

# Reading for Meaning

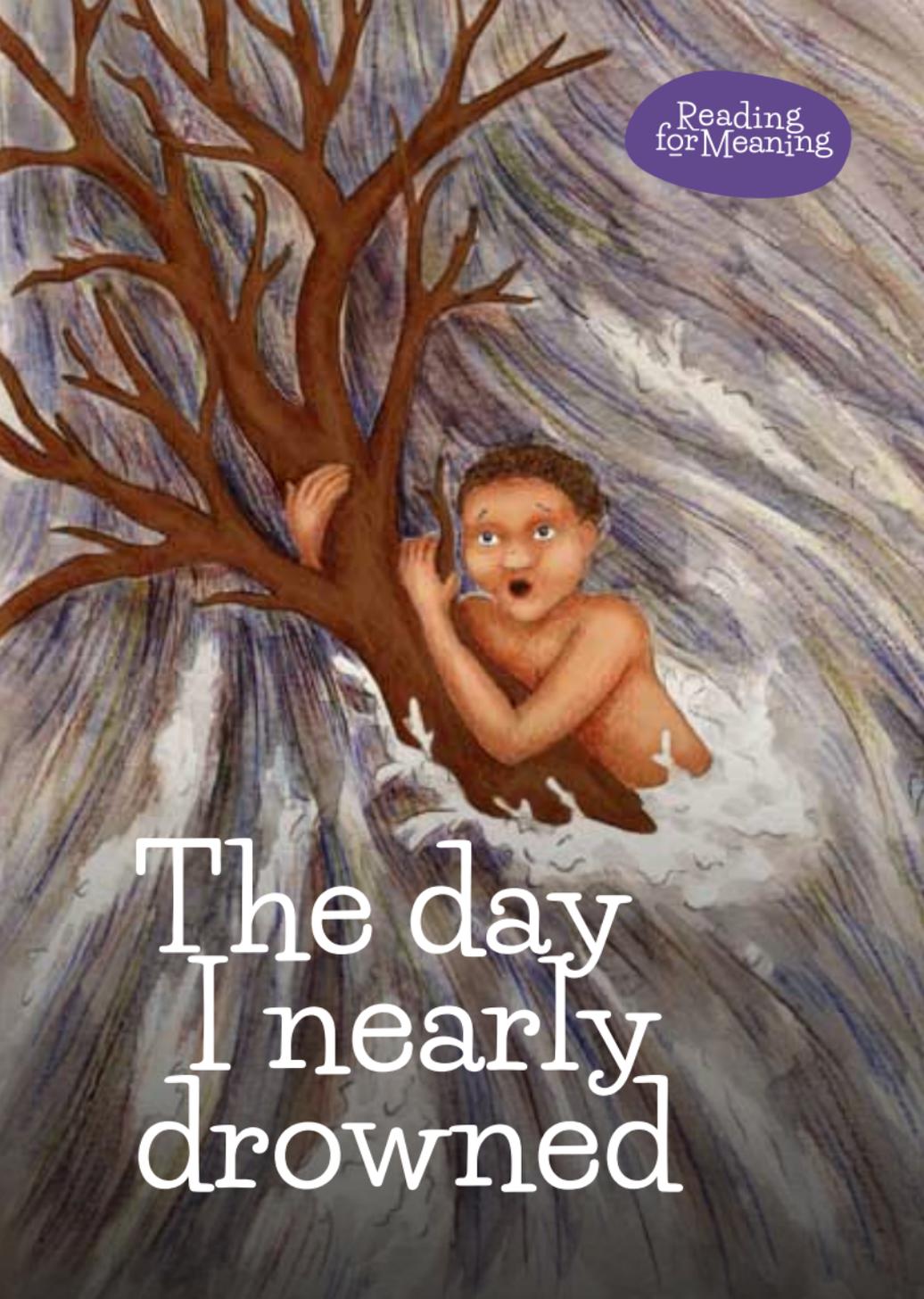
**Welcome, story supporter!**

**We hope that you and your child  
have fun with this story.**

**Nurturing and supporting  
your child is important for  
their physical, emotional and  
academic development.**

**ZERO  
DROP/OUT**

Part of the Zero Dropout campaign working towards  
halving the rate of school dropout by 2030.

A painting of a young boy with a shocked expression, clinging to the trunk of a large, leafless tree. The background is a turbulent sea with dark, swirling waves and white foam, suggesting a storm. The boy is shirtless and appears to be in a state of panic or fear. The tree's branches are dark brown and intricate. The overall style is expressive and somewhat somber.

