

# THE CROWDED HOUSE

## A Folktale



Long ago, eight members of the Rubin family lived in a little house that seemed terribly **cramped** and crowded. Papa, Mama, their four children, Aunt Gert, and Grandmother Rubin were always getting in each other's way. They complained unhappily that one day they might **burst** right through the walls. So Papa and Mama went to the wisest man in the village, Reb Solman, to ask for advice.

Reb Solman stroked his beard thoughtfully as he listened. Then he said, "Yes, I can help you, but you must do exactly as I say, no questions asked." Papa and Mama **eagerly** agreed.

"The first thing you must do," Reb Solman told Mama, "is to invite your sister and her family to visit."

"But, Reb Solman," said Mama worriedly, "my sister and brother-in-law have three big sons, so how will five more people in our crowded house solve our problem?"

Reb Solman replied, "Remember—you promised to obey and ask no questions."

So the five relatives arrived, and everyone was elbowing each other and tripping over feet, and the walls **trembled** as if about to explode. After several days, Papa ran back to Reb Solman and pleaded, "Oh, it is unbearably crowded and noisy now. Please, what should we do?"

Reb Solman said, "Bring your chickens, goat, and cow into the house." Papa blinked hard when he heard that, but he had promised to obey, so he did as he was told.

A few days later, Papa returned to Reb Solman. In an exhausted voice, Papa said, "The noise, the smells, the crowding—the situation is impossible."

Reb Solman said, "Send your relatives home, and put the animals outside."

So the visitors left, and the animals went outside where they belonged. The eight members of the Rubin family breathed a big sigh of relief. "I never knew that our house could feel so **spacious**," said Mama as she looked around.

"It certainly feels as if our house has grown bigger," said Papa. "Reb Solman is a very wise man." And everyone, smiling in agreement, relaxed in their remarkably roomy house.



## The Crowded House: A Folktale

### KEY VOCABULARY

- **cramped** (adjective) *Cramped* means uncomfortably small.
- **burst** (verb) To *burst* is to suddenly split or break open.
- **eagerly** (adverb) *Eagerly* means in an interested or hopeful way.
- **trembled** (verb) To *tremble* means to shake.
- **spacious** (adjective) *Spacious* means having a lot of space.

- ▶ How many people live in the Rubin's house at the beginning of the story? Who are they?
- ▶ Explain why Mama questioned Reb Solman's advice.
- ▶ Illustrate and describe the Rubin's house at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the story.
- ▶ If the Rubins had not taken Reb Solman's advice, what might the ending have been?
- ▶ Do you think Reb Solman is wise? Why or why not?
- ▶ How would you have solved the Rubin's crowded house problem?

# TWO DESERTS

Great mounds of golden sand bake under a blazing sun. A line of camels is crossing these sand **dunes**. The people riding the camels are dressed to protect themselves from the heat and windblown sand. What is this place? It is the **Sahara** Desert, the largest desert in the world. It spreads across northern Africa.

The Sahara's dunes may seem to stretch forever, but these "sand seas" cover only part of this **vast** desert. The Sahara also has flat, stony lands as well as mountains. In places, underground water rises to form springs where trees and plants grow. In these **oases**, farmers grow crops.

