

BOY HUNTED

Boy was tired. The back of his legs ached, and his arms were sore from carrying his spear. The pack had been walking for days now, stopping only to sleep and check for tracks. The elders could sense that they were getting closer to their quarry. Boy hoped it wouldn't be much longer.

A stab of pain blossomed across Boy's shoulders as the men started to sprint again. He bit his lip and pushed himself forward. He didn't say anything. This was his first hunt: he had to prove he was old enough.

Storm clouds swirled and spun in the sky, but mercifully the rain was falling in the distance. This high in the mountains, the rain would fall like ice, and the wind would bite through his wolf-skin cloak. A rumble of thunder, preceded by a white flash of lightning, startled the hunting pack.

Boy glanced around for a glimpse of the sun. It was hidden behind the clouds high in the sky. It had a long journey to evening, a long time before Boy would be able to rest. He stumbled, and his foot scraped against a sharp rock. He felt his skin tear but fought to regain his balance. Every step was even more agony now.

Up ahead, the men were disappearing over the brow of the hill. He called out, but his voice was washed away by the thunder. He stepped up his pace, screaming with every step, and pushed on. When he reached the top of the hill, where he'd last seen the rest of his pack, his breath stuck in his throat. They were nowhere to be seen. Ahead of him, a maze of towering rocks was punctuated by sharp, evergreen trees.

Surely they'll notice I'm missing? Boy hoped. There was a rock to one side, worn flat by the elements, so he perched on it and tried to make himself comfortable. Bony fingers dug into his muscles, no matter how he rearranged himself, but at least the taller rocks protected him from the worst of the growing storm.

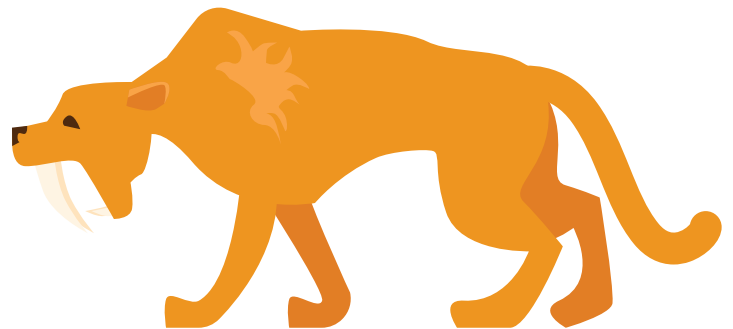
A heavy PUTT PUTT sound drew Boy's attention. He looked down and saw, with dismay, that the rains had reached them. That was a bad sign. If they fell for a long time, the river would burst its

banks, and his tribe would move on. He would have no way to find his way home.

He knew he was faced with an unenviable choice. He could push on and try to find the other men, with no idea of which direction they'd headed in nor how far they had travelled. Alternatively, he could turn around and try to make it home before the others moved on. He knew it would take him a few days to get back, and he'd be racing the storm every step of the way.

It wasn't really a choice and Boy knew it. There was no way he could catch the men now unless they'd stopped to wait. He tore a strip of leather from the hem of his trousers. He bound it tightly around the wound on his foot. It still hurt, but at least he might be able to run on it.

He stood up and grabbed his spear. A deep rumble behind him seemed to grab his shoulders and spin him on the spot. A pair of long, curved teeth filled his entire world. Boy's legs froze under the stare of the sabre-tooth tiger. His spear clattered to the floor from his unresisting grip. Time stretched out like an endless, silent ribbon.



VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find a word or phrase that means something came before it.
2. Which word has a definition closest to a quick or small view?
3. What is the "brow" of a hill?
4. What does the word "perched" tell you about how Boy sat on the rock?
5. What does the word "unenviable" tell you about the choice Boy had to make?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I

Why was it "merciful" that the rain was falling in the distance?

P

What do you think will happen next in the story? Why do you think this?

S

Why did Boy lose track of the men?

R

What weapon did Boy have with him?

I

Why didn't Boy tell the men how hard he was finding the hunt?

Answers:

1. Preceded
2. Glimpse
3. The top
4. He had to balance/it was uncomfortable
5. It wasn't a choice that anybody would want to make

I: If the rain fell where they were, it would be icy and cold

P: Look for predictions that link with the story - the men returning to save him, Boy fleeing towards home etc

S: He tripped on a rock and cut his foot. This slowed him down and they had disappeared.

R: A spear

I: He wanted to show that he was brave/ready for the hunt. He didn't want to seem weak.