

Lesson 30

MYSTERY

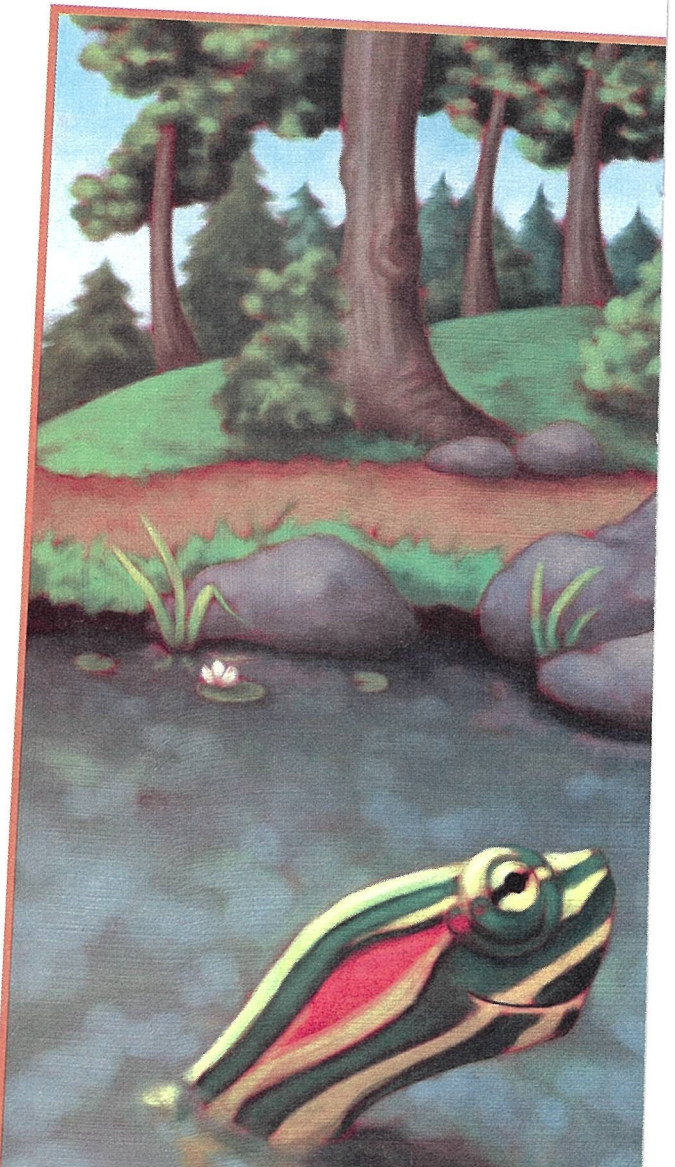
Once a week, Ms. Cabrera's science class spent an afternoon outside, working in teams to observe different habitats. Adrian, Mara, and Nicole were assigned pond patrol. Adrian wondered if his team had gotten the best assignment because of his extra-sharp eyes.

Reed's Pond lay at the end of a shady, sloping path. Pine trees towered overhead. Bushes and moss-covered rocks rimmed the shore. Adrian had been the first one in class to spot the turtle at the pond—even though its brown shell and wrinkled skin blended in perfectly with its surroundings.

"Here, Brownie . . . here, Brownie," Adrian whispered as he approached the water's edge. But today, the turtle that peeked from the water looked different. Instead of a little brown face, this one

had streaks of red near each eye.

"Brownie? Are you wearing makeup?" From what Adrian could see, the turtle's shell looked different, too. Today it was green with yellow stripes.



at Reed's Pond

The girls hurried over. When the turtle came up for another breath, Nicole noticed the changes, too.

"That's not Brownie. That's a different kind of turtle," she said. "Its name should be Red Dot."

"Maybe Brownie's somewhere else," said Mara.

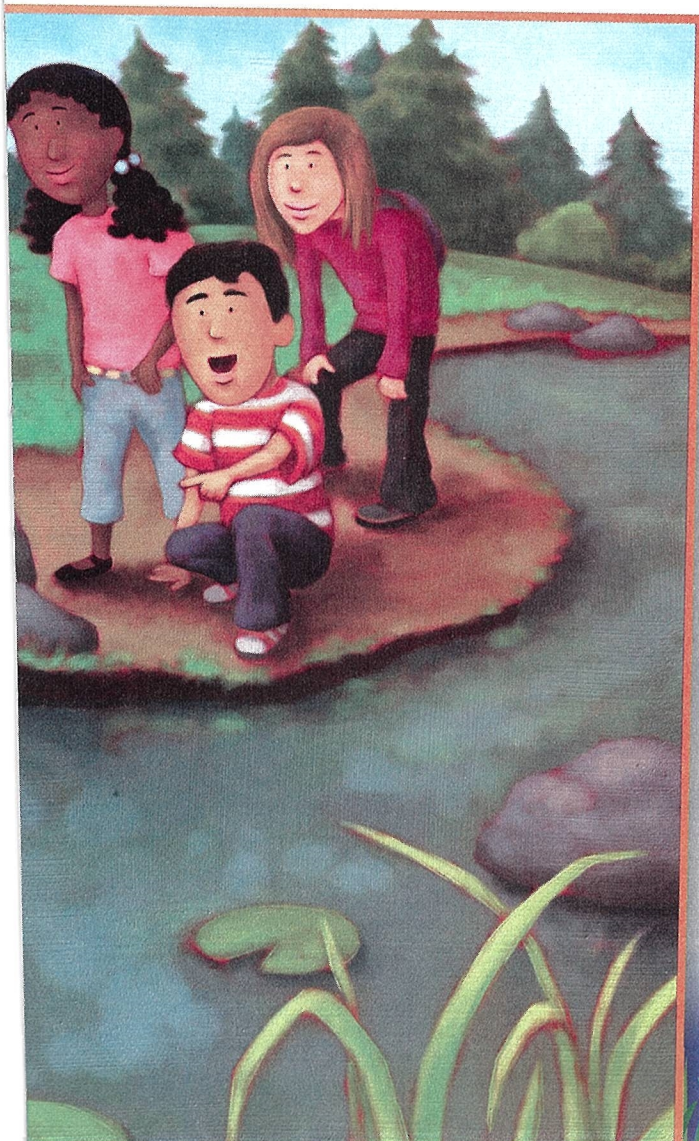
They continued their pond patrol, but Adrian had a strange feeling that something wasn't right. Sure enough, his hunch was correct.

"Look!" Mara shouted. She was pointing at a bird's nest or what used to be a bird's nest.

Just last week they had written about the nest in their logs. It was a carefully made cup of sticks nestled in a low-hanging branch. There had been three brown eggs in it. Now the branch was broken. The bowl was squashed into a messy ball.

"Where are the eggs?" asked Nicole.

Adrian crouched under the branch, which jutted out over some rocks at the water's edge. He saw one egg smashed into a crevice between two rocks. He couldn't see any sign of the other two eggs.



“Do you think an animal did this to the nest?” Nicole wondered.

“An animal couldn’t have turned Brownie into Red Dot,” said Adrian.

“And an animal wouldn’t have left this,” said Mara. She held up a shopping bag that she had found. “There’s lettuce in it. Maybe it’s a clue.”

“A clue to what?” asked Nicole.

Ms. Cabrera’s whistle blew. It was time to go back to class.

“We need to do some more investigating,” said Mara. “Let’s meet here Saturday, when we have more time.”

The weather on Saturday was sunny and warm, but no one else was at the pond. Nicole, Mara, and Adrian scanned the area. Adrian soon found the new turtle. It sat basking on a rock at the edge of the water. When it saw the three children, it quickly slid into the water. The ripples spread and soon faded. Then Adrian, Mara, and Nicole went to investigate the bird’s nest. The clump of sticks remained, but there were no new clues about what had destroyed the nest or where the two eggs had gone.

Many turtles like to bask, or warm themselves, in the sun.





"This is the case of the missing turtle and eggs," Mara said.


"Shh," whispered Adrian. He could hear leaves crunching on the path. "Someone's coming. Hide!"

The three crouched in the bushes. Through the leaves, they could see a teenaged boy wearing a blue backpack. At the edge of the pond, the boy swung it from his shoulder and knelt down. Adrian held his breath. He could hear his heart beating. Had the boy noticed them?

