

# Comprehension

## Genre

**Realistic Fiction** has real-life settings, well-developed characters, and realistic problems and solutions.

## Monitor Comprehension

### Make Judgments

Use story details to form opinions about the characters and their actions. As you read, use your Judgments Chart.

Action	→	Judgment
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	

### Read to Find Out

How does Teddy feel about the camping trip?

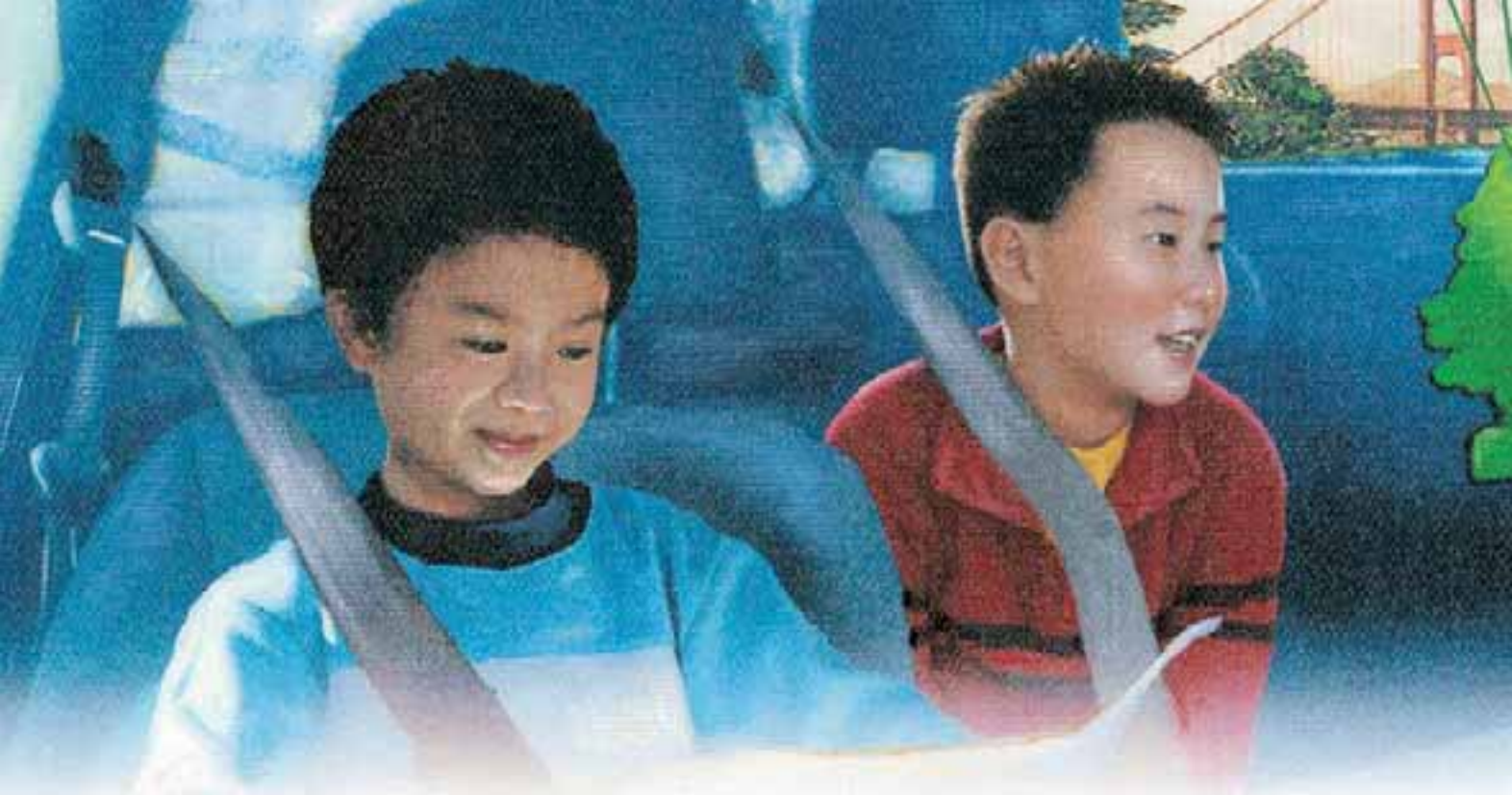
# SKUNK SCOUT

by *Laurence Yep*

Award  
Winning  
Author

*illustrated by Winson Trang*





*Teddy lives in San Francisco's Chinatown and loves city life. When Teddy reluctantly accepts an invitation to go camping with his Uncle Curtis and little brother Bobby, he has no idea what adventures Mother Nature has in store for them.*

Mount Tamalpais kept growing bigger and bigger as we drove along. I thought some of the skyscrapers in San Francisco had been big, but they were toys compared to it.

You wouldn't think anyone could miss something that huge, but our uncle did. "Look, boys. That hawk's diving!" I thought he had told us everything possible about hawks, but he began spouting more.

"Oh, too bad," Bobby said. "He missed. I wonder what he was going for?"

The hawk wasn't the only one that needed better aim. As we shot past the exit, I leaned over the back of my uncle's seat. "Unh, Uncle Curtis, you should have turned back there."

Bobby rattled his map as he examined it. "Really?"

"Bobby you're supposed to be the navigator," I sighed.

"I'm sorry," Bobby said.

"How could you miss the sign?" I asked. "It's as big as a car."

"Now, now, no harm." Uncle Curtis shrugged. He left the freeway the first chance he got and then reentered the freeway, heading south.



Bobby leaned against his shoulder strap. “We’ll get it this time.”

But just as we got near the correct exit, Uncle Curtis suddenly twisted in his seat. “There’s a rabbit!” he cried, pointing.

“Where?” Bobby asked, craning his neck.

As we shot past, I moaned, “We missed it again.”

Uncle Curtis glanced into the rearview mirror. “Man, that came up faster than I thought.”

I put a hand on his shoulder. “Okay. This time, no hawks. No rabbits. Just exit signs. Okay?”