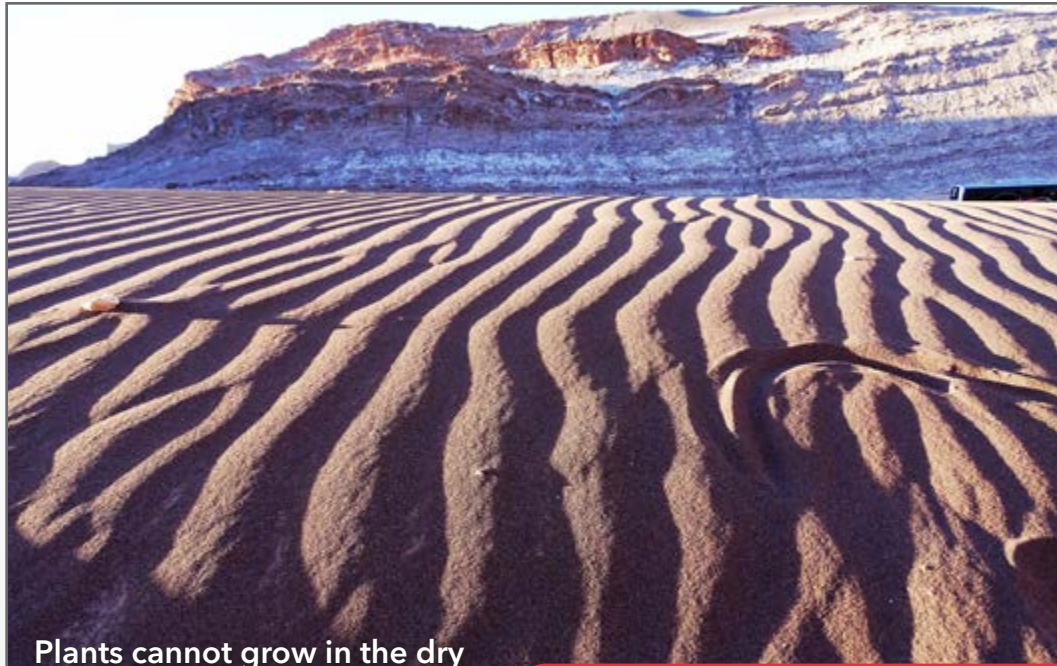


The Sahara is called a hot desert, but not all of it is hot year round. Still, the summer sun can roast the air. At one spot, the **temperature** once soared to a record-breaking 136 degrees F (58 degrees C).

All deserts are dry lands. The yearly rainfall in the Sahara is less than 10 inches (25 **centimeters**), often, much less. Some places

Sand dunes cover only part of the Sahara Desert.





Plants cannot grow in the dry soil of the Atacama Desert.

here get no rain for years. Yet the Sahara is not the driest desert in the world. That record belongs to the **Atacama** Desert of South America.

The Atacama lies between high mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The mountains stop **moist** air from reaching the desert land, and the cold ocean also acts to prevent rain. The yearly rainfall in the Atacama is less than .004 inches (.01 centimeters). Some spots have not had rain since recordkeeping began 400 years ago! With soil this dry, no plants can grow.



Unlike the Sahara, the Atacama is a cool desert. There are few scorching summer days but on winter nights, the temperature is often below freezing.

The Sahara and the Atacama are both deserts. They are alike in some ways, and different in many others.



## Two Deserts

### KEY VOCABULARY

- **dunes** (noun) A *dune* is a hill made of sand.
- **Sahara** (proper noun) *Sahara* is the name of a desert.
- **vast** (adjective) *Vast* means very great in size.
- **oases** (noun) An *oasis* is a spot in the desert where water is found.
- **temperature** (noun) *Temperature* is the amount of heat in something.
- **centimeters** (noun) A *centimeter* is a unit of length.
- **Atacama** (proper noun) *Atacama* is the name of a desert.
- **moist** (adjective) *Moist* means slightly wet.

- ▶ What is the largest desert in the world? What is the driest desert in the world?
- ▶ Explain why it rarely rains in the Atacama Desert.
- ▶ Choose one of the deserts. What would you pack if you were planning a visit?
- ▶ What might you see if you visited the Sahara Desert that you might not see if you visited the Atacama Desert?
- ▶ Which desert would you like to visit in the summer? Which desert would you rather visit in the winter? Why?
- ▶ Imagine a creature that is well-suited to live in the Sahara and another creature that is well-suited to live in the Atacama. Illustrate these two imaginary creatures, and label the features that would help each survive.

# In Grandfather's Day

Sharr and her brother Kaze were visiting Grandfather to **celebrate** his 75th birthday. Grandfather was born way back in the year 2000, and the two grandchildren always liked to hear about life in the olden days, when he was a boy.

"What was it like before there were Mindcaps?" Kaze asked.

"We typed on a keyboard," Grandfather replied, wiggling his fingers over an imaginary keyboard.

"Or we tapped a touchscreen," he added, **demonstrating** with two fingers.

"That must have been so slow," said Sharr.

