

Name: _____ Class: _____

Trail into Darkness

By Brad Robie
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Brad Robie has written for Highlights Magazine for Kids. In this short story, a boy gets lost while snowshoeing with his family. As you read, take notes on how Luke responds to being lost.

- [1] *A boulder as big as a house.* That’s how the guide book described Giant Rock. Dad said it was carried here by a glacier¹ millions of years ago.

I was finally going to see it, on snowshoes, with my three older cousins, my dad, and my uncle Don. I’d been snowshoeing before, and I liked the adventure of trekking² through deep snow alongside wild-animal tracks.

At the parking area, after putting on our snowshoes, we studied the map in the information kiosk. “We start here,” Dad said, “on the red trail. Then we turn left onto the purple loop. That’s where Giant Rock is.”

“Remember to stick together, guys,” Uncle Don said.



“Where is everyone?” by Melissa Manwill is used with permission.

- [5] The trail ran uphill alongside a stone wall. It was easy to follow because red markers were nailed to the trees and the snow had been packed down by other hikers. At the top of the hill, we turned onto the purple trail, which wound back and forth, traversing³ the hills and gullies.⁴ We settled into a rhythm, with Dad and everyone else in front and me in the back, *crunch-crunch-crunching* through the snow. My cousins were faster than I was, but I managed to keep up.

The late afternoon sun felt warm, although it was already sinking lower. I saw lots of animal tracks — mostly deer, squirrel, and rabbit prints, which I recognized from my field guide.⁵ As the trail zigzagged on, my cousin Andrew said what I’d been thinking: “Will we ever reach Giant Rock?”

My cousin Aiden smiled and turned to me. “Luke, do you think your dad invented the idea of Giant Rock just to get us away from the TV for a while?”

I laughed. “You never know.”

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1. a slow-moving mass of ice formed over many years
 2. **Trek (verb):** to go on a long journey, usually by foot
 3. to travel across or through something
 4. a small valley worn away by running water
 5. a book for identifying things in nature

Finally, we crested⁶ a hill and saw the massive boulder sitting alone in the forest. “It really is as big as a house!” my cousin Josh said, gazing up.

- [10] My cousins and I high-fived each other and jogged down the slope until we stood at the base, breathless.

Standing in the boulder’s giant shadow, I noticed the sun had dipped even lower.

“Let’s head back,” Dad said after a few minutes.

Soon we were *crunch-crunch-crunching* our way home.

I was a little behind the group when I noticed a set of animal tracks I didn’t recognize. They were hard to see among the snowshoe prints, so I followed them off the trail for a closer look. There were no claw marks, which meant they didn’t belong to a dog or a fox. Instead, they looked like tiny handprints and footprints. *Must be a raccoon*, I thought, matching them to prints in my guide.

- [15] I looked up when I suddenly realized how quiet it had gotten. I was totally alone. “Hey!” I shouted. “Where is everyone?”

Nothing. Just the sound of my own breathing and the hammering of a woodpecker echoing in the bare woods. *They couldn’t have gone far*, I thought, stepping back onto the trail. *I’ll catch up to them if I hurry*.

I came to a junction⁷ where I could turn left or go straight, but both trails had purple markers. The path to the left looked familiar. But when I stepped over a log I thought I’d seen before, something told me I was going the wrong way. So I reversed direction. My mind started to race. Soon it might be too dark to tell what color the markers were. And I couldn’t just follow my own footsteps because there were so many tracks from other hikers.

It seemed to grow darker by the second. I had no flashlight. No phone. I began running. What if I couldn’t find my way back? I started tearing through the woods in a panic, watching as the sun disappeared behind the trees.

Then I came to a crossroads. Which way should I turn?

- [20] *Stop*, I told myself. *Think*. I pictured the map again. To get to Giant Rock we had turned left onto the purple loop. To get back, I needed to do the opposite and turn right onto the red trail.

If this didn’t work, I’d do what I had always heard you should do in a situation like this: stay put, and let your group find you.

I heard voices, someone calling. Then I noticed the stone wall, the trail running alongside it. This *had* to be right. I plunged⁸ downhill in giant steps.

And then, the best sight ever: the parking lot — and my family! I shouted as I ran toward them.

6. to reach the top of something

7. a point where two or more things are joined

8. **Plunge (verb):** to jump or dive quickly and with energy

"Luke? Are you OK?" Dad's voice was urgent.⁹ He shined a flashlight in my direction.

[25] I'd only been lost for minutes, but it had felt like forever. Now all I wanted was a bear hug from Dad and to make tracks for home.

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9. **Urgent** (*adjective*): calling for immediate attention

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence best describes the theme of the short story?
 - A. It's important to have proper supplies before you go outdoors.
 - B. Outdoor activities in the snow are too dangerous for kids.
 - C. The beauty of nature can often be distracting.
 - D. It's important to stay calm in an emergency situation.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "I'd been snowshoeing before, and I liked the adventure of trekking through deep snow alongside wild-animal tracks." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "The late afternoon sun felt warm, although it was already sinking lower. I saw lots of animal tracks — mostly deer, squirrel, and rabbit prints, which I recognized from my field guide." (Paragraph 6)
 - C. "I looked up when I suddenly realized how quiet it had gotten. I was totally alone. 'Hey!' I shouted. 'Where is everyone?'" (Paragraph 15)
 - D. "Stop, I told myself. Think. I pictured the map again. To get to Giant Rock we had turned left onto the purple loop." (Paragraph 20)

3. What does it mean when Luke describes his mind as "racing" in paragraph 17?
 - A. He is thinking many thoughts very quickly.
 - B. He is imagining himself running very fast.
 - C. He is smarter than the average person.
 - D. He is trying not to think about his situation.

4. How does paragraph 17 contribute to the text?
 - A. It suggests that Luke will never go home.
 - B. It reveals that Luke knows what to do.
 - C. It shows that Luke is in serious trouble.
 - D. It stresses how poorly marked the path is.

5. How does Luke react to not being able to find his family?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the story, Luke is scared to be lost in nature. What dangers does he face out in nature? Describe a time you were scared by something in nature.
2. When Luke gets separated from his family, he is fearful. How do you think Luke's fear affects him while he's lost? Does it help him act and find his family or distract him? Describe a time that your fear has driven you to act, or kept you from acting.
3. How does Luke act bravely when he gets separated from his family? Describe a time when you had to be brave, despite being afraid.