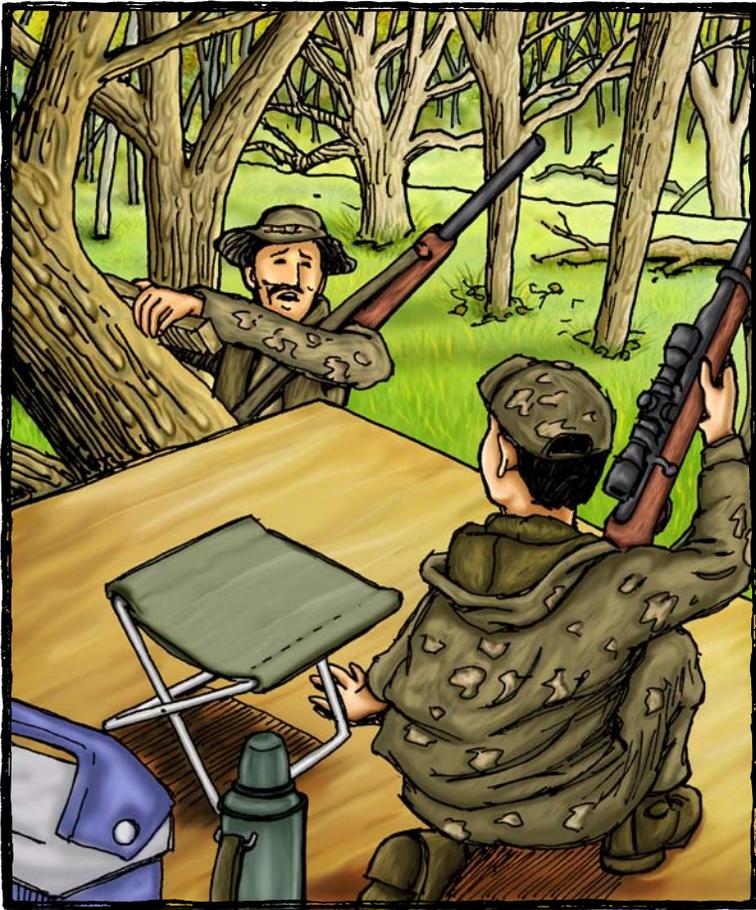


The Hunting Trip

A Reading A-Z Level R Benchmark Book
Word Count: 851



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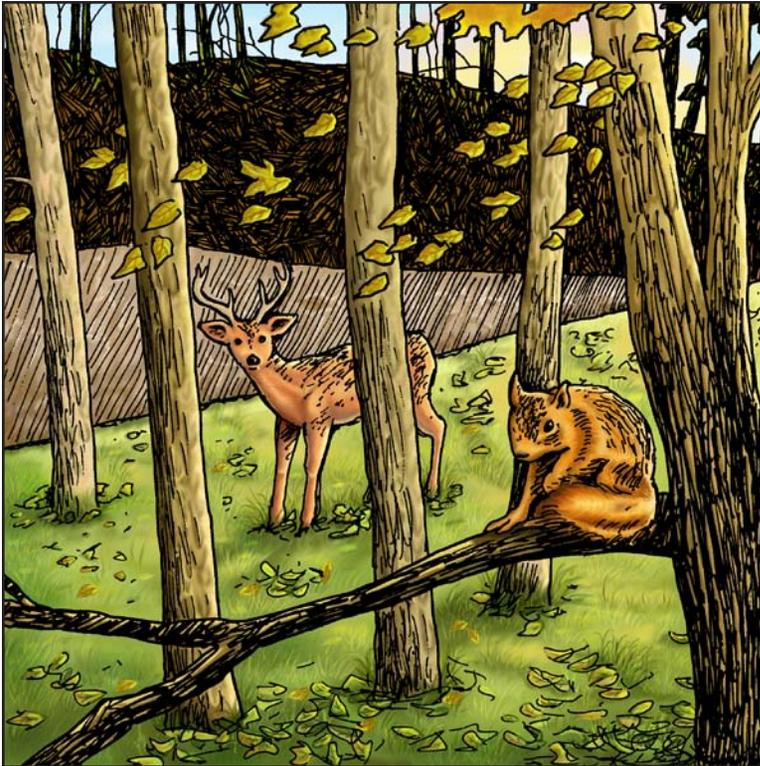
The Hunting Trip



Written by Katherine Follett
Illustrated by John Kastner

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Level R Benchmark Book
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Correlation

LEVEL R

Fountas & Pinnell	N
Reading Recovery	30
DRA	30



José scurried up a makeshift ladder, which was nothing more than strips of scrap wood nailed to the trunk of the ancient oak. He pulled himself onto the flimsy sheet of plywood that served as the floor of the tree stand. He gently set his rifle down and took a seat in one of the two aluminum folding chairs while his father slowly followed him.