Uncle Curtis gave a thumbs-up. “Got you.”

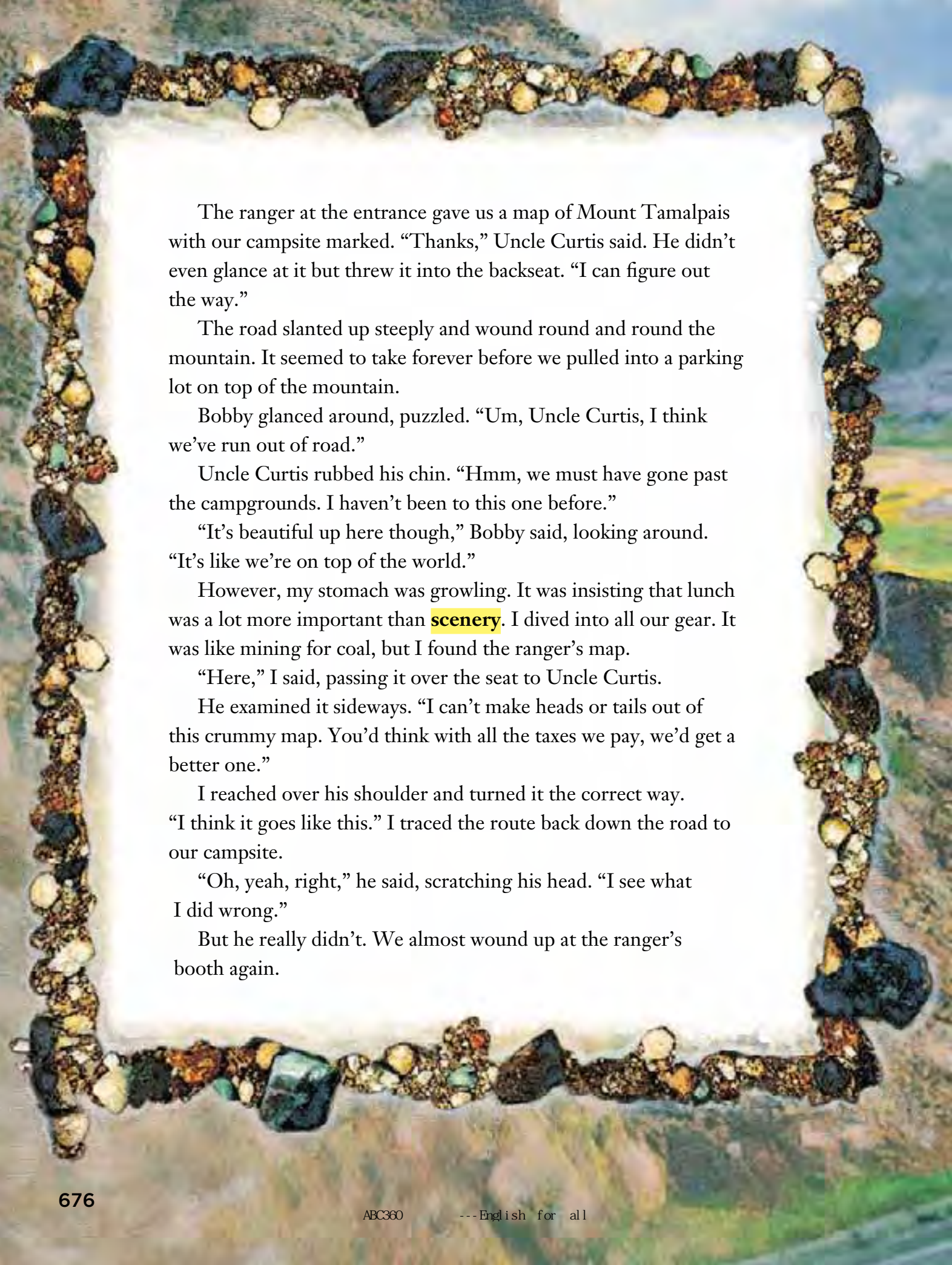
“And don’t you dare say anything except navigation stuff,” I warned Bobby.

This time we got off at the right exit. I began to wonder how Uncle Curtis found his own bathroom at home. Maybe Aunt Ethel put up signs.



### Make Judgments

Do you think Teddy’s actions on this page are appropriate? Why or why not?



The ranger at the entrance gave us a map of Mount Tamalpais with our campsite marked. “Thanks,” Uncle Curtis said. He didn’t even glance at it but threw it into the backseat. “I can figure out the way.”

The road slanted up steeply and wound round and round the mountain. It seemed to take forever before we pulled into a parking lot on top of the mountain.

Bobby glanced around, puzzled. “Um, Uncle Curtis, I think we’ve run out of road.”

Uncle Curtis rubbed his chin. “Hmm, we must have gone past the campgrounds. I haven’t been to this one before.”

“It’s beautiful up here though,” Bobby said, looking around. “It’s like we’re on top of the world.”

However, my stomach was growling. It was insisting that lunch was a lot more important than **scenery**. I dived into all our gear. It was like mining for coal, but I found the ranger’s map.