"We didn't have thought commands back then," said Grandfather as he placed a Mindcap on his head and glanced at the Wallscreen. The wall lit up with a photograph taken of Grandfather as a boy. "I'm standing in front of our family's car," Grandfather explained.

"Was it fun to drive such a big car?" asked Kaze.



Grandfather **chuckled**. "I was only ten years old, so I couldn't drive a car. Drivers needed special training because driving was dangerous. Today, accidents don't happen. A child can sit in a Plugger, give a thought command, and off it scoots. Nobody dreamed of such a thing back in the early 2000s."

Grandfather blinked at the Wallscreen, and a new image appeared, this one showing seven-year-old Grandfather and his mother in the kitchen of their house.

"What is Great-Grandmother doing?" asked Sharr.

"She is cooking a pot of stew on the stove," said Grandfather. "It took hours."

Sharr said, "I'm glad we have Menu-Mems, because who wants to wait hours to eat? Just give a thought command to the slot, and out comes the meal."

Grandfather was smiling as he stared at the picture. "I remember it like it was yesterday," he said dreamily. "I helped peel potatoes while Mom chopped up carrots. The kitchen filled with spicy warmth as the stew **simmered** in the pot." Grandfather breathed in deeply, as if sniffing a wonderful **aroma**.

Kaze and Sharr studied the picture. Then Kaze said, "I wonder what a home-cooked meal tastes like." Sharr nodded in agreement.

"It is **unforgettable**," said Grandfather with a sigh.







## In Grandfather's Day

### KEY VOCABULARY

- **celebrate** (verb) To *celebrate* is to do something fun or special.
- **demonstrating** (verb) To *demonstrate* is to show clearly.
- **chuckled** (verb) To *chuckle* is to laugh quietly.
- **simmered** (verb) To *simmer* is to boil gently.
- **aroma** (noun) An *aroma* is the smell of something.
- **unforgettable** (adjective) *Unforgettable* means very easy to remember.

- ▶ Name three examples of technology available to Sharr and Kaze that were not invented when Grandfather was a boy.
- ▶ Explain how Mindcaps and Pluggers changed people's lives.
- ▶ How might you use thought commands in your life?
- ▶ Compare and contrast Grandfather's childhood to that of Sharr and Kaze.
- ▶ Do you agree with Sharr that Menu-Mems are a good thing? Why or why not?
- ▶ How do you think life will be different when you are 75 years old?



# Potatoes and Tomatoes

## From Poisonous to Popular



What would the world of food be like without the potato and the tomato? Dishes from all over the globe contain these two popular plants. But these two have a lot more in common than their popularity.

They both began in the **Andes** Mountains of South America, around what is now Peru. For thousands of years, farmers in this **region cultivated** these plants as food crops. People outside of Latin America knew nothing of the potato and the tomato. They grew nowhere else.

Then, in the 1500s, armies from Spain **invaded** Latin America to **conquer** the Incas, the people that ruled in these regions. The invaders were called the Conquistadors ("conquerors"). Along with the other treasures that they claimed, the Conquistadors brought tomato and potato plants back to Europe.



Spanish armies invaded the Andes region and brought potato and tomato plants back to Europe.

For Europeans, both plants were a novelty, something unknown to grow and display. They were not eaten, however, because most Europeans were convinced these plants would kill them. This is not so strange. Both belong to the Nightshade family of plants, many of which are poisonous. And so are parts of the potato and tomato plants.

The part of the potato plant that we eat is the vegetable that grows underground. The leaves and stems that grow above-ground are the poisonous parts of the plant. The tomato is a fruit that grows above ground. The fruit is good to eat. It is the tomato plant's vines and leaves that are poisonous.

But two cultures helped change people's minds, turning tomatoes and potatoes into foods loved round the world.

Italy gets the credit for first making the tomato popular in Europe. The Italians began growing and eating tomatoes in the mid-1500s and on, making it a major part of their **diet**. (It still is!) By the 1700s, the tomato had spread around the world.

It took a bit longer for the potato. The people of Ireland, realizing how cheap and easy the potato was to grow, began to depend on it by the late 1700s. By the 1800s, the potato, too, had spread around the world.





