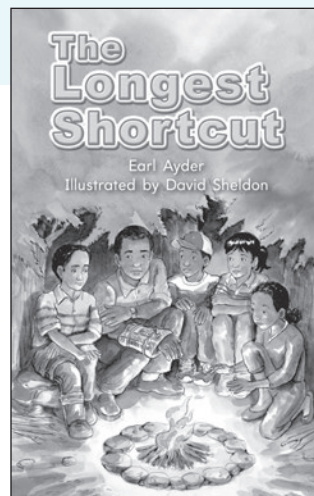


# The Longest Shortcut

**GENRE** Realistic Fiction

## WHY THIS TEXT?

In this chapter book, Dionne, his father, and his friends run into trouble on a remote mountain road. Dionne's father has taken a shortcut, but there is a minor accident, and the group is stranded with no vehicle and no way to call for help. Each person in the group contributes creatively to help everyone stay safe and warm through the night. Rescuers come to help after a clever idea alerts a passing plane. Realistic dialogue and illustrations bring this suspenseful story to life.



## VOCABULARY NETWORK

**Words About Emotions** anxiously (adv.), frustration (n.), nervously (adv.)

## TEXT COMPLEXITY

**READING LEVEL** O **OVERALL RATING** Slightly Complex



## TEXT X-RAY

KEY IDEAS	LANGUAGE	BACKGROUND & CULTURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr. Jones is driving his son and friends to a mountain lake when he takes a shortcut to avoid traffic.</li> <li>A big rock knocks Mr. Jones's van off the road. Mr. Jones and the group are stranded.</li> <li>The group creatively uses the few supplies they have to survive the night.</li> <li>Finally, they signal an airplane and are rescued.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Vocabulary</b></p> <p>apologized (p. 5) <b>frustration</b> (p. 17)</p> <p>assured (p. 7) fractured (p. 20)</p> <p>tease (p. 8) swollen (p. 26)</p> <p><b>anxiously</b> (p. 10) reduce (p. 26)</p> <p><b>nervously</b> (p. 13) chattering (p. 27)</p> <p>worried (p. 15) reluctantly (p. 28)</p> <p><b>Idiomatic Expression</b></p> <p>stay behind (p. 4)</p>	<p>Cell phones make communication convenient, except when they don't get a signal. The radio waves that carry information through the air to and from cell phones can be blocked by forest leaves or mountains. When traveling in wilderness areas, people might have to use other means of communication, such as short-distance CB radios, satellite phones, or even smoke signals.</p>

## INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

### Options for Teacher-Led Sessions

- ☐ Key Ideas & Details ..... 2
- ☐ Figurative Language..... 4
- ☐ Plot..... 6
- ☐ Respond & Extend..... 8

### Online Printables

- Vocabulary Network
- Organizer
- Comprehension Quiz

### Tabletop Minilessons: Reading

- Figurative Language
- Plot
- Genre: Realistic Fiction

# Key Ideas & Details

## GENERATE INTEREST

- What does it mean to take a shortcut?
- What kind of problems might come up when people use an unfamiliar or little-used road?

## BUILD VOCABULARY

Use the Vocabulary Network Organizer to develop vocabulary and explore language connections.

- anxiously (adv.), frustration (n.), nervously (adv.)

## GUIDE INSTRUCTION

Build comprehension of the text, using the prompts below as needed.

4–5

**How do the friends feel about the change of plans for getting to the lake?** (*excited*) **Why?** (*They can leave for the lake right away instead of waiting until the next day.*)

**Reread** Point out that readers learn about characters' feelings by paying attention to the characters' actions and dialogue. Ask volunteers to point out actions and read aloud dialogue that indicates how the friends feel.

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- He'll take us to the lake right now, if you're ready to go!
- Alright! . . . Let's go!
- jumped to their feet and ran outside to Mr. Jones's van

### English Learner Support

Explain that exclamation points tell readers to read with extra excitement or feeling. Model how to read one of the sentences.

6–7

**Why does Mr. Jones decide to take a shortcut to the lake?** (*Traffic is backed up on the highway, and he thinks his shortcut will get them to the lake sooner.*)

**Discuss** Talk about why Mr. Jones thinks the shortcut is a good idea. Point out that Paula seems worried. *Do you think Paula is right to be worried? What does Mr. Jones say to reassure Paula?*

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- the main highway was a parking lot . . . there had been an accident ahead
- I know a shortcut . . . There's an old dirt road that goes over Mount Wilson.

### English Learner Support

Explain the meaning of the word *shortcut*. Draw a simple map to compare a long route with a shortcut.