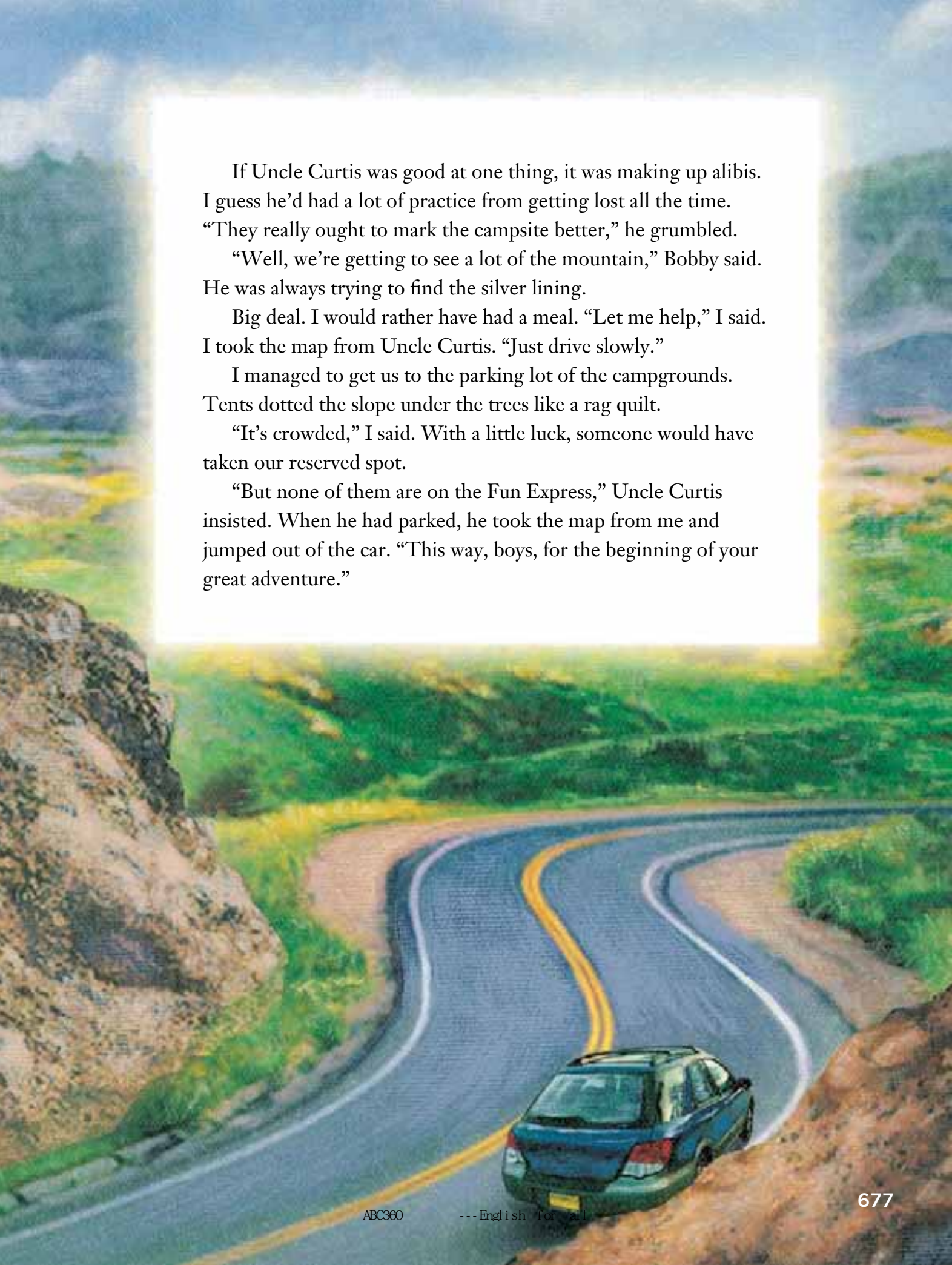
“Here,” I said, passing it over the seat to Uncle Curtis.

He examined it sideways. “I can’t make heads or tails out of this crummy map. You’d think with all the taxes we pay, we’d get a better one.”

I reached over his shoulder and turned it the correct way. “I think it goes like this.” I traced the route back down the road to our campsite.

“Oh, yeah, right,” he said, scratching his head. “I see what I did wrong.”

But he really didn’t. We almost wound up at the ranger’s booth again.



If Uncle Curtis was good at one thing, it was making up alibis. I guess he'd had a lot of practice from getting lost all the time. "They really ought to mark the campsite better," he grumbled.

"Well, we're getting to see a lot of the mountain," Bobby said. He was always trying to find the silver lining.

Big deal. I would rather have had a meal. "Let me help," I said. I took the map from Uncle Curtis. "Just drive slowly."

I managed to get us to the parking lot of the campgrounds. Tents dotted the slope under the trees like a rag quilt.

"It's crowded," I said. With a little luck, someone would have taken our reserved spot.

"But none of them are on the Fun Express," Uncle Curtis insisted. When he had parked, he took the map from me and jumped out of the car. "This way, boys, for the beginning of your great adventure."