The boy seemed to think he was alone, however. He reached into his

backpack and pulled out a turtle whose shell was as big as a plate. It was bright green, with yellow and green markings on the belly. Suddenly the turtle's head shot out of the shell and snapped at the boy's wrist. The boy dropped the turtle into the pond. The splash rang out as loud as a slap. Adrian saw the red dashes on the turtle's face.

The boy darted back up the path and quickly vanished.



"So that's where Red Dot came from," whispered Nicole.

"Red Dot was already here on Thursday, though," said Adrian. "This is the same kind of turtle, but it's not the *same* turtle. Also, what about Brownie? Where's he?"

"We've got to talk to that boy," said Mara. "Come on." Adrian wasn't sure it was a good idea, but Mara was already running up the path. He and Nicole followed.

"Excuse me!" Mara called out when she reached the field. The boy turned to look but kept striding toward his bike.

"I just want to ask you about the turtle," Mara said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," the boy said. "I don't know anything about turtles." He got on his bike.

"We just saw you drop one into the pond!" Mara shouted. It didn't matter. The boy pedaled off without looking back.

"Something fishy is going on," Nicole said.

"Something turtle-y, you mean," replied Adrian.

"I think it's time for a little research," said Mara.



Red-eared sliders are popular pets.



On Monday, they told Ms. Cabrera what they had seen. During science, she gave them time to research on the computer. Mara typed the words *red dot turtle* into the search engine. Links for turtleneck sweaters, Turtle Island, and a video game came up.

"This won't help," said Nicole.

"Don't give up yet," said Mara. She typed in *red turtle*. That was better. Lots of listings appeared for a turtle called a red-eared slider. The first thing Mara did was to click on the images.

"That's it!" said Adrian, as a photo appeared. "That's Red Dot, all right."

With a few more mouse-clicks, the students learned that the turtles were common pets. They also learned that the red-eared slider's natural habitat was east of the Rocky Mountains. "So what is one doing in a pond in California?" asked Nicole.

Mara typed *red-eared slider in California* into the search engine.

Among the listings of turtles for sale and questions about pet turtles, they saw an article from a California paper. The three of them read silently.

The article told about people dumping their pet turtles into local waters and the problems that occurred as a result. "Mystery solved!" said Mara.

"Ms. Cabrera!" they called.

"It looks like the pond patrol might have uncovered some illegal activity," Ms. Cabrera said when they told her what they had learned. "Let's report it to the water district."

That Thursday, Ms. Cabrera's class had a special observation day at the pond. Mr. Roberts, an officer from the water district, was with them. He had brought nets for capturing the red-eared sliders. Adrian spotted the first one, basking near the ruined bird's nest. Working together, the class helped Mr. Roberts catch two more.

"We'll take them to a turtle sanctuary," Mr. Roberts explained. "It's a place where they keep the turtles safe until someone can adopt them."

While Mr. Roberts talked, Adrian was looking for his old friend.

"Brownie!" said Adrian when he saw the head peek up. "Look, Mr. Roberts. That's the turtle I'm used to seeing."

"That's a western pond turtle. It's just the kind of turtle we want to see around here."

"I never knew what kind he was. I just knew I liked him," said Adrian. *Western pond turtle*, he wrote in his log.

Western pond turtles live in California, Oregon, and Washington.





"We got the sliders out just in time. Red-eared sliders are big. They eat the same things as the western pond turtles, and the western pond turtles can't compete," said Mr. Roberts.

"What about the bird eggs?" asked Nicole. "Did the turtles have anything to do with those?"

"Probably, but we can't be sure," said Mr. Roberts. "Red-eared sliders like to bask on nests. They can squash the nests and crush the eggs."

"That's another reason why people shouldn't leave their pets here," said Ms. Cabrera. She was posting a sign on a tree. **DON'T DUMP YOUR PETS. BRING PET TURTLES TO VALLEY TURTLE SANCTUARY.**

"Thanks for helping us save the native species," Mr. Roberts told the class. "I have something for Adrian, Mara, and Nicole." He handed them each an envelope and a patch that said *Water District* with a picture of a river.