10–12

**What happens to the van on the icy road?** (*A rolling rock hits the van and knocks it off the road and down the hill.*)

**Create a Visual** Talk with students about the steps involved in the van accident. Work with them to create a simple sequence chart that explains what happens.

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- the large rock hit the front tire and knocked the van toward the side of the road
- The van slid down the hill about 100 feet

### English Learner Support

Spanish cognate: *roca* (rock)

Multiple-meaning words: *second*, *feet*

## 13–21

**Why can't the group count on being rescued before nightfall?** (*They can't call for help, no one is aware of their travel plans, and their classmates don't expect them to arrive until tomorrow.*) **What complications arise to make the situation even more tense?** (*The van slides, and they realize they can't stay inside it. Mr. Jones's arm is apparently broken.*)

**Discuss** Talk with students about how the characters feel when they realize they are stuck without help. *What details show that the characters try to remain calm? What do they do to improve their situation?* Discuss how the children solve problems.

## TEXT EVIDENCE

- The cell phone doesn't work up here
- The radio didn't work either.
- Everyone at the lake thinks we're coming tomorrow, and everyone at home thinks we're at the lake now!
- Just then the van started to slide again
- the bone in your arm may be fractured

## English Learner Support

Use the meaning of the suffix *-ly* ("in a way that is") to develop students' understanding of the words *nervously*, *safely*, and *slowly*.

## 24–31

**What does the group do to stay warm?** (*They build a fire, put newspapers in their clothes, and put on trash bags.*)

**Guide** Point out that the group's equipment has been sent to the lake, so they do not have outdoor supplies. Have students list items the group does not have, as well as how the kids creatively use what they do have.

## TEXT EVIDENCE

- Once the fire was burning, they all gathered around it
- Putting newspaper inside your clothes can help you stay warm.
- They all looked funny wearing trash bags stuffed with newspapers, but they had stopped shivering.

## 34–36

**Why does Alicia try to make smoke?** (*She thinks someone in the town will see the smoke and come to the mountain to check it out.*)

**Create a Visual** Draw a simple sketch of how smoke signals work. Talk about Alicia's plan. *Do you think Alicia's idea would have worked if the fire had stayed lit? Why?*

## TEXT EVIDENCE

- If people in the town see smoke up here, they might think it's a forest fire and send someone

## English Learner Support

Use the illustration on page 33 to explain what smoke is.

## 38–40

**How does the group finally get the attention of the plane overhead?** (*They lay out trash bags in the shape of a big X on the snow so it's visible to the plane.*)

**Guide** Discuss the illustration on pages 38–39. *How did the X make it easier to find the group?* Then discuss the illustration on page 40. Help students understand that Mr. Jones is being taken to a hospital in the ambulance in the background. *How do the kids feel? How do you know?*

## TEXT EVIDENCE

- black trash bags on white snow in . . . a big X
- ILLUSTRATION CLUES

## English Learner Support

- Does the pilot see the X or miss it?
- What does the group do with the trash bags?
- Why is the pilot able to see the group?

# Figurative Language

## INTRODUCE THE DRIVING QUESTION

- How does the author use language to help readers create images in their minds?

## GUIDE INSTRUCTION

Use the prompts below to guide students through the text. For additional support, refer to the relevant Tabletop Minilesson.

6

**What does the author mean by “the main highway was a parking lot”?** (*The cars on the road are not moving, as if they are parked.*)

**Guide** Tell students that a metaphor compares two things by saying one thing is another thing. Reread the metaphor. Help students understand how this comparison helps them picture what the highway is like.

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- there were so many cars on the road that the main highway was a parking lot

### English Learner Support

Explain that a parking lot is a place where people park their cars. As needed, refer to the school’s own parking lot.

6

**Dionne says, “Yeah, by the time we get past that accident, it will be tomorrow!” What does he mean?** (*It will take so long for traffic to clear that it will feel like a day has passed.*)

**Discuss** Explain that authors sometimes use exaggeration to make things sound more dramatic than they are. *How do you know that Dionne’s words are an exaggeration?*

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- it won’t really matter that we left today
- we get past that accident, it will be tomorrow!

### English Learner Support

Spanish cognates: *accidente* (accident), *tráfico* (traffic)

Multiple-meaning word: *past*

10

**What does “bushes and trees were rushing at them” mean?** (*The van is moving so quickly, that it seems as if the trees are coming toward them instead of standing still.*)

**How does this phrase make this scene tense?** (*It’s as if the bushes and trees are attacking the van, which is scary.*)

**Create a Visual** Explain that some language appeals to readers’ senses. Create a web labeled with the senses, and have students complete the web with sensory language as they read. Discuss phrases, such as *stomachs growled* on page 24, that appeal to multiple senses.

