squatted by a rushing river.

“Who are those guys?” Matt asked. “Are they looking for gold?”

“They might be,” said Eric’s dad as he came into the room. He held out a small piece of paper with two Chinese characters written on it. “This is the name of our ancestor who first came to California. I don’t know Chinese, but my grandfather wrote it down for me when I was growing up.”

Eric turned and looked. “What was his name?”

“Daido,” his dad said. “I’ll say it slower, ‘Dye-doe.’ It means ‘Great Path.’ That’s a good name for a man who took a great adventure traveling across the Pacific Ocean to a new land. In Chinese, his family name would be given first. And so, he was called Wong Daido.”

“Wong Daido,” Eric repeated. “Yeah.”

“Do you know how to write that?” Matt asked, looking at the name.

“No.” Eric shrugged.

“We’ll let you play your game,” said Eric’s mom. “Come on, dear.” She and Eric’s dad walked away.

“Look.” Eric pointed to the screen. A miner wearing a broad-brimmed gray hat lifted a rock showing a button that said, “Press if you dare.”

“I dare you,” Matt said loudly.

“I’m doing it.” **Annoyed**, Eric pressed the button.



Suddenly Eric and Matt found themselves standing in a narrow space between two large, tall rocks by the muddy road in the mountains, with trees towering over their heads. Miners and **prospectors** walked and rode past. Eric's heart beat faster with excitement, but he was also a little scared.

"What happened?" Matt asked. "This is creepy. Where are we?"

Eric smelled the scent of pine trees and kicked at the mud. "I think we're really in the Gold Rush. We went back in time!"

"Did you say, back in time?" Matt stared around them in shock.

"Come on." Eric walked up to the mysterious miner who had lifted the rock. "Do you know a man named Wong Daido?" Eric carefully pronounced his ancestor's name, remembering to put his family name first.

The miner laughed. Then he looked closely at Eric and Matt. "You're not from around here are you?"

"No, we're not," said Eric hoping the man wouldn't ask any more questions.

"Do you know how many people are in this area? We're on the Feather River upstream from Marysville, in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada in California. Men came to find gold. We're called the Forty-niners because so many of us have come this year."

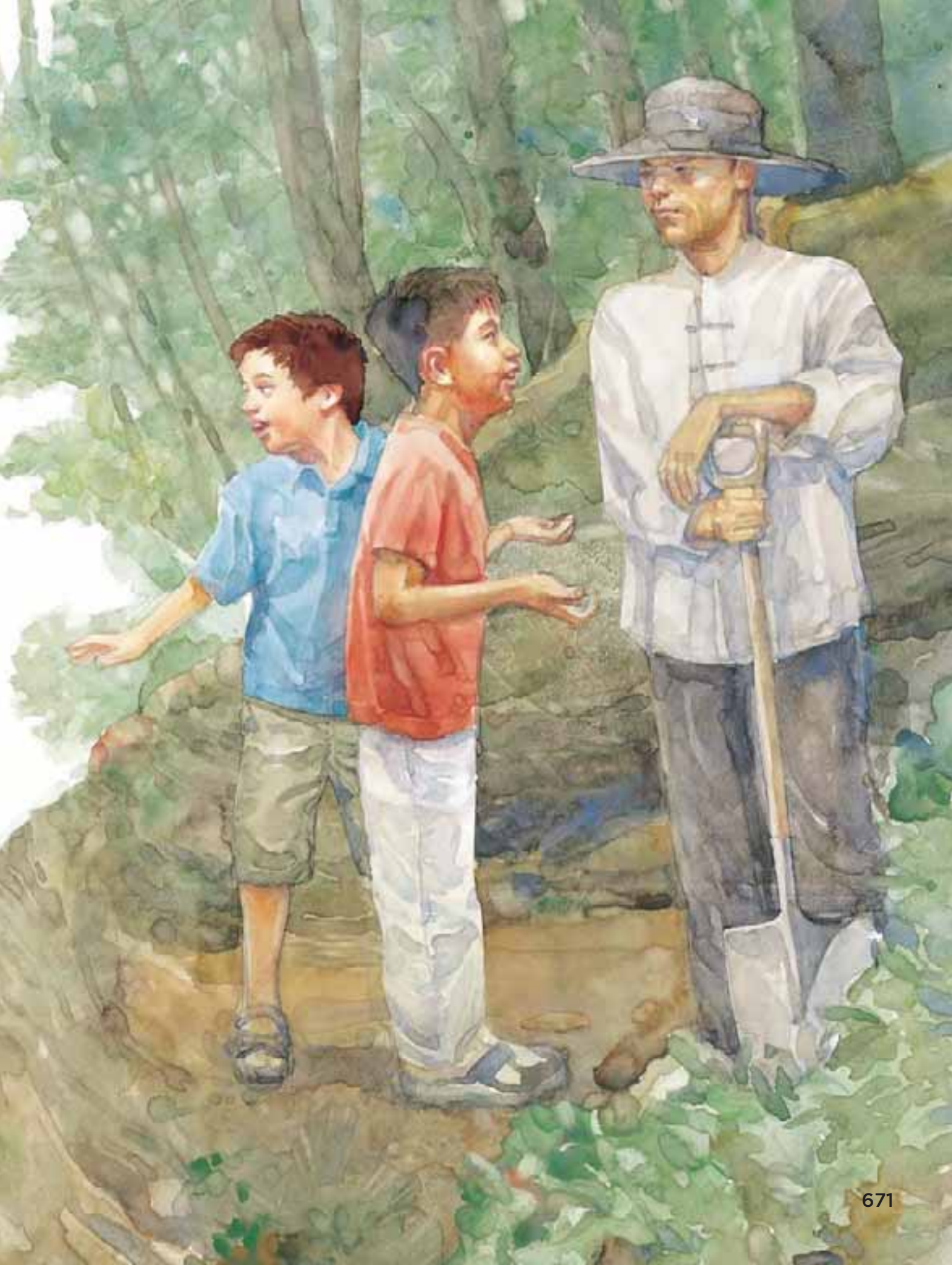
"What year?" Matt asked, his eyes wide.