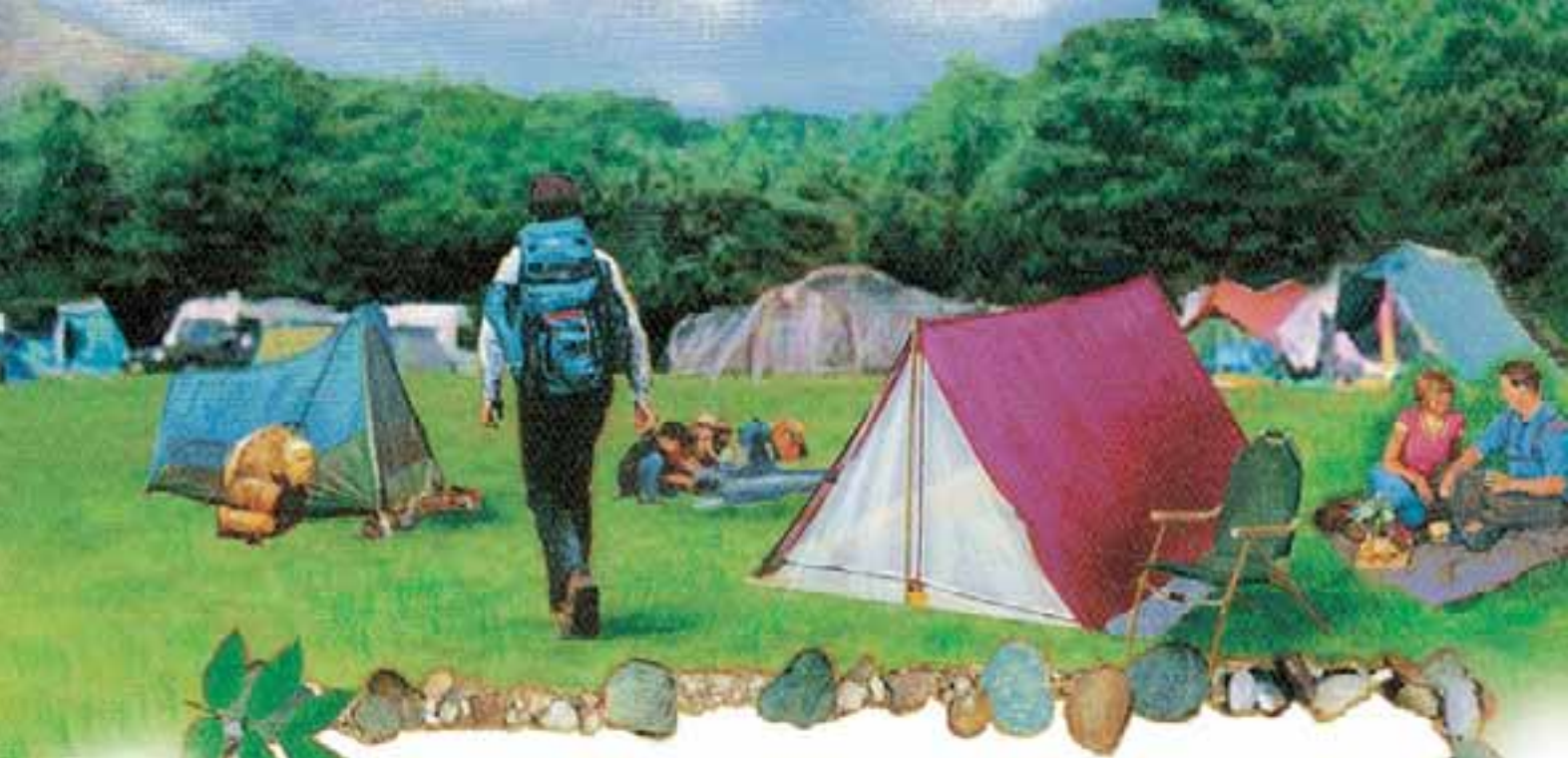


We followed him up a dirt trail from the parking lot to a patch by some trees. Uncle Curtis stopped. "This is it," he declared, folding the map into neat little squares. "The great outdoors!"

As I kicked at one of the many rocks on the ground, I didn't see what was so great about it. "Isn't fun supposed to be less lumpy?"

My parents are always scolding me about being so messy. However, they should have seen Mother Nature. There were all these pebbles and leaves littering the dirt. I would have tidied up a little, especially for paying guests.

Satisfied, Uncle Curtis surveyed the site. "All this fresh air! It's **guaranteed** to make you feel so tired, you won't notice any rocks."



I think you could get just as tired breathing bus fumes. However, I kept my mouth shut and helped unload the station wagon. Though it was a very cloudy day, it was still warm and muggy. Almost everyone was in T-shirts and shorts. However, Bobby and I were wearing our usual clothes for a San Francisco summer: sweatshirts and corduroy pants. The corduroy made a flapping sound when the trouser legs rubbed together.

Soon we were both sweating. In San Francisco, the thermostat was set to a sensible sixty degrees or so. Not like this oven. So finally we took off our sweatshirts and tied the sleeves around our waists.

I was glad Grandmother wasn't around. She would have made us keep them on, so we wouldn't catch cold.

As we worked, dust got into everything. It was all over my clothes. It was in my mouth. I felt like I was being buried alive.

It didn't seem to bother Uncle Curtis, though. He was humming happily as he unrolled the army surplus tent. Then he laid out the tent stakes where he wanted them. Finally, he took out an army shovel with a short handle. Unfolding it, he put it together quickly.

"Now I'll demonstrate the fine art of putting up a tent," he said. Kneeling, he used the flat of the shovel blade to hammer the stake into the ground.



“Me next,” Bobby said eagerly.

“You want to try everything, don’t you?” Uncle Curtis grinned but he surrendered the shovel.

I knew my little brother, so I stepped back. Bobby thought that energy could always make up for lack of **coordination**. Uncle Curtis, though, made the mistake of staying close to **supervise**. He almost lost a kneecap when Bobby whacked at the tent stake and missed.

“Easy there,” Uncle Curtis warned as he stumbled back.

Most of the time I try to get someone else to do all the work. But I saw another chance to prove I was just as good as my little brother.

“Let me have a turn,” I said, holding out my hand.

I guess Uncle Curtis figured Bobby could take forever. “Let Teddy do that. You help me get the tent ready.”

“But I want to do it,” Bobby complained.

Uncle Curtis rubbed his head. “The sooner we set up camp, the sooner I can show you around. Isn’t that what’s really important?”

Bobby grudgingly handed the shovel to me and helped Uncle Curtis unroll the tent itself.

The ground was a lot harder than it looked. But lifting all those boxes in the store had given me muscles. So I hammered away until I got the stakes in.

It took all three of us to put up the tent. I still thought it leaned a little when we were done.

Uncle Curtis inspected the tent ropes carefully. He acted as though they were the cables holding up the Golden Gate Bridge. Finally, though, he nodded his head in approval. “That looks good.”

When we had stowed our gear inside, I said, “I’m hungry. Let’s eat.”

“We’ve gotten used to eating Spam,” Bobby explained.

“When you ride the Fun Express, you dine first class,” Uncle Curtis boasted as he went over to the ice chest in the shadow of a big tree. He squatted down and undid the lid’s clasps. “I brought hot dogs and hamburgers. I’ll make you boys a feast.” When he raised the lid, fog rolled out around him.





Bobby and I jumped back. “What’s wrong?” my brother asked. “It’s just the dry ice.” I laughed. I was enjoying my moment of triumph.

Uncle Curtis fanned his hand over the chest to help blow away some of the fog. “Boy, Teddy, I know this is one batch of meat that’s not going to spoil.”

White ribbons crept out of the chest and down the sides while Uncle Curtis carefully lifted out a big parcel wrapped in pink butcher paper.