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- van slid sideways . . . bushes and trees were rushing at them as the van slipped down the hill

### English Learner Support

Act out, or have students act out, the actions related to the vivid verbs on this page: *rolling, knocked, slid, rushing, slipped*.

27

**The author says that Mr. Jones’s teeth are chattering. What does that tell you about him?** (*He is so cold that he is shaking.*) **The author says that Paula is shivering and the kids are huddled together. What does this help you imagine?** (*how extremely cold it is*)

**Discuss** Explain that the author could have said that it was cold. *How does the phrase his teeth were chattering create a more vivid picture than just saying it was cold?*

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- *his teeth were chattering*

**English Learner Support**

- Does Mr. Jones feel cold or hot?
- Mr. Jones feels \_\_\_\_\_.
- Describe how Mr. Jones feels.

28

**How does the author describe the wind?** (*The wind howled and whipped through the trees.*) **What does the author mean?** (*The wind is so strong that it sounds like a howling animal.*)

**Guide** Help students understand that when the wind howls, it is usually a strong, loud wind. *How does this help you see and feel the wind?* Have them add this sensory language to the web.

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- *The wind howled as it whipped through the trees*

**English Learner Support**

Demonstrate what a howling sound is.

37

**After the group sees the plane overhead, Paula says, “We must look like ants to them.” What does she mean?** (*Because the plane is so high up, the people on the ground look very tiny to whomever is in the plane.*)

**Reread** Tell students that a simile compares two things using the words *like* or *as*. Have students reread page 37. *How does this expression help readers understand why the plane doesn’t see the group on its first pass?*

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- *They were up too high and couldn’t see us . . . We must look like ants to them.*

**English Learner Support**

Use the illustration to build meaning for the phrase *look like ants*.

40

**What does Khalid mean when he says that their “shortcut would have been even longer”?** (*Without the trash bags, the kids might have been lost for a long time.*) **Why is *The Longest Shortcut* a good title for this book?** (*A shortcut is supposed to be fast and easy, but the group’s shortcut was longer than the usual route.*)

**Discuss** Talk about why *the longest shortcut* is a funny phrase. Then discuss the different ideas that contributed to keeping the group safe. *How does each kid help?*

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- *Everyone saved us, not just me. We all worked as a team!*

**English Learner Support**

Help students recognize the words *long* and *short* within the title words, and make sure they understand that the words have opposite meanings.

# Plot

## INTRODUCE THE DRIVING QUESTIONS

- How does the author connect events in a way that builds suspense and keeps readers interested?
- How do the characters solve their problems?

## GUIDE INSTRUCTION

Use the prompts below to guide students through the text. For additional support, refer to the relevant Tabletop Minilesson.

4–7

**What causes Mr. Jones to take a shortcut?** (*delayed traffic*) **How does Paula feel about the shortcut?** (*worried; nervous; concerned*)

**Create a Visual** Explain that the plot of a story is made up of its main events. Begin a story map to list the main events. Point out that Mr. Jones mentions that the shortcut is an old dirt road and Paula questions the road's safety. *Why do you think Paula is worried about safety?*

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- the main highway was a parking lot
- “Is that road safe?” Paula asked.

### English Learner Support

Explain that *mount* is another word for *mountain*. Make sure students understand the setting, as it plays an important part in the story's plot.  
Multiple-meaning word: *lot*

7–8

**How does Mr. Jones reassure Paula?** (*He says the old dirt road is safe and lists his safety equipment.*) **What is in Paula's bag?** (*water bottles, snack bars, trash bags*) **What does this tell you about Paula?** (*She likes to be prepared.*)

**Discuss** Talk about Mr. Jones and Paula's preparations. *How is Mr. Jones prepared? Paula?* Then discuss why Paula says, “There are never enough trash bags.” Point out that authors may hint about, or foreshadow, later events early in the story. *How might trash bags be helpful while camping?*

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- started listing all his safety equipment
- There are never enough trash bags
- Everyone . . . tease Paula about her trash bags

### English Learner Support

Explain that *tease* can sometimes be another word for *joke*.  
Spanish cognate: *equipo* (*equipment*)

10–15

**What problem does the group encounter on the shortcut?** (*A rock hits the van, and it slides down the hill.*) **How does the problem get worse?** (*They have no way to call for help, and no one knows where they are.*)

**Guide** Explain that a plot has a problem, or conflict, that characters have to solve. Point out that the problem is magnified because of Mr. Jones's injury and the lack of help. *What makes the situation tense and suspenseful?*

### TEXT EVIDENCE

- the large rock . . . knocked the van
- the van slipped down the hill
- The cell phone doesn't work up here
- The radio didn't work either.
- Nobody will know we're missing . . . Everyone at the lake thinks we're coming tomorrow, and everyone at home thinks we're at the lake now!