"1849, of course," said the miner. He frowned. "Don't you boys know what year it is? Gold was discovered in this area last year. Now, Forty-niners are coming from all over America and lots of other places."



Cause and Effect

How did Eric and Matt find themselves back in 1849?



“How do they get here?” Eric asked.

“I came overland from the eastern United States by wagon train. A good friend of mine took a ship from the east coast south around Cape Horn at the tip of South America. From China, other men come on ships across the Pacific Ocean.”

“But where do they live?” Eric asked. “I don’t see any houses here.”

“Marysville is a new town,” said the miner. “It was started by miners and prospectors. But men also live in camps, sometimes together and sometimes on their own, while they look for gold.” He pointed to the river. “But the best way to find a Chinese miner is to ask other Chinese miners.”



Matt ran down to the edge of the river, where a Chinese miner squatted by the rushing water, swirling sand in a metal pan.

Eric hurried after him. “Hey, mister, is your name Wong Daido?”

“No.” The man shook his head. Then he gave Eric a little smile and pointed downstream. “You see that man? His name is Wong.”

Matt ran down the bank, but this time Eric ran, too. They stopped next to Mr. Wong together, near a big tree growing right beside the river.

“Are you named Wong Daido?” Eric asked.

Mr. Wong was a little younger than the other Chinese miner. His long, braided queue swung behind him as he looked up. “I am,” he said, giving both boys a big smile. “Why do you ask?”

Eric was afraid to explain he and Matt had traveled through time from the future. He was sure Mr. Wong wouldn't believe him and might chase them away, so he changed the subject. “My name's Eric, and this is my friend Matt. Have you found any gold?”

“Not today. Some days I find enough gold to buy food that will last until the next time I find gold. I filed this claim so I have the right to pan gold here. The river washes gold dust downstream, so I catch river water, mud, and sand in this pan and try to find it.” He moved the pan in a **circular** motion, so that water sloshed out with some of the sand. “Gold is heavy, so it stays in the pan.”

“Wow,” said Matt. “And the river's so fast.”

“Don't you have to get sand from the bottom of the river?” Eric asked. “It looks really deep right here!”

“It's very deep here,” said Mr. Wong. “The riverbank drops steeply from the edge of the water and the current's very fast. But I can take the sand and mud right here at the edge and pan it. And the water itself carries sand, even when it looks clear. On a good day, the water brings gold to me.”

Suddenly the ground shook. Eric and Matt thumped backward into a sitting position in the mud. Mr. Wong fell into the river with a splash.