"The water district invites you to be its first junior officers," Mr. Roberts said. "We'd also like to offer each of you a scholarship to ecology camp this summer. You can talk it over with your parents."

"Thanks!" said Adrian. He'd never thought his sharp eyes would actually help wildlife survive.

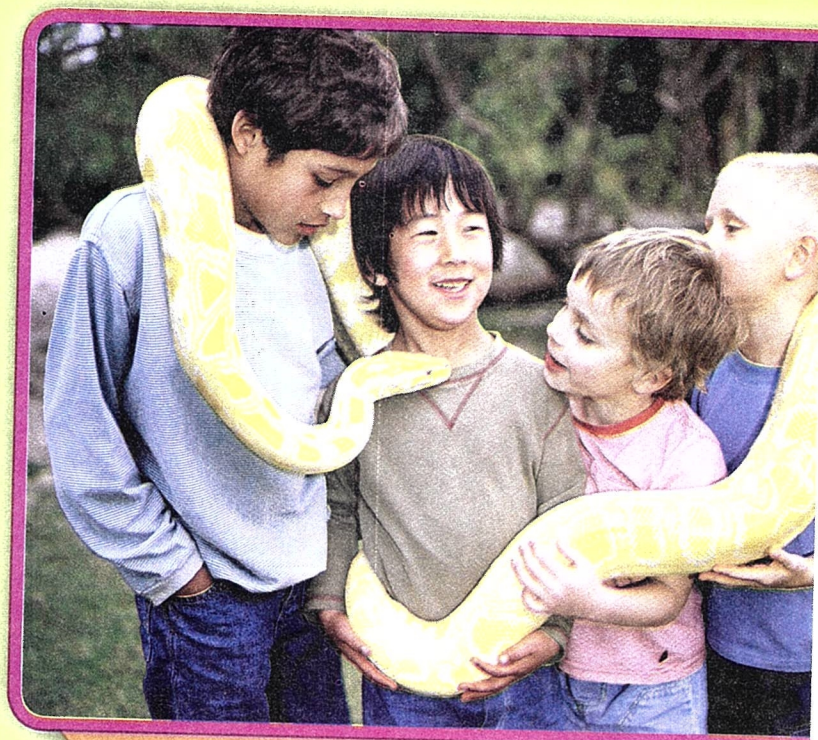


A Dangerous Predator

Pythons come from Asia and Africa and are among the longest snakes in the world. They can grow to be more than twenty feet long—longer than a large pickup truck. Their bodies can be as thick as a telephone pole. Pythons' mouths can stretch so wide they can swallow prey as large as deer and alligators.

Surprisingly, baby pythons are popular pets in this country. But pythons grow quickly. In a year, a tiny baby can become an eight-foot long snake. As time passes, it grows even bigger. Many owners have trouble caring for such large, dangerous animals. Sometimes, they take their snake and leave it in the wild.

In most areas of the United States, pythons wouldn't have enough warmth, water, or space to survive. Places like southern Florida, though, have a perfect climate for pythons. Because of this, pythons are causing serious trouble in Florida's Everglades National Park.



Adult pythons can weigh up to 200 pounds.

