Name _____ Date _____

The Camping Trip

Short story · 4th–5th grade

Ava had never been camping, and she was pretty sure she wouldn't like it. There would be bugs. There would be no Wi-Fi. And worst of all, there would be her cousin Jonah, who was twelve and acted like he knew everything.

The campsite sat beside a lake ringed with tall pines. Jonah showed her how to stake the tent, explaining every step as if she were five. Ava rolled her eyes and hammered the stakes extra hard.

By evening, though, the lake turned gold and then purple, and the air smelled of pine needles and woodsmoke. Uncle Ray told a story about a moose that wandered into a grocery store, and Ava laughed until her side hurt.

That night in the tent, the sounds began. A crackle of branches. A long, low hoo-hoo. Then something scratching right outside the tent wall. Ava froze, her heart pounding so hard she could hear it.

"Jonah," she whispered. "Are you awake?" "Yeah," he whispered back, and his voice was shaking too. "I hate the noises," he admitted. "I always have. I just pretend I don't."

Ava was so surprised she almost laughed. Jonah, scared? She clicked on her flashlight. "Let's look together." They unzipped the door an inch and shone the light out. Two shiny eyes blinked back: a raccoon, holding a marshmallow it had stolen from their bag. It waddled off into the dark.

The cousins collapsed into giggles. Then they lay awake whispering until the stars faded: about school, about friends, about the things that scared them. Jonah, it turned out, was pretty funny when he wasn't showing off.

In the morning, as they packed up, Ava caught herself wishing for one more night. "Same time next year?" Jonah asked. "Only if you bring a raccoon-proof marshmallow bag," said Ava.

Questions

1. How did Ava feel about camping at first?

2. Why did Ava roll her eyes at Jonah?

3. What surprised Ava in the tent?

4. What was making the noise outside?

5. How did Ava's view of Jonah change?

6. What is a theme?

7. Why do you think Jonah pretended not to be scared?

8. How did the sensory details help you picture the campsite?

The lesson in my own words

Answer Key

1. She didn't think she would like it.
2. He acted like he knew everything.
3. Jonah was scared too.
4. A raccoon.
5. She found out he was funny and also got scared.
6. Courage means facing fear, and people can surprise us.
7. Answers will vary.
8. Answers will vary.

Lesson: Courage isn't the absence of fear, and people are often braver and kinder than we expect.