“It’s an earthquake!” Eric jumped up again. He had felt small earthquakes before, and this one was so quick it had ended already. When he looked up, he saw Mr. Wong in the river, desperately holding onto a tree root with both hands. The power of the river current pulled his legs downstream and he struggled to hold his head above the water. “Help me!”

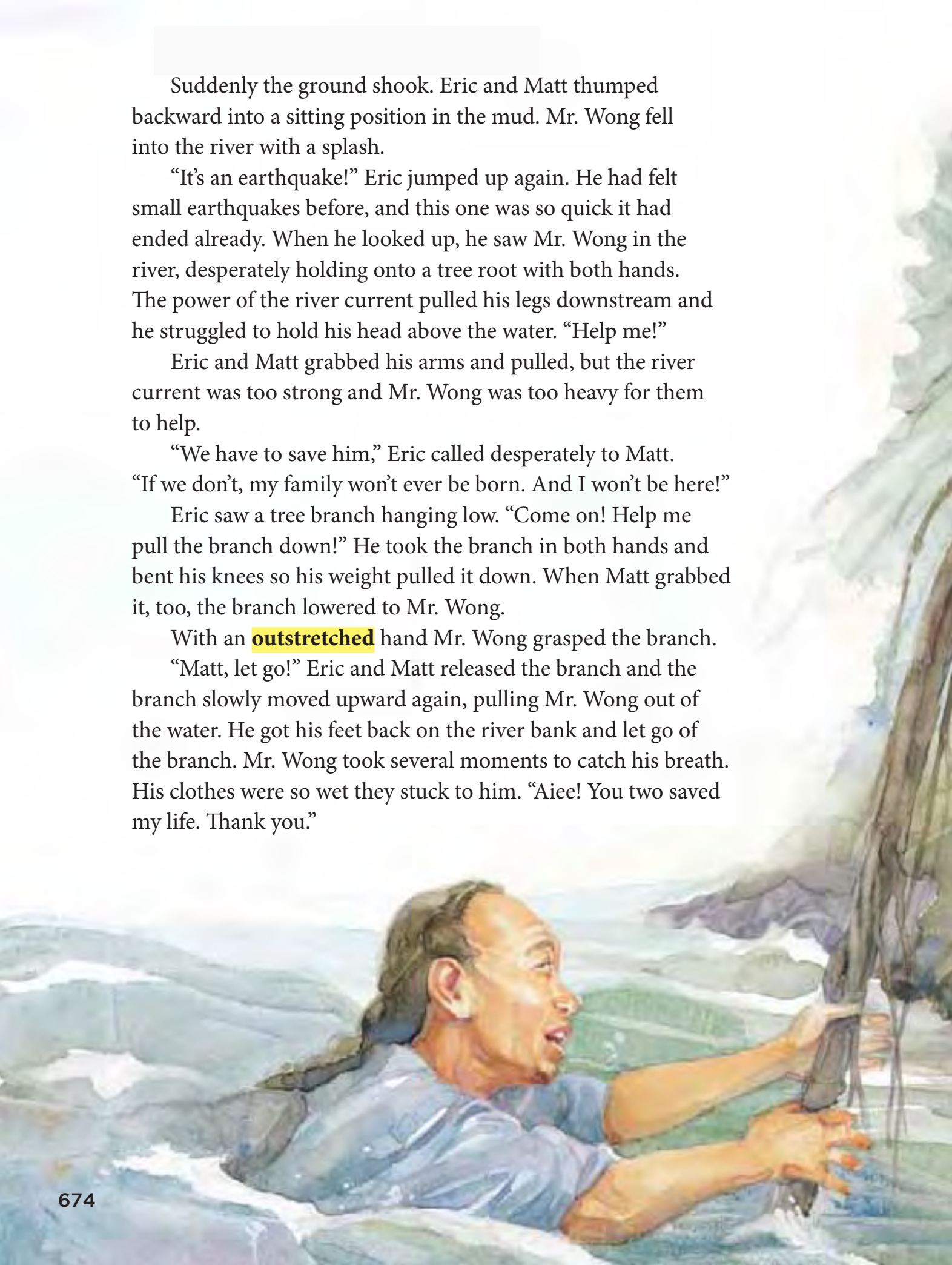
Eric and Matt grabbed his arms and pulled, but the river current was too strong and Mr. Wong was too heavy for them to help.

