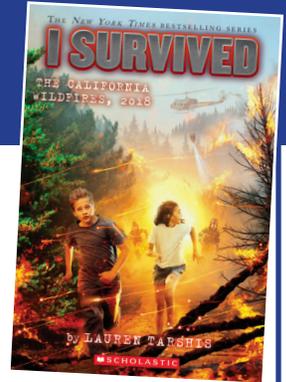


### I Survived The California Wildfires, 2018



# READ-ALLOUD

Assign roles to your family and friends for this read-aloud from *I Survived the California Wildfires, 2018*, in which Josh and his mother arrive in Northern California for a visit with their cousins after Josh's dad gets arrested.

### CHARACTERS:

Narrator	Josh	Mom
Bubbles	Holly	Aunt Nicole

**Narrator:** Josh is staring at his phone, reading the story about his father's arrest. His mom turns off the main road, driving deeper into the Northern California woods.

**Mom:** Why don't you put the phone away? Take a break from those stories. That's why we're here.

**Narrator:** Reluctantly, Josh puts his phone away. This is the last place he wants to be right now, visiting cousins he doesn't even know. He looks out the window, and something catches his eye.

**Josh:** Whoa. What happened there?

**Mom:** Must have been a wildfire. California's had some big ones lately.

**Narrator:** Everywhere Josh looks, there are dead, blackened trees that remind him of skeletons. This is where they're going to spend the rest of the summer? They pass through the burned area and pull up to a small white house with a front porch, flowerpots, and chirping birds.

**Mom:** How charming.

**Josh:** I mean, sure, if you like being in the middle of nowhere.

**Narrator:** Mom sighs and gives Josh a sad smile.

**Mom:** I know you miss Dad. But give this a shot, okay? The "middle of nowhere" is exactly what we need right now. Why don't you grab the suitcases and bring them to the porch? I'll go find Holly and Nicole.

**Narrator:** As Mom walks around to the back of the house, Josh hauls his duffel and Mom's suitcase up the porch, looking around at the property.

**Josh:** (*to himself*) No basketball hoop, no swimming pool—this is going to be one boring summer.

**Narrator:** Suddenly, Josh hears a sound he's never heard before.

**Bubbles:** Hsssssssss...

**Narrator:** He turns around but doesn't believe his eyes: A massive 6-foot-long lizard with brown-and-black speckled skin and a bullet-shaped head is heading right for him! Josh starts running for his life.

**Holly:** Stop!

**Narrator:** Josh stops so suddenly that he loses his balance, falling forward into the grass.

## READ-ALOUD (CONTINUED)

The beast is right there, glaring at Josh, teeth bared. Josh closes his eyes, bracing for the worst. But something gentle brushes against his cheek.

**Bubbles:** *Ffffffftttt!*

**Narrator:** Josh opens his eyes to see the lizard's long skinny tongue shoot out and touch Josh's skin. It almost tickles.

**Holly:** Sorry about that! I doubt she would have bitten you—Savannah monitor lizards are usually pretty calm—but you never know. I'm Holly. And this beauty is Bubbles.

**Josh:** She's your pet?!

**Holly:** No, no, no. Nobody should be allowed to keep these wild creatures as pets.

**Josh:** So where did you get her?

**Holly:** Someone bought her, then probably abandoned her in the forest. She would have died—lizards can't survive the winters here. But luckily someone found her and called us. We run a reptile shelter with our friends.

**Josh:** That's...different.

**Holly:** We like it. We take care of the animals until we can find them good homes.

**Narrator:** Josh brushes his fingers across Bubbles's head, and it feels warm and smooth, not slick and slimy like he expected. Bubbles gives him another kiss.

**Bubbles:** *Ffffffftttt!*

**Josh:** Do you have other reptiles here right now?

**Holly:** Just King Kong. He's a Burmese python.

**Josh:** Those giant snakes?

**Holly:** Yep. He's about 12-feet long. Want to

meet him?

**Josh:** Yes!

**Narrator:** When Josh, Holly, and Bubbles reach King Kong's enclosure, Josh looks inside. But he jumps back quickly at the sight of the snake—something's not right.

**Josh:** What's wrong with him? Is he okay?

**Holly:** He's just shedding his skin. All reptiles do it. The old skin comes off, the new skin underneath is nice and healthy. It's not easy though. You know that expression "shed your skin," about leaving your old self behind? This is where it comes from.

**Narrator:** As Josh looks at King Kong, he wonders: what's it like to shed your skin?

**Aunt Nicole:** Holly! Josh! Where are you guys?

**Narrator:** Mom and Aunt Nicole find Josh and Holly at the snake enclosure.

**Mom:** There you are!

**Narrator:** Aunt Nicole puts an arm around Josh and grins like she's known him forever.

**Aunt Nicole:** You must be hungry. Come with me.

**Holly:** She's been baking for two days.

**Aunt Nicole:** We've got brownies, muffins, chocolate chip cookies—

**Josh:** Sounds good. Does Bubbles get some?

**Aunt Nicole:** Ah, Bubbles has won your heart already, huh? She does that.

**Narrator:** As they all head back to the house, Josh looks around. This place is definitely different from New Jersey, but maybe it won't be so bad after all. ■

