

Dinosaur Rescue 8 – Salto-scaredypus

Author: Kyle Mewburn

Illustrator: Donovan Bixley

Synopsis

Arg is different from your average cave boy. He has a huge brain which makes him far more intelligent than everyone else in his entire village. He knows that when the Nn-Grrrdy tribe come to his village to barter for mammoth skins that he needs to hide all of his favourite possessions or else they will be stolen. Running around in a panic, Arg comes across a hole in the ground which looks like the perfect hiding place. The only problem is, the hole's a bit small and Arg has to jump on his stuff to get it in. What he doesn't realise is that the hole is not a hole at all; it is actually a tunnel leading to an underground cavern. Arg finds himself hurtling through the air, unable to control his descent, until he lands in a giant pile of bat poo.

At first, Arg's problem seems to be finding a way out of the cave. However, his predicament becomes even more dangerous when he realises that the cave is filled with hungry saltopuses who seem to think he would make a great meal.

Arg knows that there has to be a way out – after all, how did the saltopuses get in? When a young cave boy pokes his head through the hole Arg thinks that he's saved. What he doesn't know is that the boy is the one who trapped all the saltopuses in the cave in the first place and he has no intention of letting them, or Arg, free. Will Arg be savaged by a pack of starving saltopuses or will his giant brain (and maybe a bit of luck) be enough to save him?

Text Type

Salto-scaredypus is the eighth book in the hugely successful Dinosaur Rescue series written by New Zealand author Kyle Mewburn and illustrated by Donovan Bixley. For those who have not read any other books in the series, a map of Arg's valley and an illustrated guide to Arg's friends and family is included.

Salto-scaredypus continues the story of Arg, who is a bit of an outsider in his village because he is much brighter than everyone else. His friends and family think he is strange because he likes to wear clothes, keep himself clean and collects interesting things. Their needs are far more basic and the only real friend who Arg has is Skeet, a T-Rex who also has an enormous brain.

The story, aimed for readers aged 8–10, is full of disgusting descriptions of unsavoury cave man behaviour, which will appeal particularly to boys. Set in the Stone Age, the story contains fascinating and hilarious information about Neanderthals and their lifestyle.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 9–29), Chapter 2 and 3 (pp.30–64) and Chapter 4 (pp. 65–96).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them make predictions about what will happen next in the story. Students need to learn about the main character Arg and understand the difficulties that he faces because of his superior intelligence. Most importantly, students should enjoy the book and allow themselves to get caught up in Arg’s prehistoric world where dinosaurs and cavemen exist and adventures abound. The book is delightfully illustrated with humorous drawings that really bring the setting and characters to life.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- How do you know that this book is part of a series?
- Why do you think having a big brain might mean big trouble?
- Who is the main character in the story? What is his problem?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 9–29) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 9–29)

- Study the map of Arg’s valley. Which parts do you think would be the most interesting to visit and why?
- Who are the members of Arg’s family? In what ways does he look different to them?
- Who are the Nn-Grrrdy? How can you spot them?
- How does Arg’s village prepare for the Nn-Grrrdy tribes arrival?
- Why can’t Arg’s tribe let their guard down for a second around the Nn-Grrrdy?
- Why do the Nn-Grrrdy tribe have to barter with Arg’s tribe?
- What are some of the potential problems with using dinosaur skin as clothing?
- Which is the only tribe more unpleasant than the Nn-Grrrdy?
- What does the Nn-Grrrdy have that other tribes want?
- What is Arg running around looking for?

- Why does Arg's tribe gather around the fire pit to welcome the Nn-Grrrdy? Why is everyone so nervous?
- Why has Arg's tribe hidden away all the best mammoth hides?
- What has Arg's mum prepared for the feast? Why does Arg's tribe like it when the Nn-Grrrdy drink plenty of fermented cycad sap?
- Why doesn't Arg want Hng to see where he hides his stuff?
- Why is Arg's game "Hide and Find" a disaster?
- Where does Arg decide to hide his stuff? Why does he think that having too much stuff is a bad idea?
- How does Arg fall in the hole?
- What is bartering? Why do prices change depending on circumstances? Why was money invented?
- Who is the world's best mammoth hunter? What does he turn a herd of stampeding mammoths into?

Discussion

- In what ways is Arg different to the rest of his tribe? Why is it hard having a bigger brain than everyone else?
- What do you think Arg will find at the bottom of the hole?
- What do you think will happen when the Nn-Grrrdy reach Arg's village?