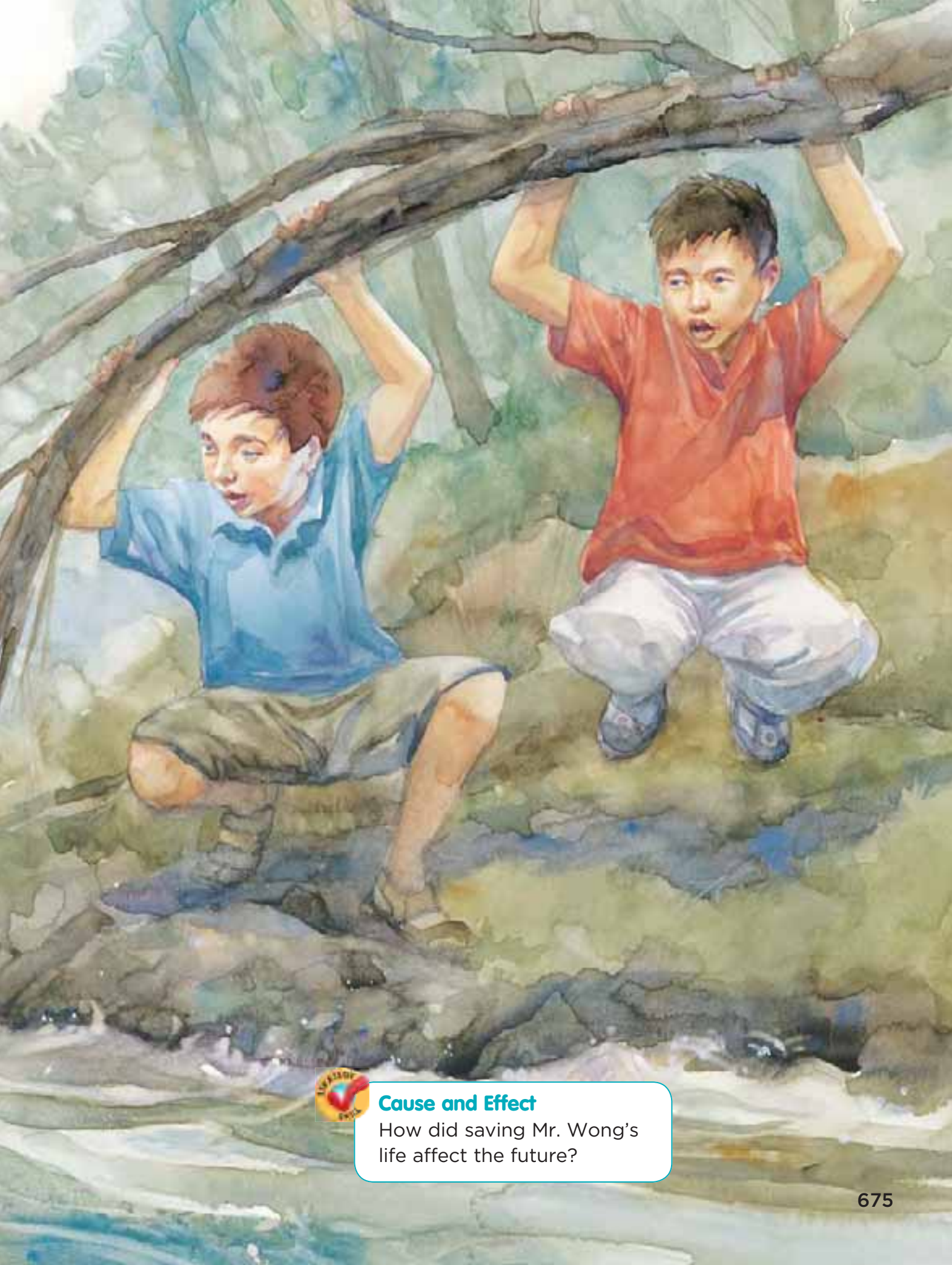
“We have to save him,” Eric called desperately to Matt. “If we don’t, my family won’t ever be born. And I won’t be here!”

Eric saw a tree branch hanging low. “Come on! Help me pull the branch down!” He took the branch in both hands and bent his knees so his weight pulled it down. When Matt grabbed it, too, the branch lowered to Mr. Wong.