He lost his grin though. “It’s like a glacier.”

I poked at the package in his hands. It was cold enough to make my body and hands ache. Through the paper, I traced the shape of hot dogs. “They feel like rocks.”

Uncle Curtis lifted out the other package and hefted it over his shoulder like a shot put. “The hamburger’s like a lump of coal, too.”

I wasn’t going to let this ruin my achievement. “Let’s set them out,” I urged. “Part of one of these packages will thaw out and we can have that.”

So Uncle Curtis placed both packages out on a rock. “You boys have to get some firewood anyway. Just pick up the dead wood lying around. We’re not allowed to chop down any trees.”

“Right away,” Bobby said, heading out.

“Wait for me, oh, fearless leader,” I muttered, and wandered off after Bobby. “Just how much wood do you need to cook food anyway?” I asked the researcher. “I don’t think we can carry back a log.”

“The books didn’t say,” Bobby said, “but on television they always seem to use the wood about this thick.” He held his fingers apart about six inches.

In the movies, there’s always dead wood lying around, but all we could gather were twigs.

Disgusted, I looked at the handful I had. “This isn’t even enough for a broom.”

Bobby held up his own. “The other campers must have picked the mountain clean.”

When we returned, Uncle Curtis stared at the handful of twigs. “That’s okay for kindling. But where are the branches?”

“This is all we could find,” I confessed helplessly.

Uncle Curtis rubbed the back of his neck. “I was counting on using firewood.”

I saw a column of smoke rising a short distance away. “Maybe someone has spare firewood?”

“I’ll borrow some. Nature lovers always share with one another. It’s the code of camping,” Uncle Curtis said. Suddenly he slapped himself. “Ow. Darn mosquitoes.”

Apparently, there were other creatures besides humans having a meal. “I guess it’s time to use my birthday gift,” I said.

I went back to the tent. Something rustled in the brush nearby, but the bushes were too small for a bear to hide behind. So I went inside and got the mosquito repellent.

I can’t say it did much good. Even as I sprayed my arm, a mosquito flew right through the mist to land on it. “This stuff just makes us tastier to the mosquitoes,” I said.

I was hot, sweaty, being eaten alive, and hungry. So hungry that even Spam would have tasted good.

I poked each package in disappointment. “They’re still like ice.”

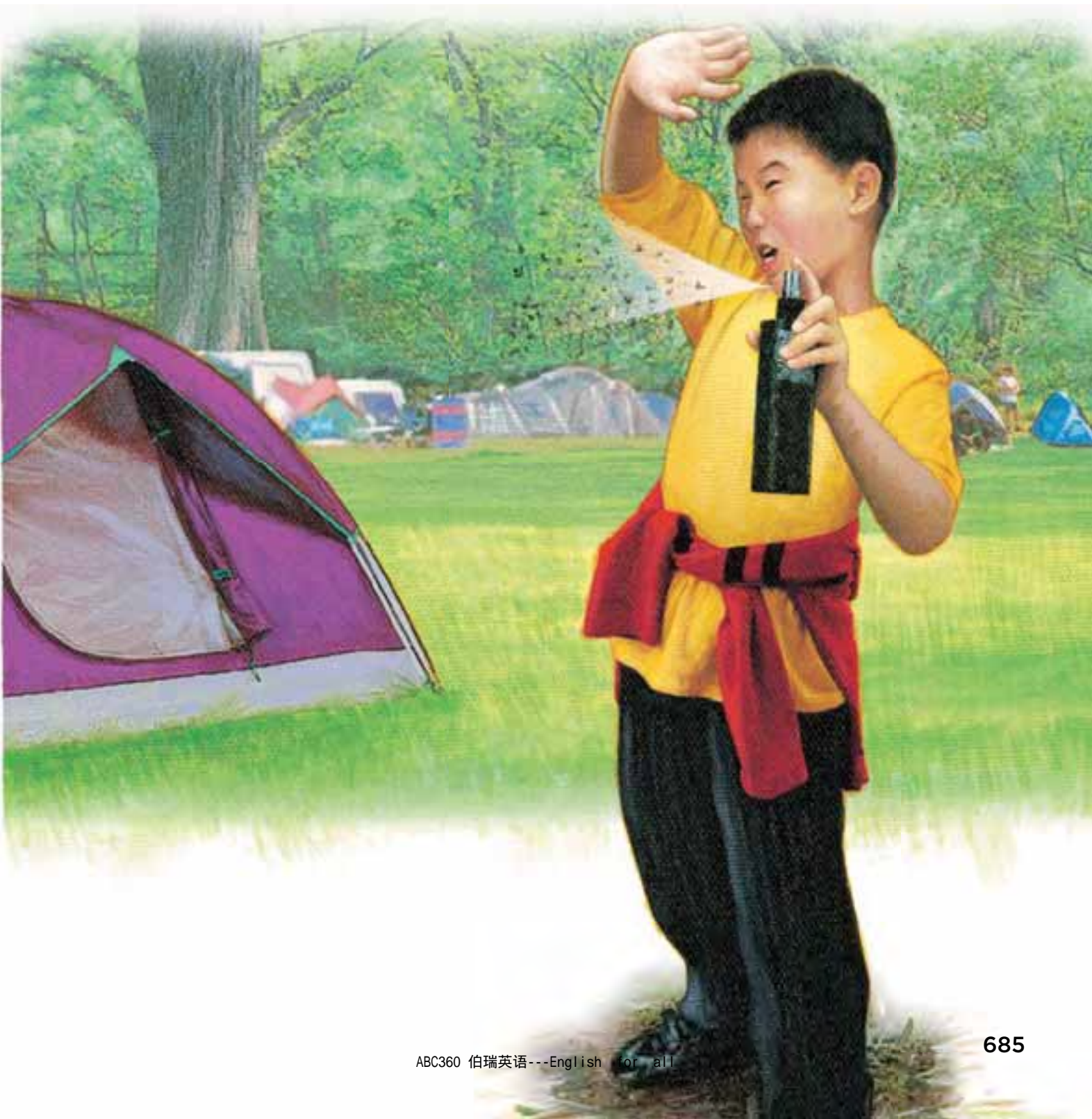
Bobby turned the packages over on the rock. They each clonked against the stone. “Darn dry ice.” **Frustrated**, he picked up the package and dropped it against the rock. It landed with a loud crack. I thought there was a fifty-fifty chance that either the rock or the meat had broken.

