

Playground Mystery



by Michèle Dufresne



- 1 “Oh gross!” said Josh. “It’s dead.”
- 2 Josh and Justin stared down at the furry animal with a long, skinny tail. It lay sprawled on the ground near the swings. Its tongue hung out of its open mouth.
- 3 “Gross!” agreed Justin. “It’s going to stink.”
- 4 “This will make Haley puke,” said Josh. “Let’s get her!” The boys snickered.
- 5 Justin looked around and spotted Haley kicking a soccer ball with some kids in the field. “There she is,” he said.
- 6 They raced over, and Josh shouted, “Hey, Haley! Come check out this super interesting animal. We’re wondering what it is—maybe you can figure it out!”
- 7 Haley tossed the ball to one of the other kids and asked, “There’s an animal on the playground? You don’t know what it is?”
- 8 “Nope!” said Josh. “It’s different than any creature I’ve ever seen. Since you are always photographing animals, we thought you might know! If you have your camera, you can get its picture.” Josh knew Haley always had her small camera and wouldn’t resist an opportunity to take an animal’s picture.
- 9 Haley followed them back to the swings. But when they got there, the animal had disappeared!
- 10 Josh and Justin looked at each other, then scanned the playground. “Hey, where’d it go?” Josh exclaimed.

- 11 Haley's brows knitted together, and she leaned over, studying the ground. "Ah, look!" she said, pointing to some tracks in the mud next to a half-eaten apple. "It probably was attracted by the apple, but you scared it off! Hmmm ... interesting tracks!"
- 12 They all stared at the prints that looked like little hands with four fingers and a thumb. There also was a curvy line that looked like the animal had been dragging its tail.
- 13 "It was going to wait for its photograph," said Josh. "Because it was *dead!*"
- 14 "Dead!" cried Haley. "You brought me here to take a photograph of a dead animal?"
- 15 Josh and Justin shuffled their feet. "Well, er, kind of," said Justin. "It was super gross!"
- 16 "Ha! You were just trying to make me sick. You're both such jerks!" She stomped off.
- 17 "What happened to the animal?" asked Josh. "Who would take a dead animal?"
- 18 Justin's eyes widened. "Do you think it's like supernatural?" he asked.
- 19 "Like an animal spirit that is haunting the playground!" Josh said breathlessly.
- 20 The boys began spreading the tale of the mysterious, disappearing dead creature. "It had a long tail. Its tongue was sticking out like this," Josh told a group of second graders. He demonstrated with his tongue.
- 21 Soon the story had spread through the whole school, and the kindergartners began refusing to go out for recess.
- 22 "There's a disappearing spirit animal on the playground," Haley's little brother told her on the way home from school.
- 23 Haley sighed, and that night she got her dad to take her to the library. She asked the librarian to help her find a book on opossums. The next day, she pulled the book out of her backpack and pointed to a picture on the cover. "Did the animal look like this?" she asked Justin and Josh.
- 24 "Yeah," said Josh. "Only it was dead!"
- 25 "And came back to life and walked away," added Justin.
- 26 "No," said Haley. "You saw an opossum. If they feel threatened and feel they can't escape, they play dead. He was just fooling you, hoping you'd leave him alone and go away!"
- 27 "You mean it wasn't really dead?" asked Josh.
- 28 "Nope," said Haley.
- 29 "There isn't a supernatural creature haunting the playground?" asked Justin.
- 30 "No animal spirit that is waiting to eat our brains?" asked Josh.
- 31 "No, just a simple opossum that knows how to fool a bunch of third-grade boys!" laughed Haley.

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Test Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. What is the lesson learned in this story?

- a. It is more important to be a good friend than to be a strong friend.
- b. Research and clues can sometimes help you to problem-solve.
- c. Research and clues can sometimes bring animals back to life.
- d. It is more important to study dead animals than living animals.

2. This question has two parts. First answer Part A, and then answer Part B.

Part A: Which of the following character trait words best describes Haley?

- a. curious
- b. terrified
- c. shy
- d. rude

Part B: Which detail from the text best supports your answer to Part A?

- a. Justin looked around and spotted Haley kicking a soccer ball with some kids in the field.
- b. “It probably was attracted by the apple, but you scared it off! Hmmm ... interesting tracks!”
- c. “Dead!” cried Haley. “You brought me here to take a photograph of a dead animal?”
- d. The boys began spreading the tale of the mysterious, disappearing dead creature.

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Test Questions (*continued*)

3. What is this story mostly about?

- a. Josh and Justin make Haley laugh.
- b. Haley gets grossed out by a dead animal.
- c. Haley is determined to solve the playground mystery.
- d. Josh and Justin want the playground to themselves.

4. What might have happened if Haley hadn't solved the mystery?

- a. They were afraid that there would be a spirit animal that might harm them.
- b. They were upset that the animal would not be on the playground.
- c. They were upset at Josh and Justin for tricking Haley.
- d. They were afraid that Haley would take a picture of them looking for the animal.

5. What does the phrase *resist an opportunity* mean as it is used in the following sentence from the passage?

Josh knew Haley always had her small camera and wouldn't **resist an opportunity** to take an animal's picture.

- a. gain a chance
- b. prevent a chance
- c. care about a chance
- d. lose a chance