With an **outstretched** hand Mr. Wong grasped the branch.

“Matt, let go!” Eric and Matt released the branch and the branch slowly moved upward again, pulling Mr. Wong out of the water. He got his feet back on the river bank and let go of the branch. Mr. Wong took several moments to catch his breath. His clothes were so wet they stuck to him. “Aiee! You two saved my life. Thank you.”





Cause and Effect

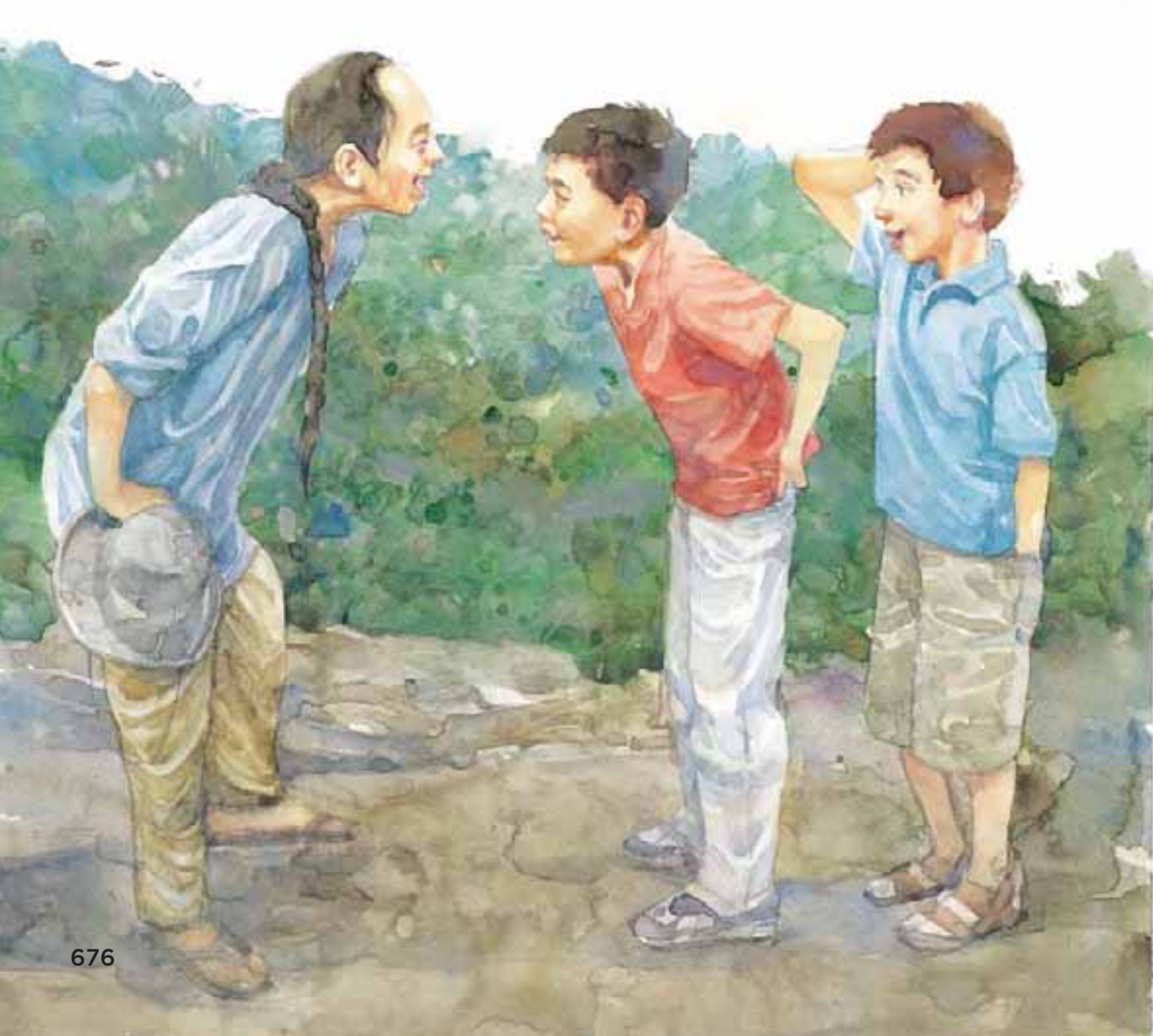
How did saving Mr. Wong's life affect the future?

