



Marsh Island

Sonya Spreen Bates
illustrated by Kasia Charko

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About the Book

Marsh Island is a fast-paced adventure story. Jake and his younger brother Tommy are on their first camping trip and are eager to explore the forest around their campsite. Following animal trails and their own instincts, they soon come across something they never expected to find: buried treasure. Before the boys can open the treasure, a noise in the bushes startles them. They dash blindly into the woods, where they become hopelessly lost. Exhausted, footsore and hungry, the boys begin searching for their campsite, only to stumble across the hut of the legendary Alfred Marsh, for whom the island was named. When they start to feel like they're not alone in the woods, they begin to wonder if the story their dad told them about old Alfred Marsh and his lost fortune is true.

About the Author

Sonya Spreen Bates is a Canadian writer living in Australia. Sonya has a Masters in Speech Pathology and has spent many years working with children with communication disorders, both in Canada and Australia, often writing her own stories to use in therapy.

She began writing children's fiction in 2001, inspired by her two daughters and their love of the stories she told them. She is the author of *A Tank of Trouble* (Scholastic Education Australia) and *Midnight Ghost* (Limelight Press), and her short stories have been published in school magazines in Australia and New Zealand. *Marsh Island* is her first book with Orca.

About the Writing

Camping and walking in the woods were a big part of Sonya's life as a child and provided inspiration for writing *Marsh Island*. While the island itself is fictional, it is based on similar places she has visited and camped in throughout British Columbia and the Rocky Mountains. Old buildings, castles and ruins have always been of particular interest to Sonya, and as the story developed, it quickly evolved from a simple lost-in-the-woods story to an encounter with the past. This new development led to a number of questions that needed to be answered before the story was complete: Who was Alfred Marsh? Why did he flee to Marsh Island? What happened to him? How did he survive? And of course, the main question for Jake and Tommy: Was the treasure really his? Learning about the history and life of this character was fun and exciting and added mystery and a touch of fear to the story that it previously lacked. Sonya has always found that her stories develop in this way. Although she has an initial plan and outline, the story seems to take over and move in directions she never imagined when she first started writing.

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections

Prereading Idea

At the beginning of the story, Jake feels that his brother Tommy is a pest. Does his attitude change over the course of the story? If so, how has it changed and why?

Classroom Discussion Questions

Tommy and Jake have very different attitudes towards being in the woods. How does Jake feel? How does Tommy feel? Do their attitudes change over the course of the story? How?

Jake and Tommy didn't tell their dad that they were going exploring. Why not? Would the outcome of the story have been different if they had let him know where they were going?

Tommy doesn't really want to go exploring in the woods and repeatedly asks Jake if they can go back to the tent. If your friends were going to do something that you think is wrong or dangerous, what would you do?

Walking in the woods can be fun and exciting, but it can also be dangerous if hikers are careless. What might the dangers be and what precautions do we need to take when out in the forest? We also need to protect our forests from damage from hikers and walkers. What should we do to keep our forests green and beautiful?

Jake and Tommy found their way back to the tent by climbing to a high spot and searching the forest below them. How else could they have found their way back? What could they have brought with them to prepare for the possibility of getting lost? If they couldn't find their way back, how could they signal their position to any rescuers?

Suggested Activities

Create a map of your own island. Put in a variety of geographical features, such as hills/mountains, gullies/ravines, forested areas, grassy banks, streams/rivers, beaches, coves, lagoons etc. Also add any man-made features such as roads, houses, boat docks or shopping areas.

Jake wanted to see some animals in the woods of Marsh Island. Do a research project on the types of animals that might be living in the forest on an island such as this.

Alfred Marsh lost his fortune in the Great Depression of the 1930s. Research what happened in the Great Depression and how it affected people's lives. How did their daily life compare to how we live today?

Write about an experience you have had in the woods—a camping trip, a day hike or a stroll through a wooded park. What did you see, hear, feel and smell? Write a story, a poem or a journal entry.

Imagine that you are lost in the woods and need to make a shelter. What would you use? Build a model of a shelter using the types of materials you might find in the forest.

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

Camp Out!: The Ultimate Kids' Guide by Lynne Brunelle, Brian Biggs (illustrator) and Elara Tanguy (illustrator)

Questions and Answers About Forest Animals by Michael Chinery

Potato: A Tale from the Great Depression by Kate Lied