## Potatoes and Tomatoes: From Poisonous to Popular

### KEY VOCABULARY

- **Andes** (proper noun) *Andes* is the name of a mountain range.
- **region** (noun) A *region* is an area.
- **cultivated** (verb) To *cultivate* is to grow plants for a specific purpose.
- **invaded** (verb) To *invade* is to enter and try to take over a place.
- **conquer** (verb) To *conquer* is to take control of.
- **diet** (noun) *Diet* is the variety of foods that a group usually eats.

- ▶ Describe how potatoes and tomatoes were introduced to Europe.
- ▶ Think about the most important facts from this passage and summarize what you read.
- ▶ Make a timeline showing how tomatoes and potatoes became popular around the world.
- ▶ If the people of Italy and Ireland did not discover that tomatoes and potatoes were safe to eat, how might your life be different?
- ▶ Do you think the Conquistadors should have brought tomato and potato plants back to Europe? Why or why not?
- ▶ Imagine owning a restaurant that serves foods made from only potatoes and tomatoes. Keep in mind the history of both plants. Design an ad or a webpage that includes the restaurant's name, logo, and sample menu items.



# A Modern-Day Dragon

**W**hat do the words *giant lizard* make you think of? One of the enormous dinosaurs that once roamed the land? Or maybe the imaginary dragons from fairy tales and fantasy films? None of those lizards actually exist in our world, but there is a rather large lizard that does. It's even got dragon in its name.

**Komodo** dragons are the largest and heaviest lizards living on Earth. The biggest on record measured 10.3 feet (3.13 meters) in length and weighed 366 pounds (166 kilograms). But generally, these creatures are smaller, at about 8 feet (2.5 meters) long and weighing about 200 pounds (91 kilograms).

Like all lizards (and dragons), Komodo dragons have teeth, scaly skin, four legs, clawed feet, and a long tail. They can't fly like



dragons. But like many other lizards, they can climb and swim. They also move like their smaller relatives, twisting from side to side, using their tails for balance. This movement comes from the placement of their legs. Lizards' legs stick out to the side, rather than under their bodies. This **arrangement** doesn't slow up Komodo dragons. They can reach speeds of 11 mph (18 kph) for short distances.

Something else the Komodo dragon has in common with



The Komodo dragon uses its long forked tongue to “smell” the air.

dragons and smaller lizards is a long forked tongue. It uses its tongue to “smell” the air. If the wind is right, it can smell a dead animal up to 5 miles (8.5 kilometers) away.

The Komodo dragon cannot breathe fire, but its mouth contains a different weapon. Its bite is poisonous. This causes **fatal** infections in any prey that manages to escape. The Komodo dragon then tracks down the poisoned animal.

There are 3,000-5,000 wild Komodo dragons living at any one time, all on volcanic islands in **Indonesia**. They are named for the largest of these islands, Komodo.

According to fossil evidence, these **creatures** originated 25 to 40 million years ago. But the Komodo dragon was unknown to most of the world until about 100 years ago. Then some Dutch **soldiers** had a run-in with one and sent its photograph to a nearby zoo.

Now the world knows that there really *are* dragons.



Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands.

## A Modern-Day Dragon

### KEY VOCABULARY

- **Komodo** (proper noun) *Komodo* is the name of a large island in Indonesia and a lizard that gets its name from the island.
- **arrangement** (noun) An *arrangement* is the way things are positioned.
- **fatal** (adjective) *Fatal* means causing something to die.
- **Indonesia** (proper noun) *Indonesia* is the name of a country.
- **creatures** (noun) A *creature* is an animal or other being.
- **soldiers** (noun) A *soldier* is a person who serves in an army.

- ▶ Where do Komodo dragons live?
- ▶ Explain how Komodo dragons hunt for food.
- ▶ Illustrate a Komodo dragon and label the parts of its body.
- ▶ How are Komodo dragons different from dragons in fairy tales?
- ▶ Would you want a Komodo dragon as a pet? Why or why not?
- ▶ Imagine you are a Komodo dragon. Write about or discuss a typical day in your life.