Reading  
for Meaning

# The day I nearly drowned

I will never forget the day I nearly drowned.

It was the school holidays and I was staying with my grandmother. She lives in Molatedi, in the North West Province. It's a small town, very rural, not like where I live in Pretoria. My mother likes sending me to my grandmother in Molatedi because she says it's safe.

I was very excited when she told me I was going to my grandmother. I feel so free there. There's lots of open space to run and hide and play in, trees to climb, there's even a river. Also, I love my grandmother. She is kind and always looks out for me. But best of all, I like seeing my cousins and playing with them.

My cousin Neo is older than me. He is a whizz at soccer. He can put the ball in goal from the other end of the field.

My cousin Bontle is younger than me. He is a great dancer and is known in Molatedi for his fancy dance steps.

Best of all is my cousin Max. He's my age and we like all the same things. We are always challenging each other to go one better. Maybe that's why things went wrong that day.

It all started so well. The morning after I arrived I was woken by Max jumping on me. "Hey Sandi," he said. "Get up you lazy boy. We're going swimming!"

Now, my name is Sandile and I don't like people shortening my name to Sandi because it feels like they are treating me like a child. But I don't mind if Max does it because then it feels like we are brothers. So I just said: "Yo, Maxie" and punched him back.

Gogo had made some breakfast and, while we ate, Max told me: "Hey Sandi, it's good you're here now. We've had rain so the river is full. Let's go swim."

"Hey Max that's cool but ... ummm ... I'm not such a good swimmer, you know." I didn't want to tell

Max, that I couldn't really swim; that I could only doggy-paddle. "But hey, I'm a lot better than you!" I quickly added.

"Huh. We'll see who's the best swimmer!" said Max. "Don't worry – I'll show you how to swim. But just to be safe let's take a tube."

We finished our breakfast quickly and cleaned up (Gogo was very strict about us helping her tidy up). My three cousins and I were soon heading through the town, carrying a blown-up tyre tube.

It was a short run to the river and, when I saw it, I said "Uh-uh" quietly to myself because there really was a lot of water, much more than I remembered. But I thought to myself: "I can't back down now." Besides, I had the tube to keep me afloat.

So, trying to sound confident, I shouted: "Okay, last one to swim across the river is a pumpkin!" and I ran towards the water. By the time I had

the tyre over my head I saw that all three cousins were already in the river and splashing across toward the other side. I remember thinking: “Hey, I’ll have to catch up!” and so I took a flying leap into the river.

As soon as I hit the water I knew I was in trouble. It was cold and it made me gasp. I took in a mouthful and started coughing. As I was thrashing around, trying to get my breath, the tyre slipped away and I was on my own!

I sank down, down, down but I couldn’t find the bottom. I started to panic – the water was deep and muddy, and I didn’t know where I was. I could feel the current moving me along, and I thought: “Oh no! Go up! Go up!” but I could hardly tell what was up and what was down. Then I got to the surface and tried to call out, but I went down under the water again (I heard later that my cousins didn’t hear a thing). Then suddenly I felt my leg scrape against something.

I grabbed it – it was a tree, growing under the water. I held onto it tightly – and it saved my life! I pulled myself up and dragged myself to the bank. I couldn't stop coughing and even vomited up some water.

This all happened so quickly, my three cousins didn't even know that I had almost drowned. They thought I was safe with the tyre. But here I was, lying on the river bank, with the tyre floating away down the river. At last I managed to shout out “Haaai...” and then at last they heard me. They swam back to me as quickly as they could.

There was no more swimming that day. We talked about it a lot and agreed we had made some mistakes. I was lucky to be alive. And do you know what? – I didn't mind at all when Gogo herself called me Sandi and gave me a big hug.

*Adapted from 'The Day I nearly Drowned'  
(Time to Read Tutor Guide, J-PAL Africa)*

## EXTEND THE STORY...

# Water safety



WRITING  
ACTIVITIES

### WHAT TO USE

*Pen / pencil, piece of paper*

### WHAT TO DO

- Ask your child to write down 5 things they have learned about keeping safe in water (sea, river, dam etc.) For example: **Check the conditions of the water before swimming.**

## EXTEND THE STORY...

# A personal story



GAMES

### WHAT TO USE

*Props for storytelling (optional)*

### WHAT TO DO

- Ask your child to share a day something exciting or scary happened to them. Reassure them that it is okay if they don't want to share their story and that if they do share with you, you will keep it private.

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