“Mine too,” said Eric. “You’re welcome.”

“I thought I was going to drown. Everything I have dreamed about would have come to an end.” He paused and looked down at the ground. “I came from a poor peasant village in southern China,” Mr. Wong went on. “I hope to find some gold and send for a woman I love. We’ll marry here and raise a family in America—at least, I hope so.”

“Hey, that’s good,” said Matt. “Because—”

Eric jabbed Matt with his elbow and interrupted, “. . . because it’s a good idea.” He smiled, knowing that Mr. Wong’s dream was going to come true.





“I don’t have much to offer in return for my life,” said Mr. Wong. He reached into his pocket and pulled something out. “This is my chop.”

Eric and Matt looked. It was a small piece of ivory, with unfamiliar shapes carved on the bottom. “What’s it for?” Eric asked.

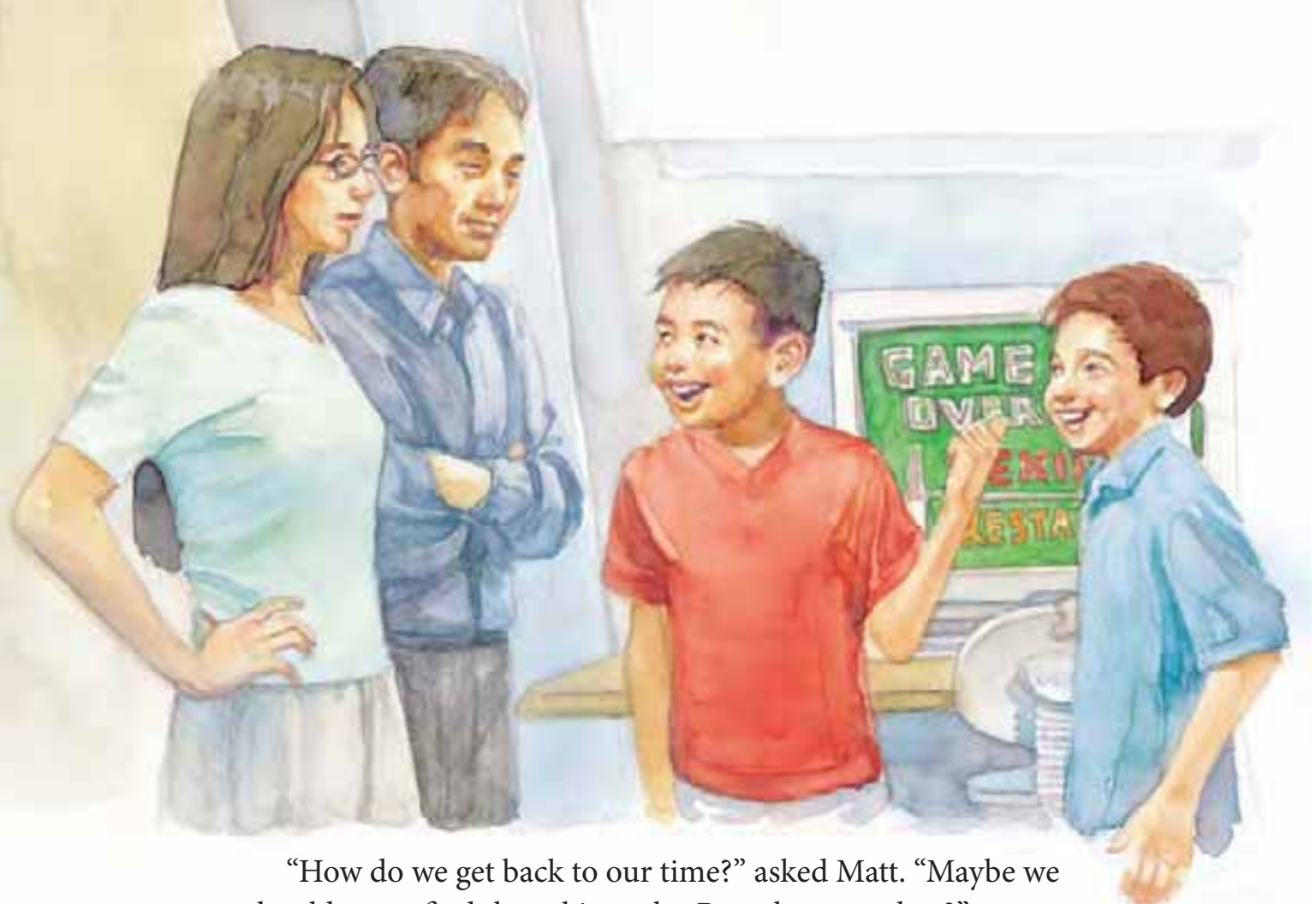
“I’ll show you.” Mr. Wong pushed the bottom into a smooth spot of mud next to the river. When he lifted it, three marks were in the mud. “That’s my name, Wong Daido. I don’t have any gold today. But I would like you to accept this as my gift. I will always remember you.”

