UNIT 13: Finding Gold in the Clouds

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Finding Gold in the Clouds

"I can't believe we're visiting a cloud forest!" Carlos exclaimed, stepping out of Dr. Oust's van. He added timidly, "I wonder how big the snakes are around here."

Carlos, Mai-Lin, and LaShonda had tied for first place in a science **competition**. First prize was a trip to the cloud forest in Costa Rica. The great scientist, Dr. Seymour Oust, had picked them up from the airport and driven them to his lab deep in the forest.

The chorus of sounds in the rich green of the terrain amazed the three friends.

A peaceful mist soaked the cloud forest. Mai-Lin took out her camera and snapped pictures of everything she saw.

The doctor could barely **contain** his excitement as they entered the lab. "The three of you are very lucky to have won that contest. It is a very thrilling time!" He grinned. "You three will be assisting me with an unbelievable scientific discovery!" LaShonda asked, "What is it, Dr.

Oust?"

"I believe I have discovered an animal species that scientists think has been gone from the planet for many years," he explained.

Remember, the setting describes where the characters are.



The author is telling us more about Dr. Oust. How do you think Dr. Oust feels about his work?



The kids are going to be inlved with some kind of scientific discovery. Maybe it's about some kind of plant or animal. What do you think?

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"The golden toad was one of the world's most interesting creatures." Dr. Oust pointed to the wall. The three friends stared at dozens of photographs of a bright orange toad with black eyes.

"It lived only in the cloud forest, and its population was **abundant**," he continued. "People traveled from around the world to catch a glimpse of it." He shook his head sadly. "But no one has seen the species in 20 years."

Mai-Lin could sense the doctor's distress. "What happened?" she asked.

Dr. Oust sighed. "The climate of the cloud forest has changed over the years.

The scientist seems upset about the extinction of the Gold Toad. Why would it matter if a species became extinct?

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Many believe this caused the toads to become extinct." Suddenly he grinned again. "Yesterday I was exploring a section of the forest I'd never been in before. I came through a clearing in the trees and found a small pond. Just as I turned to leave, I heard it!"

Carlos, Mai-Lin, and LaShonda stood frozen. They were completely absorbed in the doctor's tale.

He continued, "The chirping call of the golden toad! It could be the solitary surviving member of the species!"

Carlos was astonished. "Wow! We could discover a new animal or a really old species!"

LaShonda whispered to Mai-Lin, "Ten minutes ago, Carlos was worried about the snakes!" Both girls giggled.

Dr. Oust peered at the students. "Would you like to start your adventure? You could help me scout out the frog's hiding place."

They all nodded and smiled. Dr. Oust gave them yellow rain **ponchos** and rubber boots that came up to their knees. He suggested that Mai-Lin bring her camera to document the mission. The group set out onto a misty trail. The students gaped in wonder at the strangely twisted trees.

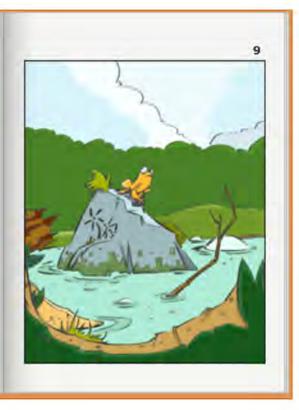
When you read a descriptive paragraph, it almost makes you feel like you're there. How does painting a picture in your mind help you understand the story?

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8 The smell of fragrant flowers washed over them. Birds and insects called down from every direction. They felt as if they had landed on another planet.

They hiked for an hour on **rugged**, bumpy trails. Eventually the group scrambled over the **mammoth** trunk of a fallen tree. Then they saw the pond. The doctor put his finger to his lips. They heard a soft chirping. "The toad," he whispered, pointing to a small pile of mossy rocks in the water.

Dr. Oust crouched and stepped lightly to where the water rippled. LaShonda walked softly to the opposite end of the pond.



They seem to have heard the golden toad. What do you think will happen next?

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The doctor turned around and shook his head. "I can see the toad. But if one of us tries to grab it, we'll scare it away. There are too many hiding places in these rocks. We might lose it."

The group stood thinking for several moments. The toad continued to sing.

A grin spread across Mai-Lin's face. "I know! One of us can wade through the pond and sneak up behind the toad. That person will make a noise, and the toad will try to escape through the rocks on this side. It will jump right into our hands!"

"Excellent method of capture, Mai-Lin," agreed Dr. Oust. "I'll do it!" LaShonda said. She forced thoughts of snakes from her mind as she walked into the murky water. She was relieved that her boots were tall enough to keep the water out. LaShonda stood still when she got to the rocks. She could hear the golden toad singing in its rocky home. She saw its orange head shimmering in the sunlight just a few feet in front of her. Suddenly she started splashing water at the rocks.

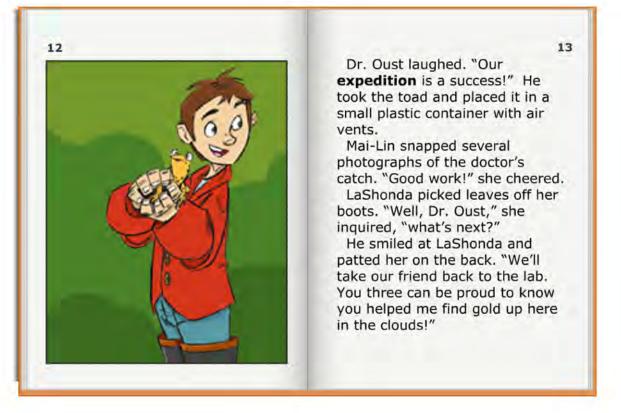
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A blur of orange erupted from the mossy stones.

"I've got it!" yelled Carlos. He cupped the frog gently in his hand.

In splashing, the consonants "sh" represent one sound that is different from the individual letters : splash/ing.

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Sometimes two consonants together represent different sounds. When that happens, the syllables divide between the consonants: plas/tic.