

The Great Eagle Page 26-31

Great Eagle

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Excerpted from the book Morning on the Lake
Illustrated by Karen Reczuch*

READING TIP

Identify with the character

Think of a time when you had to struggle against fear to achieve a goal. How did you try to overcome your fear? Read to see what the boy in this story did to overcome his fears and achieve his goals.

Grandfather is looking up. I know he is searching the sky. Grandfather is wise and knows many things. He says I will too.

"When, Mishomis?" I ask.

"In time," he answers. "Wisdom will come."

I stand beside Grandfather. I look up and search too. The sun is low on the horizon. I feel the wind's wings, warm on my arms and legs.

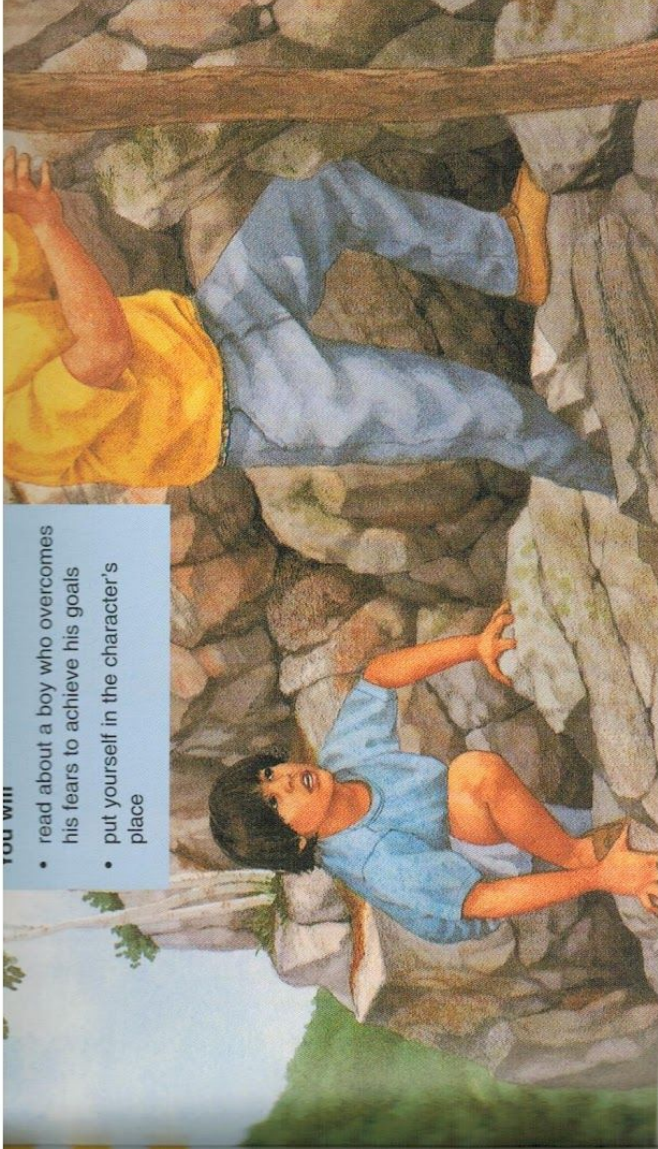
Grandfather speaks softly. "It is time—we will go."

I want to jump up and down and make a lot of noise. But I do not. For where we are going only silence is needed.

We leave before the sun climbs to the centre of the sky.

You will

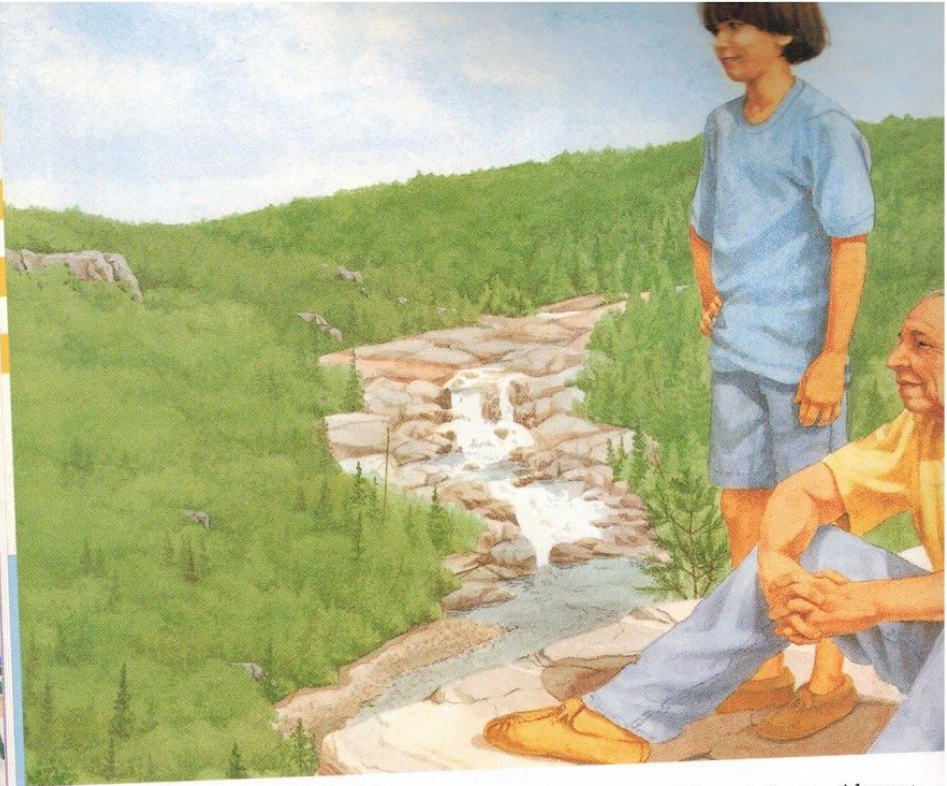
- read about a boy who overcomes his fears to achieve his goals
- put yourself in the character's place



I follow Grandfather like a shadow. Quietly, quickly, he moves like a fox, over the familiar path of the forest floor. I know that many animals have made this trail as they walked beneath the ancient white pines that whisper and past the singing water of the river.

But I don't see any of them today, only Grandfather ahead of me. I try to stay close behind, but it is not easy keeping up with his strong, silent strides. I stop a moment to taste a plump purple berry from a saskatoon bush and then hurry on.

I am hot and thirsty. There are beads of sweat on my nose. I am getting tired but I do not slow down.



Finally Grandfather stops. We are almost there. Almost. He turns to me and smiles. "You travel swiftly with soft steps. That is good. Now you must show strength as well."


He points to a rocky cliff and then tousles my hair with his long fingers. His dark brown eyes are bright and catch the sun's reflection.

"Are you ready, Noshen?"

I wipe the sweat from my nose, take a deep breath, and nod.

"I am, Mishomis."

Before we begin our climb, I watch my grandfather's strong brown arms reach out and spread open to the turquoise sky. So I too stretch my arms high. Grandfather looks at me and nods.



As I climb, I can feel each rough groove etched in the face of the cliff. Its surface is hot and dry under my sweaty palms. My fingers are red and tingling, and I feel the hard ridges of rock pressing against my bare knees.

The cliff is steep, so I avoid looking down. Although I am not afraid, I am tiring. I keep up with Grandfather, but my legs feel as heavy as rocks. I cannot let this slow me, for I know that many ancestors have climbed here before me, and before Grandfather too. I imagine each foothold, formed through time by their steps.

Finally, we reach the top. The sun is high. It is very still and quiet.

I can look back now, but as I turn, I notice a large shadow cast down on the ground. I quickly look up but cannot see what has made the shadow. Instead, I see thin birch trees waving in the soft breeze. It is strange because I cannot hear the leaves rustling. Neither can I feel the wind cooling my skin or smell the dry moss under my moccasins.

Up here, I stand closer to the noon sun, yet I do not feel the heat, nor do I have to shield my eyes from its brightness.

Grandfather sits down and motions for me to sit beside him. I do. He does not speak. Neither will I. This is his special place. Noon is his favourite time, and so it is mine.

We look out over the fast-flowing river and the thick green forest below. I can see with birds' eyes. I feel that I am soaring, touching the endless sky, floating through powder-white clouds. Flying free, high above our world.

Very still, we wait, perched on top of our rocky nest. I can hear my own breathing. It is loud. I cannot hear Grandfather's. I wonder if he is holding his breath. I want to look at him, take one quick peek. But then ... I see a powerful bird in slow motion. Alone and gliding.



In silence he moves with smooth graceful strokes.
Around and around, he circles us with wings reaching like
Mother's arms. Motionless, we watch.

The Great Eagle.

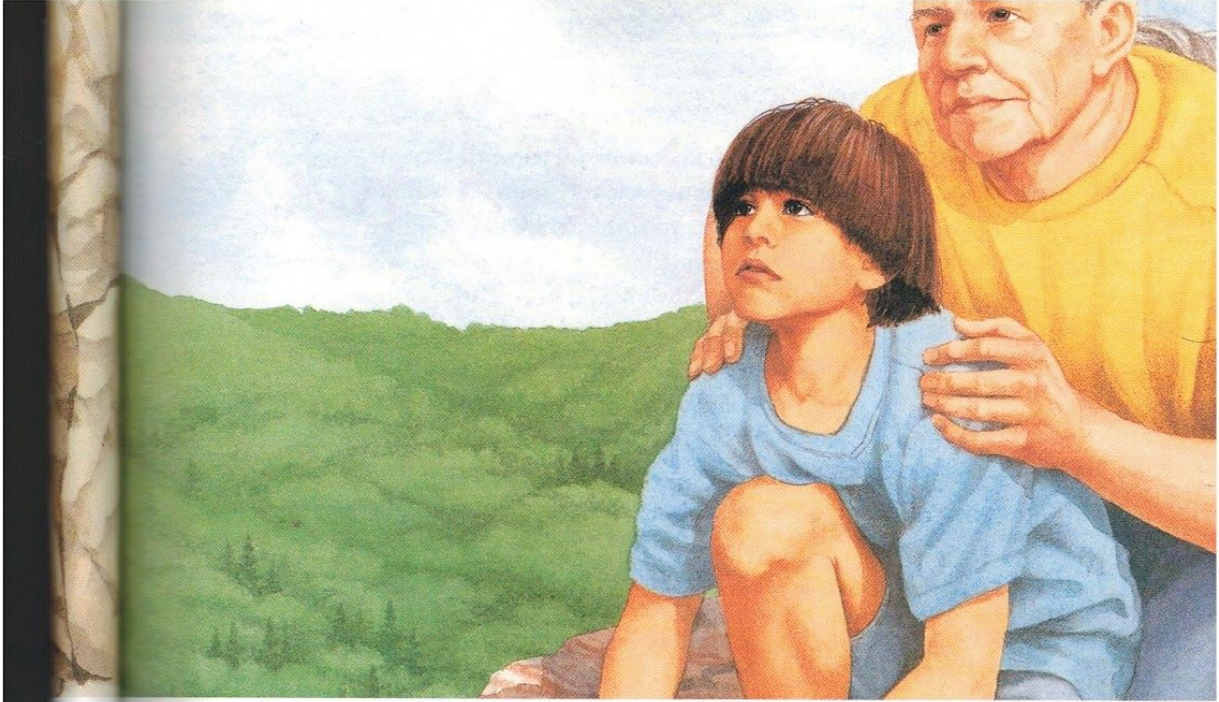
Suddenly, the eagle is looking at me. He is coming in
my direction. Faster and closer he flies.

I do not move, not one part of my body. Oh, how I
want to hold on to Grandfather. But I do not. My heart is
pounding like the beat of the drum.

And then the eagle swoops down. I can hear the rapid
rhythm of strong wings. I want to squeeze my eyes shut, but I
keep them open, watching. He is here. His scent fills my
nostrils. I feel talons combing through my hair with a
gentleness I cannot explain.

Then he is gone, as swiftly as he appeared.

I let out a long breath and look at Grandfather. He is



smiling, a very big smile. He points to the ground. There before us lies a long soft eagle feather.

I feel Grandfather's warm strong hands holding my shoulders as he speaks.

"Noshen, our people see the eagle as a powerful messenger. His presence is a sign of honour and wisdom. As the Great Eagle is a proud protector of our people, I am a proud Mishomis of my Noshen."

And so, I too am proud, just like Grandfather.

AFTER YOU READ

Make a character portrait

To make a character portrait, you describe someone using words instead of pictures. Write a character portrait of Noshen. Use words that describe his character and give examples from the story to support your description.