Eric took the chop. “That’s very nice of you. Thanks.”

“I should return to my camp and dry off,” said Mr. Wong.

“I think we better go home, too,” said Eric. “We enjoyed meeting you!” He carefully put the chop in his pants pocket.

“Thank you again for your help,” said Mr. Wong. “Goodbye.” He picked up his pan and walked away from the river toward the muddy road.



“How do we get back to our time?” asked Matt. “Maybe we should try to find those big rocks. But where are they?”

“Come on,” Eric said to Matt. “I remember where they are. Maybe we’ll find some kind of clue there that will help us get back.” He led Matt back into the space between the two big rocks where they had walked out. Suddenly they were back in Eric’s living room in front of the computer.

“Wow! It worked. Those rocks must be some kind of doorway into the past.” Matt looked at the computer screen. “That’s a great game!”

“Who’s winning?” Eric’s mom asked, as she and his dad came in.

“Mom! Dad!” Eric called out. “We went into the game and back in time!”

“Yeah,” said Matt. “We met Eric’s great-great-great grandfather!”

Eric’s mom and dad laughed.

“I love the way these games build imagination while they teach history,” said Eric’s mom. “Isn’t that nice?”

“Dad! He told us he filed a claim for his mine along the Feather River!”

“Well, I know from what I read in my grandfather’s journal that Daido did file a claim. Let’s see if we can find out if it was along the Feather River.” Eric’s dad moved to the computer and conducted an Internet search. After a while he looked up in surprise. “Wong Daido did file a claim in that area in 1849. I found a **reference** to it.”

“Do you believe me now?” Eric asked.

“C’mon, Eric. Do you expect me to believe you actually went back in time?”

“No, I guess not.” Eric felt a wave of **disappointment**, then suddenly reached into his pocket. “Maybe this will convince you!” He pulled out the chop. “Dad! Look at the name: Wong Daido.” Smiling, Eric held it up.

On the chop, a little bit of gold dust from the river **glinted** in the light.



File a Claim with William, Cornelius, and Ying-Hwa

William F. Wu has liked history since he was a boy. During recess at school, he and his friend acted out famous historical events. William also enjoyed writing stories and poems. He first thought about becoming a writer when he was eight years old.



Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu are a husband and wife team who have been illustrating books for more than 15 years. Cornelius studied art in New York City, while Ying developed her art skills in Taiwan and Minnesota. With such different backgrounds, the two try to combine their different cultures into each illustration for this story.



Find out more about William F. Wu, Cornelius Van Wright, and Ying-Hwa Hu at www.macmillanmh.com



Author's Purpose

What clues in *The Gold Rush Game* helped you to understand the author's purpose for writing this science fiction story? Did William F. Wu want to inform or entertain the reader? Discuss the evidence that led you to your conclusion.



Comprehension Check



Summarize

Summarize *The Gold Rush Game*. Who are the main characters? Explain what they are trying to do and what happens to them.

Think and Compare



1. What caused Eric and Matt to go back in time?

Use your Cause and Effect Diagram to help you answer. **Analyze Story Structure: Cause and Effect**

Cause → Effect
→
→
→
→

2. Reread page 670 of *The Gold Rush Game*. How do you think the **prospector** knew that the boys were not “from around here”? **Analyze**

3. How would you change the plot to include one of Matt’s ancestors? Invent a character with traits that would fit into the story. **Synthesize**

4. Why is it important for people to learn about their family’s history? Explain your answer. **Evaluate**

5. Read “In Search of Gold” on pages 664–665. How is Larry’s experience similar to that of the prospectors in *The Gold Rush Game*? How is it different? Use details from both selections in your answer. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**