Python Problem

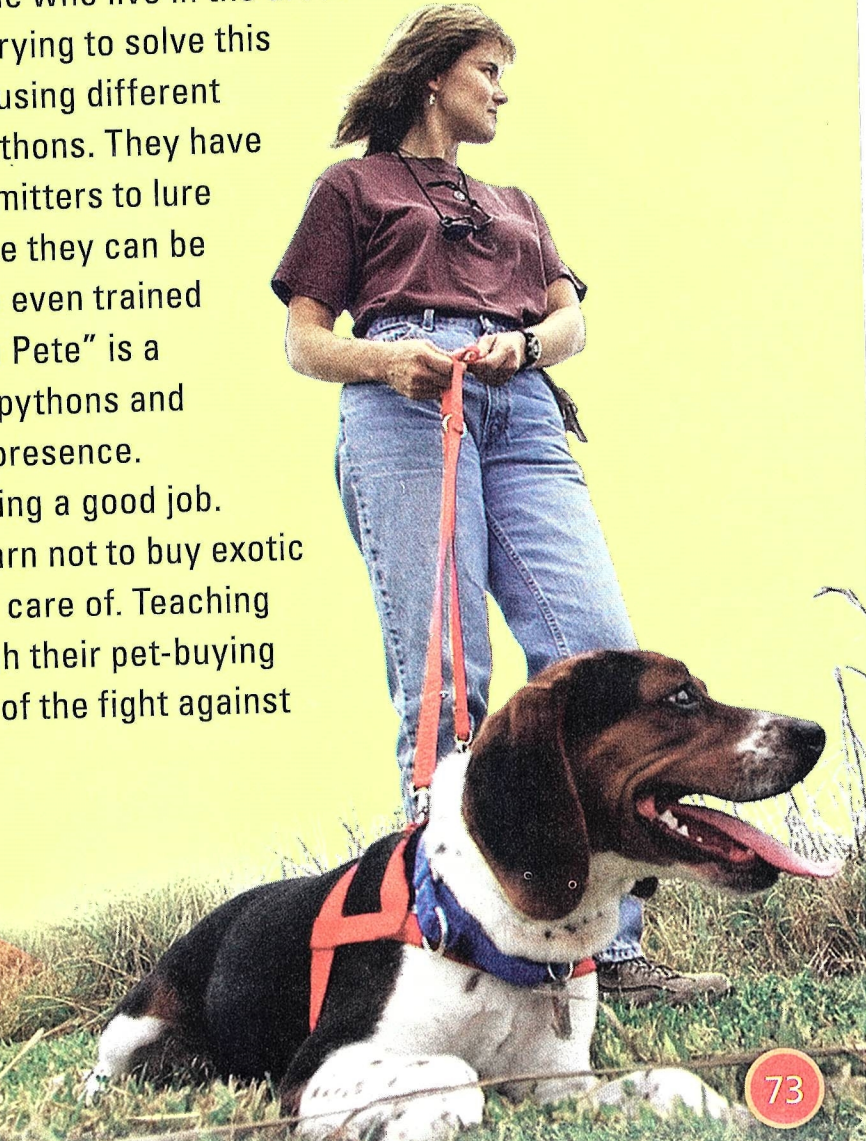


Can the Problem Be Solved?

Scientists are not sure how many pythons are in the Everglades, but they estimate that there are thousands. The big snakes eat the animals that make their natural home in the park. Some of these animals are endangered, such as the Key Largo cotton mouse and the white ibis, a water bird. Pythons have also eaten the pets of people who live in the area.

Park officials are trying to solve this big problem. They are using different methods to capture pythons. They have tried using radio transmitters to lure snakes to places where they can be caught. And they have even trained a dog to help. "Python Pete" is a beagle that can smell pythons and alert humans to their presence.

Python Pete is doing a good job. But people have to learn not to buy exotic pets they cannot take care of. Teaching people to think through their pet-buying decisions is also part of the fight against the python.



Python Pete has been trained to pick up the scent of pythons.

Naming the Turtle

by Patricia Hubbell

Slowpod,
Weightlifter,
Housemover,
Homelover.

Seaflipper,
Rainstopper,
Pond-land-
and-stream-dweller.

Platepacker,
Boneback,
Hardshell
and Softhat.

Clicktoe
and Stare-eye,
Budhead
and Stemneck.

Nob-bob and
Lookslow,
Spotback
and Ridgetop.

Plod-plod
and Plopplop,

Logloving
Rockstone.



Greater Flamingo

by Tony Johnston

Pale as the pink lip
of a shell, it drinks from its
cool green reflection



YOU BE THE DETECTIVE

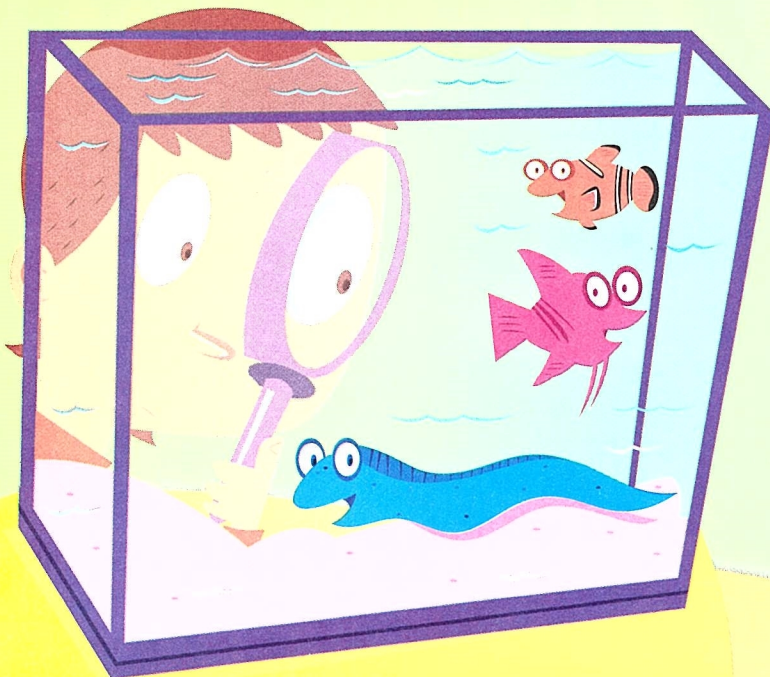
Read about the events below. From the set of clues, draw a conclusion about what happened.

The Missing Clown Fish

The Ringling School's Grade 4 class has a saltwater aquarium. It contains an eel and three large angelfish. On Monday, a family donates two colorful clown fish. On Tuesday morning, Roy Gee, "the class clown," reports one clown fish missing. What happened?

CLUES

- The school's night janitor says the clown fish looked fine at 7:00 p.m.
- Roy Gee says he'll be the other clown fish's friend.
- The three large angelfish are still in the aquarium and look no different.
- The eel does not eat its regular frozen shrimp on Tuesday morning.
- A book about the care of eels is unopened. In fact, it's covered with a layer of dust.



The eel ate the clown fish. Because the class hadn't read the eel book, they didn't realize the danger. Angelfish are big enough to avoid being eaten by the eel.

Choose Your Words

Using just the right word can help a reader understand exactly how something looks, sounds, acts, or feels.

The following Found Pet announcement is on a bulletin board. You finish it. On a piece of paper, write a list of words and phrases to fill in the blanks. Make sure they describe the pet and other details exactly.

Have you lost a _____ snake?

I found a snake in _____. The snake looks _____. When I try to hold it, the snake _____. I think it is feeling _____. I think it may be a python, because it _____. The only sound it makes is _____. I'm keeping the snake in _____. Hurry!



Pets Need You!

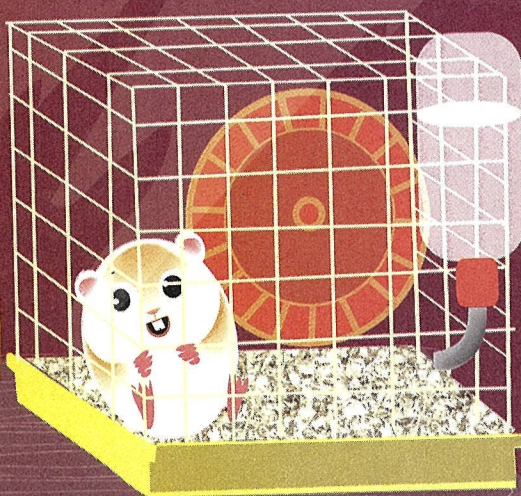
Having a pet can be hard work. Sometimes pet owners can't take care of their pets any longer but don't know what to do with them. You've read about some problems this causes.

Search on the Internet for information about how to care for pets properly. Then write an essay of at least three paragraphs that an animal shelter employee might hand out to someone thinking about caring for a pet.



ANIMAL SHELTER

Do I have
time to care
for a pet?



Here are some tips:

- 🐾 Start with an introduction to possible pet owners. Encourage them to think about whether owning a pet is right for them. End the essay with a conclusion that sums up your ideas.
- 🐾 Give examples of the responsibilities of pet ownership (food, water, shelter, exercise).
- 🐾 Give examples of problems that can be caused when people abandon their pets (problems for the pet, for the environment, and for animal shelters).
- 🐾 Use a variety of sentence types and clear transitions between paragraphs.