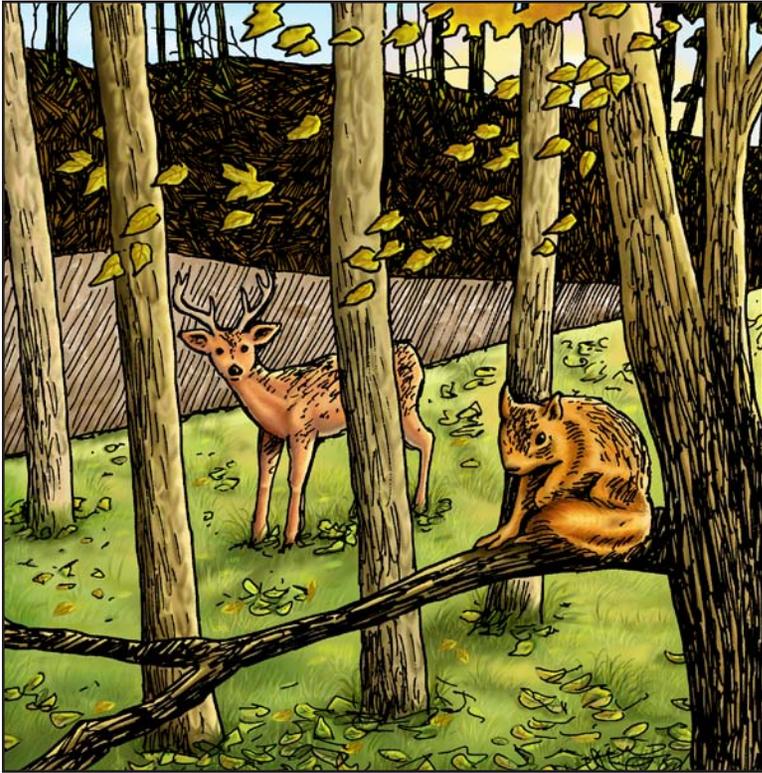
José noticed that his father was slightly out of breath when he reached the top, stopping to pull a Thermos of steaming coffee from his deep jacket pocket and **grimacing** as he swallowed. José felt his own chest constricting and realized he had been holding his breath for some time. He recalled his father's advice about nerves: "Deep breaths work better than you think." He drew a big lungful of air. His father heard him exhaling.

"You nervous?" he asked.

"No . . . well, a little," José admitted.

"Just remember that we're the only ones out here for miles. I'd be the only one to see you if you did anything **embarrassing**, and I've seen you do plenty of embarrassing things," his father chuckled.

"I know," José said. He took another deep breath, tasting the freshness of the woods around them, watching the vapor cloud materialize in front of his face. But he still clutched the barrel of his **rifle** so tightly that his fingers grew numb. He **regretted** being so



anxious, unable to truly enjoy the beauty of the forest around them. The open meadow below the tree stand was dim and frosty on this early November morning.

“Now that we’re set in our place, we’ll need to wait quietly for about half an hour before the animals forget we’re here. Until then, we probably won’t see a thing,” José’s father explained.

Remaining still for half an hour dragged on forever, and as his father had promised, they saw nothing. But just as the minute hand of José’s watch seemed about to give up and freeze altogether, he heard a rustle—a squirrel. Soon he heard other creatures; crows and ravens flapped overhead, cawing and croaking, leaving José wondering whether the birds’ breath also left little clouds in the air. Three or four rabbits browsed among the leaf litter underneath the tree stand. Suddenly José and his father heard the sharp footfalls of their approaching **quarry**—the white-tailed deer.

All the hunting advice José’s father had ever given him began to rush through José’s head: “Don’t ever shoot unless you’re absolutely sure you see antlers—we don’t want to kill a doe, and we certainly don’t want to kill another hunter.” “If you can’t see more than half the deer’s body at one time, you’re too far away and there are too many trees and bushes between you and it.” “Aim just ahead of where you want to hit, because deer move when you least expect them.”

As if fulfilling a checklist in José's brain, a buck stepped smoothly into view. It definitely had antlers, it was in plain view, and José aimed his rifle just ahead of its chest. The buck was big and sleek, with soft brown eyes and a white rump under its flicking tail. José marked it in his **crosshairs**, feeling the trigger underneath his finger.

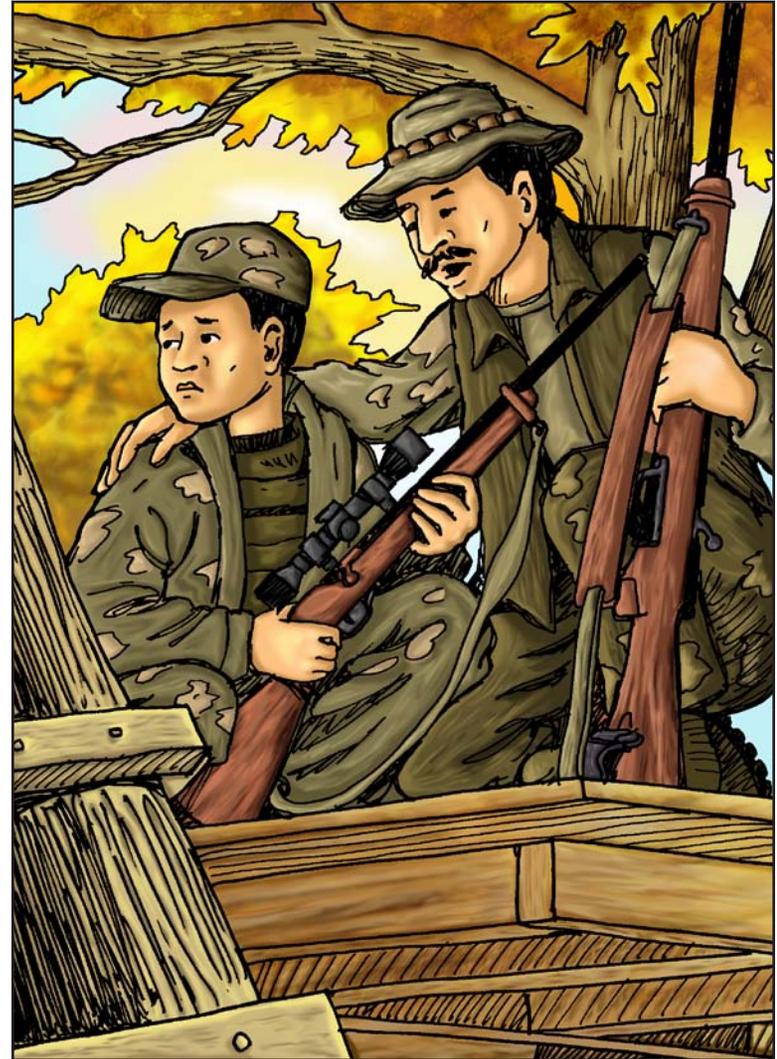
"José," his father said, not even whispering as he pointed his chin toward the buck, "go ahead."

"No," José said out loud, lowering his rifle. The deer surely heard him, for it swiveled its ears around until all of its senses focused on the tree stand, **alert** and confused, before it jogged away.

"Are you angry with me?" José asked his father.

"No, José, I'm not. In fact, I did the very same thing the first time I went out hunting with my father."

José felt **relieved**. "Really?" he said.



"I have a lot of time to think when I'm out here alone in the tree stand, and I've decided something about hunting. When we buy meat at the supermarket, we never see the animal it

comes from. But when we hunt, we see the animal, and we shoot the animal, and we take it home and eat its meat. It's more than just eating—it's an **interaction** between one person and one animal. And sometimes the animal looks at you, and you know you shouldn't shoot it. Sometimes I feel proud to get a buck, like I've won a race or I'm a cougar that caught its prey. But sometimes I feel like you just felt, and I'm glad you have that sense, too. If you shoot even when your heart tells you not to, that means you're killing without caring, without paying attention to the interaction between you and the animal. Some people never shoot, and some people don't think hunting is right at all, and that's okay, too."

José inhaled deeply and relaxed for the first time all morning. His father took out the Thermos again, popped the cup off the top, filled it, and handed it to José.

"You want me to drink coffee?" José asked.

"It's hot cocoa," his father answered. "I brought it for you."

Glossary

alert (<i>adj.</i>)	watchful and attentive to one's surroundings (p. 7)
crosshairs (<i>n.</i>)	the two fine lines that cross in the eyepiece of an optical instrument (p. 7)
embarrassing (<i>adj.</i>)	feeling awkward, uneasy, or self-conscious (p. 4)
grimacing (<i>v.</i>)	twisting the face to show pain or disgust (p. 4)
interaction (<i>n.</i>)	an exchange of ideas or information between different people or groups (p. 9)
quarry (<i>n.</i>)	an animal that is hunted or chased (p. 6)
regretted (<i>v.</i>)	felt sad or sorry about previous words or actions (p.4)
relieved (<i>adj.</i>)	freed from stress or worry (p.7)
rifle (<i>n.</i>)	a gun with a long barrel that has spiral grooves inside to make the bullet spin (p. 3)