Students read Chapter 2 (pp.30–47) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapter 2 (pp. 30–47)

- What is the first thing the Nn-Grrrdy hear when they reach Arg's village? How does this make them react?
- Why is there a standoff between the two tribes? What breaks the tension?
- Describe Arg's fall down the hole. Why is it so disgusting? Where does he think he might end up? Why can't he stop himself from falling? What happens when he shoots out of the tunnel? Why is he afraid of being turned into a half bat/half boy? What does he land on?
- How does Arg know that there has to be another way out of the cave? How does he know which direction to head in?

- List three amazing facts about bats.
- What does Arg find through the hole in the cavern wall? How does he know he is headed in the right direction? What are stalagmites and stalactites?
- Why can't Arg use the tree trunk to escape?
- What does Arg find in the cave? Why isn't he scared of it?
- What does saltopus mean? Why are saltopuses so light and swift?
- What does the saltopus do when Arg gives him a kick? Why is Arg so surprised at the saltopus's reaction?
- How does Arg know that there is more than one saltopus in the cave?

Discussion

- How will Arg escape from the cave?
- What thoughts and feelings do you think would have been running through Arg's head during his imprisonment?
- What do you think is happening back in his village while this is going on?

Students read Chapter 4 (pp. 65–96) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapter 4 (pp. 65–96)

- Why is Arg so determined to climb up the tree trunk?
- Why do the saltopuses halt their attack on Arg? What flies through the hole?
- How does Arg know that there is someone at the top of the hole? Why does he think that throwing the stygimoloch into the hole is part of a clever rescue plan? How does Arg use the diversion to his advantage?
- How does the boy at the top of the hole react when Arg calls out to him? Why is Arg surprised by his reaction?
- Why does Arg think the boy wants his coat? What does the boy do when Arg throws it up to him?
- What happens when Arg tries to jump out of the hole without any help?
- Why does Arg wish that Skeet was with him?
- How does Arg avoid the rolling boulders? What happens when the dust finally settles?

- What happens when the saltopuses find the exit?
- Why does Arg think that he might be able to outrun the saltopuses?
- Why is Arg's dad feeling so good about the bartering with Nn-Grrrdy? What clues are there in the Nn-Grrrdy's behaviour that should have alerted him to the fact that they were planning something?
- How are Arg's tribe caught by surprise? What do the Nn-Grrrdy want to take with them?
- What happens when the Nn-Grrrdy are ready to leave? What does the Nn-Grrrdy chief plan to do with Arg?
- How do the Nn-Grrrdy react when the saltopuses come running out of the jungle?
- How does Arg's dad know that the normally placid saltopuses are dangerous? What order does he give his tribe? How does he rescue Arg?
- Describe what happens when the saltopuses reach the Nn-Grrrdy tribe.
- Why does Arg's tribe consider this to be a great day?

Discussion

- Who do you think the mysterious cave boy is? Why do you think he is keeping saltopuses in the cave? Why does the boy remind Arg of his sister Hng?
- Why is it cruel to keep animals that live in the wild in cages or caves? How has being held in captivity changed the normal behaviour of the saltopuses?

Activities

Vocabulary – Identify 5 new words you learned from *Salto-scaredypus*. Using a dictionary, write a definition for each word and write out the sentences in which you found them.

Research – Conduct a research assignment on either the Stone Age or dinosaurs. Formulate 3 focussing questions. Use a range of resources to gather your information. Keep a research diary to record your process. Present your findings on a poster.

Writing – Write a paragraph explaining why this book should be read by everyone who hates reading.

Game – Invent a game that cave people could play to keep themselves entertained.

Writing – Write a letter to the author explaining why his book appeals to you.

Character – Make up 5 interview questions (with answers) for Arg.

Plot – Create a story board that shows 10 important events in the story in the order that they occur. Under each picture write a brief description about what is happening.

Static Image – Design a poster advertising *Dinosaur Rescue #8: Salto-scaredypus* that would be suitable to display in the school library.

Drama – Choose an exciting incident from the story and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Soundtrack – Imagine that *Dinosaur Rescue #8: Salto-scaredypus* is being made into a movie. Choose 5 songs for the soundtrack and explain where in the movie you would play each one. Explain how each song is appropriate.

Writing – Come up with a storyline for the next Dinosaur Rescue book.

Writing – Write an alternative ending for the story.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd