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# “The Runaway Monster”

## Before Reading

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

This story is set in an amusement park. Take a poll of students to see how many have visited an amusement park. Ask students if they have dared to get on a roller coaster or any other hair-raising ride. Let students who have ridden a roller coaster describe the experience.

### READING STRATEGY FOCUS: MAKING INFERENCES

An inference is a reasonable guess based on text clues as well as the reader’s own knowledge and experience. Ask students to make an inference about Martin’s motives in this story.

## After Reading

### TALK ABOUT IT

Revisit your “Building Background” conversation. Have students brainstorm the most exciting parts of their favorite amusement park rides (such as corkscrew twists, steep drops, banked curves). List student responses. Then let students design and draw their versions of “The Runaway Monster,” using their responses as a resource.

### WRITE ABOUT IT

Have students use their drawings to write about the most terrifying ride imaginable.

## VOCABULARY

Here are words your students will encounter in this story, along with their appropriate meanings:

**achievement**—piece of work, accomplishment

**attendant**—person taking care of riders

**babbling**—senseless talk

**determination**—what you have when your mind is made up

**grinding**—harsh sounding

**panicked**—very frightened

**plunged**—fell, dropped

**scolded**—said with anger

**sheepishly**—bashfully, shyly

**snaking**—winding

**squeaky**—high-pitched

**staggered**—walked clumsily, stumbled





# “The Runaway Monster”

Just how scary is the “Monster”?  
Karen and Ashley are about to find out!

The “Monster” was the hottest ride at the Sugar Loaf Amusement Park. In the two weeks since it had opened, thousands of people had taken a ride on the huge, twisting roller coaster. What made the Monster so special? It was the first indoor roller coaster. Riders rode the Monster in pitch darkness!

A great roller coaster that traveled in the dark? It was too good to be true for roller coaster fans. They came from all over the country to ride the Monster.

As Ashley and her friend Karen approached the line snaking toward the ride, they saw a sign that read:

YOU ARE 120 MINUTES FROM RIDING THE MONSTER.

“Aw, come on, Ashley,” Karen said. “Let’s blow this off. We could hit at least five different rides in the next two hours.”

Ashley shook her head with determination.

“Eddie Blake rode this Monster,” she said. “He bragged about it all week at school. If he can do it, so can I.”

“This had better be good,” Karen muttered.

“It depends on what you mean by ‘good,’” said a squeaky voice. “This is actually a very dangerous ride.”

Ashley and Karen turned. A skinny little boy with thick glasses stood behind them in line.

“Oh, yeah?” Ashley asked. “Who made you an expert?”

“I’m not an expert,” the boy said, “but my father is. He sells insurance.”

“So?” Karen asked.

“It’s his job to figure out how dangerous any situation is. My dad said he wouldn’t ride on the Monster, not if you paid him. By the way, my name is Martin. May I ride with you two?”





“Why not?” Ashley said with a shrug.

It didn’t take long for Ashley to regret allowing Martin to tag along. He knew all of the details of every amusement park accident that ever happened. And he was eager to tell all about them.

“...And then there was the time when the Twister broke down,” Martin said. “Twenty-five people were stuck hanging upside-down for five hours. Of course, they were lucky. They could have been victims of the Upsy-Daisy disaster back in ’83—”

“Please, Martin!” Ashley said. “That’s enough! I mean, it’s fascinating to hear about amusement park accidents. But maybe you can tell me all about them later.”

“Maybe I could,” Martin said. “If we survive this ride.”

By this time, Martin and the girls were standing near the entrance of the Monster. From within its dark shadows came the sounds of grinding machinery and the screams of terrified people.

“I think maybe I’ll take a pass on this,” Karen said, gulping back her fear as she stared wide-eyed at the ride.

“Oh, no you don’t,” Ashley said, grabbing her friend’s shoulder. “I’m not riding this Monster alone.”

By this time, they were able to see where the cars for the Monster were loaded. As each car returned to the platform carrying passengers, a few of the people laughed with joy. Most of them, though, looked terrified.

“See the chains that haul the cars up the hill?” Martin said. “If one tiny link snaps, then the car will roll out of control. The passengers would be smashed to bits. Or maybe they’d crash into another car.”

“Will you be quiet?” Ashley nearly shouted at Martin. He glanced at her sheepishly, then kept staring at the chain. Ashley heard Martin muttering something to himself.

Soon, the two girls and Martin were ready to board the ride. As they stepped up to their car, Ashley could make out what Martin was muttering.

“We’re going to die,” he said, over and over again. “We’re going to die. We’re going to die.”

“Martin, stop saying that!” Ashley scolded, as the ride attendant slammed the safety bar down.





“But we’re going to die!” Martin whined. “The chain is going to snap! Did you see it? It’s all rusted! We’re going to die!”

“Martin!”

The ride lurched forward. The car entered the cool darkness, climbing higher, higher. As the car slowly climbed the hill that carried them into the dark building, Martin’s terrified babbling grew even louder.

“Martin, be quiet!” Ashley snapped. She felt her heart jump as the car slowly went over the crest of the hill.

“But the chain is going to break!” Martin screamed. “We’re going to—”  
*Crunch!*

A harsh grating sound drowned out Martin. The car came to a dead stop. Ashley could hear her own heart beat in the sudden silence.

“What’s wrong?” Karen asked, her voice panicked. “Why did we stop?”

“I’m sure it’s all right,” Ashley said, putting on her bravest voice. “It’s probably just some minor problem—”

*SNAP!*

Ashley screamed as the sharp crack of metal breaking echoed off the walls.

Her scream grew even louder, as the car plunged straight down into the darkness.

The Monster was out of control!



### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. Why is Ashley determined to ride the Monster?*
- 2. Why do you think Martin wants to ride the Monster?*
- 3. How does Martin’s talking about amusement park accidents make Ashley feel? How would you feel if you were Ashley?*
- 4. Predict what you think will happen next in this story. Talk about the possible endings for it.*





**Now continue reading to compare your predictions with the story.**

Ashley shut her eyes and held on for dear life. The Monster pitched her up and down and left and right. She braced herself, expecting to crash into the walls or onto the floor.

Then, after 90 seconds of terror, Ashley felt herself slowing down. She opened one eye. The car she was riding was pulling up to the platform. Another group of riders was waiting to get on.

“That was great!” Karen gushed as they staggered from the ride. Martin was grinning broadly as he helped Ashley get her balance.

“But, I thought the chain broke!” she gasped. “I thought we were doomed!”

“No, that’s just a sound effect they added to the ride,” Martin said.

“How do you know so much about it?” Karen asked.

Martin blushed. “The fact is, I told you a little white lie before. My dad doesn’t sell insurance. He designs amusement park rides. And the Monster is his greatest achievement! Want to ride it again?”

“No thanks!” Ashley said.

“Okay,” Martin said. He trotted back to the end of the line.

About four hours later, Ashley and Karen passed by the line of people waiting to ride the Monster. Martin was there. Ashley heard him talking to the two kids ahead of him in line:

“My dad sells insurance,” Martin was saying. “He wouldn’t ride this ride, not if you paid him. Do you mind if I ride with you?....”



# “Wolf ’n’ the Hood”

## Before Reading

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

Tell students that this story is a modern retelling of “Little Red Riding Hood” that pokes fun at the original story.

### READING STRATEGY FOCUS: EXPLORING CHARACTERS AND SETTING

Have a volunteer tell the original version of the fairy tale. List the story’s main characters and setting on the board:

Characters:

- Little Red Hiding Hood
- Wolf
- Grandma

Setting: Grandma’s house in the woods

Point out that this version of the story is realistic, and there are no talking animals. Have students brainstorm how the story of Little Red Riding Hood could be told using real people. How would each of the three main characters be updated? Then read the story.

## After Reading

### TALK ABOUT IT

Discuss how the characters in this story stand the original characters on their heads:

- Riding Hood: Instead of being an innocent little girl, she’s a confident, independent doctor.
- Grandma: Instead of being a weak old woman, she’s an avid football fan.
- Wolf: Instead of being a dangerous animal who wants to eat Riding Hood, Wolf is a timid man with a crush on Riding Hood.

### WRITE ABOUT IT

Let students pick a favorite fairy tale and update it in the same way, turning the characters into real people and making them the opposite of their original personalities. Have students write stories updating the fairy tales.

## VOCABULARY

Here are words your students will encounter in this story, along with their appropriate meanings:

**condo**—an apartment

**contagious**—catching

**lunged**—made a swift move

**scrambled**—moved quickly







“You’re going to have to miss Sunday dinner,” Wolf said, writing a note. “Got it. I’ll give her the message.”

As he hung up, the door opened. Wolf looked up and gasped. The most beautiful woman he had ever seen stood in the doorway, drying her hair with a towel. A name tag on her jacket read “Dr. Hood.”

“Who are you?” Red asked Wolf. The poor man was too stunned to speak.

“I’m a...I’m a...I’m a...” he stammered.

“You’re a what?” Red asked.

“Janitor,” Wolf croaked as he stumbled out of her office.

Later that night, Wolf sat in the cafeteria with Clark, his best janitor buddy.

“Dr. Hood is so beautiful,” Wolf said.

“Forget about it!” Clark said. “Everyone knows that she won’t go out with good-looking doctors. What makes you think she’d look twice at a guy like you?”

Wolf shrugged his shoulders. “Why not? She seemed to like janitors.”

“Ha!” Clark laughed. “The only things Dr. Hood likes are her job, kickboxing, and her old grandma, in that order.”

“Her grandmother!” Wolf gasped, remembering the message he had forgotten to give. He jumped to his feet, ready to head to Dr. Hood’s office.

Then he stopped. He had an idea. If his idea worked, Arnie Wolf thought it might help him to win the heart of Dr. L. R. Hood.

That Sunday, Red’s grandmother stepped out the door of her condo. She wore a Bears sweatshirt and held a big foam rubber hand with “We’re #1!” printed on it.

Grandmother locked her front door, then looked around to make sure no one was watching. She hid the key under her mat, then walked off, whistling the Bears’ fight song.

Arnie Wolf, watching from around the corner, saw his chance. He sneaked up to the door and took the key from under the mat. Using the key, Wolf let himself into Grandmother’s condo.

Later that afternoon, Red came to the door of the condo carrying a paper bag filled with Chinese food. She bent over to get the key hidden under the mat. Red was surprised to see that the key was missing. She tried the front door. It was open.

“That’s odd,” Red told herself as she entered her grandmother’s condo. “Grandma!” she called out. “Are you home?”

“I’m in the—” a low voice began. Red heard the voice give a little cough, then continue. “I’m in the bedroom.”





Very curious now, and just a little worried, Red set down the food. She headed into the bedroom. What she saw made Red gasp in surprise.

The room was dark. The curtains were shut, and the only light came from a TV tuned to a football game. Through the shadows, Red could see somebody lying in her Grandmother's bed, with the covers pulled all the way up. The person in the bed wore her grandmother's baseball cap, its bill pulled low. Only a pair of eyes could be seen.

"Grandma, are you all right?" Red gasped.

"Stay back!" the harsh voice called. Red stopped in her tracks. "I have a touch of the flu," the voice continued. "It's very contagious."

"Hmmm," Red said, suspicious. "I haven't heard of any flu bugs going around."

"Did I say flu?" the voice croaked. "I meant a cold." With that, Red's "grandmother" gave a harsh sneeze.

"You sound terrible," Red said. "You need help. Let me bring you a bowl of soup."

"I'll be fine!" "Grandmother" said. "Er—speaking of help, there's someone I want to tell you about."

"Who?" Red asked.

"His name is Wolf," "Grandmother" said. "I met him at your office. What a smart young man! And kind! He helped me cross the street."

Red narrowed her eyes. "When were you at my office?"

"Uh...Tuesday?" "Grandmother" said. "When you were in the gym. I stopped by just to say hello. Anyway, as I say, I met Arnie Wolf, who is a very handsome, very funny janitor—"

Red smiled as she stared at her "Grandmother." "You know, I never noticed this before, but what big eyes you have."

"Uh...the better to see you with?" "Grandmother" replied.

"And what big, hairy knuckles you have," Red said. The hands disappeared under the blankets.

"The better to hold on to you, my dear," "Grandmother" said.

"Oh, yeah?" Red said. "Well, you better hold on to that blanket!"

With that, Red grabbed the end of the blanket and gave a mighty tug. The blanket flew off the bed.

Huddled on the mattress was Arnie Wolf.

"I thought so!" Red yelled. She crouched in a kickboxing pose. Wolf scrambled back. "Before I beat you up," Red yelled, "you had better tell me what you did to my grandmother. Now!"





### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What are the most important things in Red's life?*
2. *How does Wolf meet Red? How does he feel when he meets her? How do you know?*
3. *Where does Red's grandmother go on Sunday? What does Wolf do that day? What is his plan?*
4. *What do you think will happen next? Summarize the story so far, then make a prediction.*

**Now continue reading to see if you were right.**

"Now, now, take it easy!" Wolf said, as he jumped from the bed. "Your grandmother is fine!"

"Where is she?" Red demanded.

"At the Bears game!" Wolf said. "She left a message for you the other day. I—er—forgot to tell you."

"Don't give me that," Red said. "Everyone knows that Grandmother loves baseball, not football!"

Red lunged for Wolf. He jumped out of the way, tripped, and fell to the floor. Red crouched, ready to leap on him.

"Look!" Wolf said, pointing to the football game on the TV. "I told you!"

Red looked at the TV. The picture showed the crowd celebrating a touchdown. There, in the middle of the picture, was Red's grandmother. She had painted her face orange, and was waving the big foam rubber hand.

Red turned to Wolf, a confused look on her face. "If she's at the game, what are you doing here?"

Wolf explained what had happened. "I thought if your Grandmother put in a good word for me, then you might like me."

"That's sweet," Red said, as she led Wolf to the door of the condo. "No one's ever gone to this much trouble to impress me."

"Did it work?" Wolf asked. "Will you go out with a sweet man like me?"

"You haven't asked me yet."

Wolf swallowed hard and worked up his courage. "Dr. Hood," he asked, "Will you go out with me?"

Hood smiled sweetly.

"No, thanks," she said, shutting the door on Wolf's face.