Uncle Curtis grabbed a package under either arm. “We’ll defrost the meat as we cook it. What’s the menu for today, boys? Hot dogs or hamburgers?”

Bobby punched cheerfully at the air. "Hot dogs!"

I guess the dry ice hadn't been such a good idea, after all. Sulking, I jammed my hands in my pockets. "I'll settle for anything that isn't part of the polar ice cap."

Uncle Curtis put the hamburger into the chest and snapped the clasps shut. "You boys bring the buns and mess kits. I'll bring the hot dogs."



The cooking area was an open space. A row of stoves had been built from stones and metal grills.

Uncle Curtis went over to a table where some campers were eating.

He came back with half a bag of charcoal. “Ten dollars for this,” he complained. “Fellow lovers of nature, my eye.”

“Well, maybe it’s the membership fee to the club,” I said.

Uncle Curtis shot me a dirty look as he poured charcoal from the bag into the pit beneath the metal grill. Without lighter fluid, it took a little work and a lot of fanning and blowing before the coals caught.

As the coals slowly turned red, we began to set our stuff out on a nearby picnic table.

The previous cooks had not bothered to clean the grill. Uncle Curtis, though, had brought a spatula. He used it to scrape the metal bars.

In the meantime, we unwrapped the paper. The hot dogs were **fused** together into a lump the size of a football. No matter how hard we tried, we could not break them apart.

“Wait.” Bobby proudly opened his borrowed mess kit and took out a fork. When he tried to pry a hot dog off, the tines bent.

We still hadn’t freed any hot dogs by the time the coals were ready. By now, Uncle Curtis was too impatient to be careful. Lifting the mass of hot dogs, he set the whole fused lump on the grill. “I’ll pry them off as they defrost.” Water began dripping onto the coals with loud hisses. As steam rose around the hot dogs, Uncle Curtis straightened the tines of the fork. Carefully he worked at one of the hot dogs. “Almost...almost,” he muttered.

With a plop, the hot dog fell through the grill and onto the coals. In no time, it was as black as a stick of charcoal. By the time this had happened to three more hot dogs, I tried to use a stick to **ease** them out of the coals.

Uncle Curtis shoved me back. “They’re dirty.”

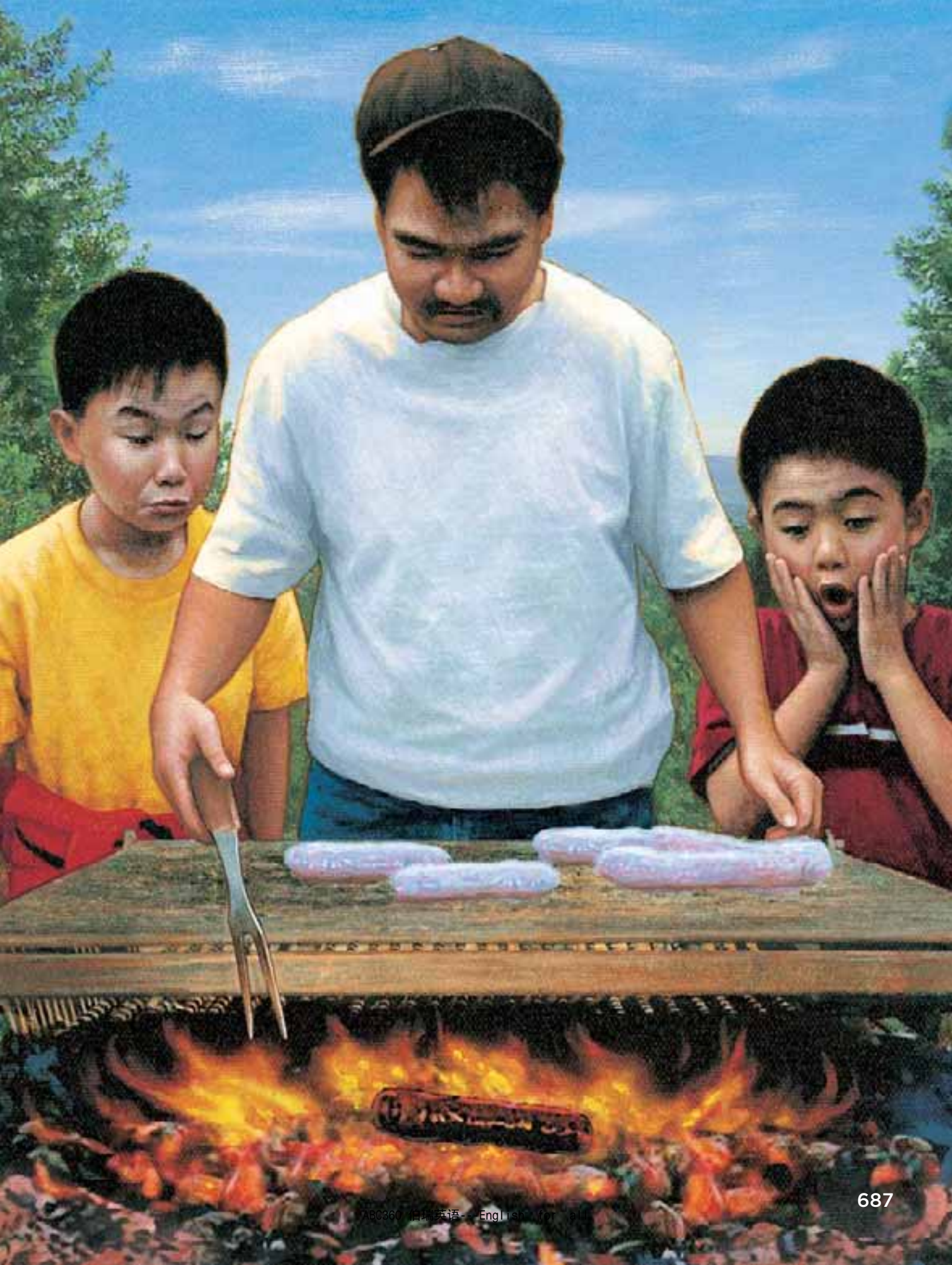
“I don’t care,” I admitted. “I’m hungry.”

“And they’re half raw, too.” He threw them into a trash can.

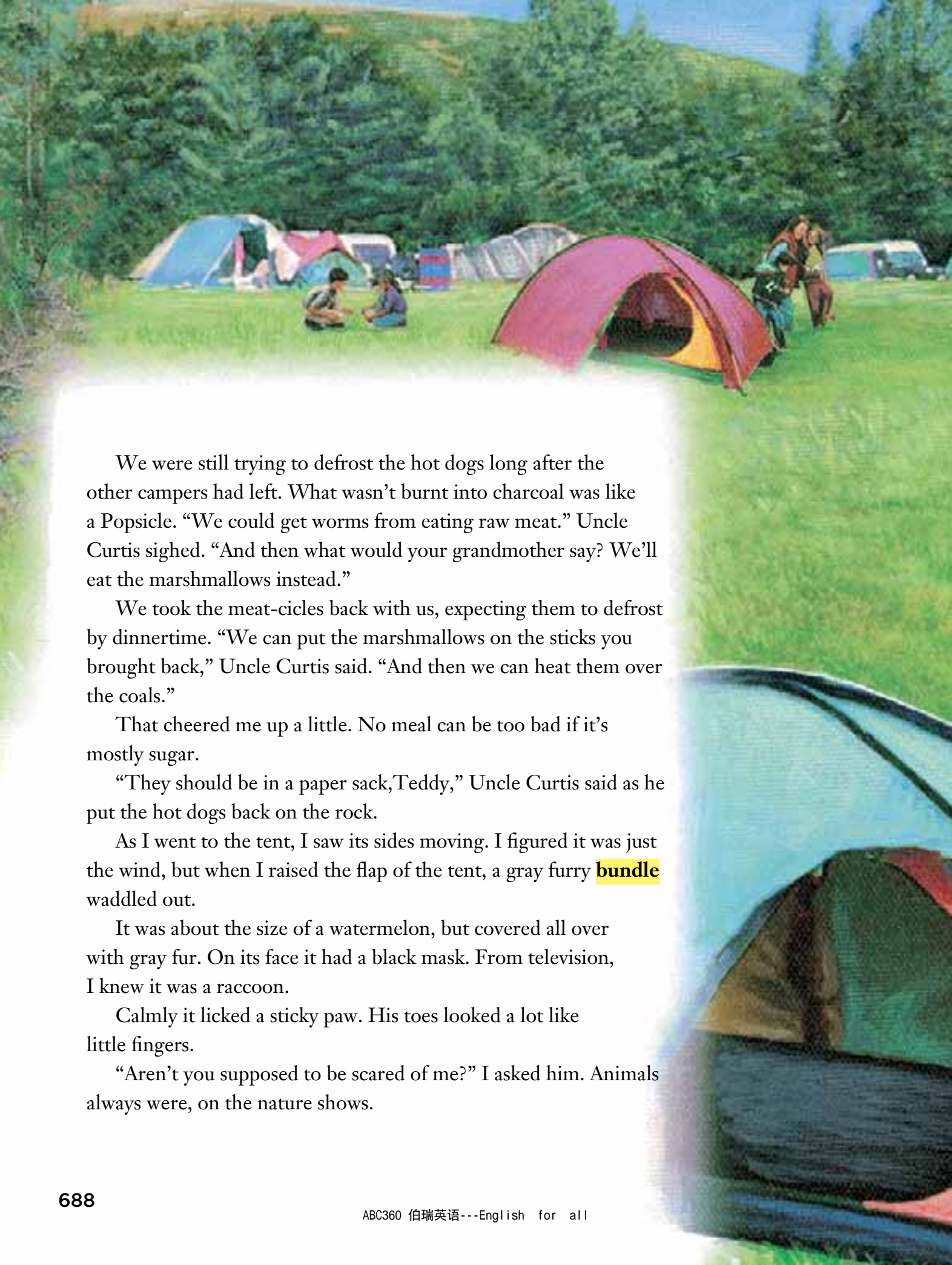


### Make Judgments

Was Uncle Curtis right to throw the hot dogs away?







We were still trying to defrost the hot dogs long after the other campers had left. What wasn't burnt into charcoal was like a Popsicle. "We could get worms from eating raw meat." Uncle Curtis sighed. "And then what would your grandmother say? We'll eat the marshmallows instead."

We took the meat-cicles back with us, expecting them to defrost by dinnertime. "We can put the marshmallows on the sticks you brought back," Uncle Curtis said. "And then we can heat them over the coals."

That cheered me up a little. No meal can be too bad if it's mostly sugar.

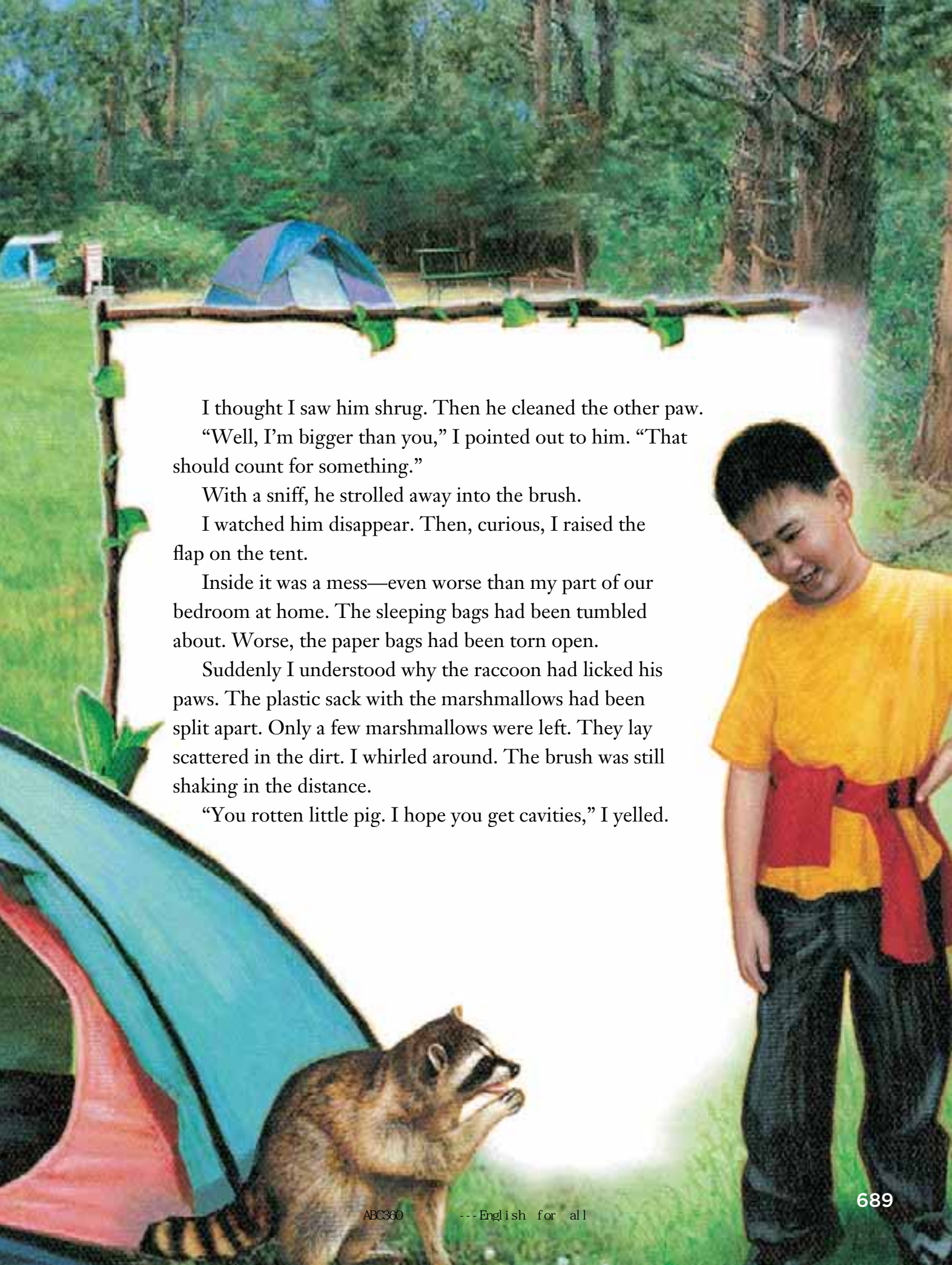
"They should be in a paper sack, Teddy," Uncle Curtis said as he put the hot dogs back on the rock.

As I went to the tent, I saw its sides moving. I figured it was just the wind, but when I raised the flap of the tent, a gray furry **bundle** waddled out.

It was about the size of a watermelon, but covered all over with gray fur. On its face it had a black mask. From television, I knew it was a raccoon.

Calmly it licked a sticky paw. His toes looked a lot like little fingers.

"Aren't you supposed to be scared of me?" I asked him. Animals always were, on the nature shows.




I thought I saw him shrug. Then he cleaned the other paw.  
“Well, I’m bigger than you,” I pointed out to him. “That should count for something.”

With a sniff, he strolled away into the brush.  
I watched him disappear. Then, curious, I raised the flap on the tent.

Inside it was a mess—even worse than my part of our bedroom at home. The sleeping bags had been tumbled about. Worse, the paper bags had been torn open.

Suddenly I understood why the raccoon had licked his paws. The plastic sack with the marshmallows had been split apart. Only a few marshmallows were left. They lay scattered in the dirt. I whirled around. The brush was still shaking in the distance.

“You rotten little pig. I hope you get cavities,” I yelled.



# Going Camping with Laurence Yep and Winson Trang



**Laurence Yep** got bit by the writing bug at his California high school. A teacher challenged his entire class to send their essays off to a national magazine. Laurence did, and soon after that he sold his first story. He was paid a penny a word! His advice to young writers: “Writing only requires one step to the side and looking at something from a slightly different angle.” Laurence still lives in California with his wife.

**Other books** by Laurence Yep:  
*Dragonwings* and *Dragon’s Gate*



**Winson Trang** is a book illustrator. He has illustrated many stories, especially those focused on Asian-American subjects. This is the second time he has worked with Laurence Yep. The first book they both worked on was *Child of the Owl*. Winson currently lives in Los Angeles with his wife and son.



## Author’s Purpose

Why is *Skunk Scout* considered to be realistic fiction? What are some details that Laurence Yep uses to make the story true-to-life as well as entertaining?



Find out more about  
Laurence Yep and  
Winson Trang at  
[www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)



# Comprehension Check



## Summarize

Use your Judgments Chart to help you summarize the chapter from *Skunk Scout*. The actions of the two brothers and their uncle while they were camping will help you organize your summary.

Action	→	Judgment
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	

## Think and Compare



1. Describe how your opinions about the characters might change if the story were told by Bobby instead of Teddy.  
**Monitor Comprehension: Make Judgments**
2. Reread pages 678–679. What can you tell about Teddy’s life at home? Use details from the story in your answer. **Analyze**
3. Would you enjoy going on a camping trip with Uncle Curtis? Explain why or why not. What **gear** would you bring with you? **Analyze**
4. Do you think it is important to preserve our national parks? Explain your answer. **Evaluate**
5. Reread “The Best Fourth of July” on pages 670–671. Compare and contrast the camping experiences that Teddy and Lateesha had. Use details from both stories to support your answer. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**