**20–27**

**What complicates the group’s problems on the mountain?** (*Mr. Jones has fractured his arm; they all need to stay warm during the cold night; they are hungry.*)

**Create a Visual** Explain that in the rising action, events get more exciting and interesting. *Why is the situation getting dangerous? How are the kids helping?* Create a T-chart to compare how each kid helps. For example, Dionne uses his shoelaces to set his dad’s arm.

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- carry the wood in my trash bags
- Alicia’s trash bag was full of dry branches
- Paula . . . scooped some snow into the bag.

**English Learner Support**

Explain that *fractured* means the same as *broken*.

**28–31**

**How do the friends solve the problem of being cold?** (*They put newspaper inside their clothes.*) **How do they protect themselves from the wind?** (*They make trash-bag coats.*)

**Discuss** Talk about how the characters solve each problem. *What can you tell about the characters from the ideas they suggest? Has Paula been right about the trash bags?*

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- ILLUSTRATION CLUES
- newspaper can help you stay warm
- plastic trash bag . . . like a T-shirt
- looked funny . . . but they had stopped shivering

**English Learner Support**

Demonstrate what shivering is.

**36–37**

**Why doesn’t the appearance of the plane solve the group’s problem?** (*The people in the plane can’t see the group.*)

**Reread** Explain that the climax of a story occurs when the characters’ problem reaches its most difficult or exciting moment. Have students reread pages 36–37. Discuss how the author creates suspense by providing a possible solution (a plane) that doesn’t work out.

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- a small airplane flew over their heads and went on
- They were up too high and couldn’t see us

**English Learner Support**

- Can the people in the plane see the kids?
- The people in the plane [do/do not] see the group.
- Why don’t the people in the plane see the group on the ground?

**38–40**

**How does the group solve the problem?** (*They use the trash bags to create a sign that is visible from the plane.*)

**How was Paula right when she said there are never enough trash bags?** (*The trash bags helped the kids solve several problems, and in the end, the trash bags saved them.*)

**Create a Visual** Point out Alicia and Khalid’s statements about the trash bags on page 40. Then have students use the story map to retell the plot.

**TEXT EVIDENCE**

- “We’re sorry we laughed at you about those trash bags. They saved us!”

**English Learner Support**

Explain that the phrase *worked as a team* indicates that each child helped during the crisis.

# Respond & Extend

## GENERATE INTEREST

- Are the characters creative thinkers? How do you know?
- What did you learn from the characters about staying calm in an emergency and using one's resources?

## GUIDE INSTRUCTION

Explain that students will be using what they have read and their own opinions to respond to the text. Then assign and support one or more of the activities below.

### Hands-On Activity

#### Make a Splint

- Learn how to make a splint with newspaper and string (or similar materials that you have on hand).
- Review the details of Mr. Jones's splint on page 20. Get information from other sources, as needed.
- Practice with a partner. Take turns making the splint.

### Research Connection

#### Research Satellite Phones

- When people get lost or stranded in the wilderness, a satellite phone can be more useful than a cell phone.
- Use the Internet or other resources to learn how satellite phones work.
- Write a short report about them.

### Project

#### Draw a Map

- Make a creative map that shows the friends' adventurous shortcut.
- Include details such as the Jones's home and Lake Elwood, the "parking lot" main highway, and Mr. Jones's shortcut.
- Use symbols to show the locations of important places or events, including the rescue site. Include a key so readers know what the symbols mean.
- Give your map a title and display it for your classmates.

### Vocabulary & Language

#### Analyze Verbs

- Scan the text for words that tell how characters speak, such as *yelled*, *laughed*, *agreed*, *gasped*, and *cried*.
- Make a list of the verbs you find. Organize them from softest to loudest or gentlest to most forceful.
- Compare your list with a partner's list.

### Response Writing

**1. Write a tall-tale** version of the story. Imagine that the kids get creative and decide to entertain their classmates with an exaggerated version of their trip. Retell the story of their night on the mountain, but with tall-tale details that stretch the imagination.

**2. Write a journal entry** about the shortcut adventure. Decide which character's viewpoint you will write from. Include details about your actions, thoughts, and feelings.