

I SURVIVED

BOOK CLUB

Name: _____

I Survived The Great Chicago Fire, 1871



READ-ALOUD

Assign roles to your family and friends for this read-aloud from *I Survived the Great Chicago Fire, 1871*, in which Oscar, Jennie, and Bruno try to make their way to Palmer House, hoping to find Oscar's mother and stepfather...

CHARACTERS

Narrator

Oscar

Jennie

Bruno

Otis

Gregor

Tom

Narrator: As Oscar, Jennie, and Bruno make their way toward Palmer House, new fires force them to find alternate routes. But then, a stroke of luck—Jennie leads them into an alley where they discover something they need very badly.

Oscar: Is that what I think it is?

Jennie: A water barrel!

Bruno: Water! Water! Water!

Narrator: They run to the barrel. Oscar takes off Bruno's fancy purple hat and holds him up so he can drink from it. Then he and Jennie take turns drinking and splashing their scorched skin.

Oscar: I've never loved water more than I do right now.

Jennie: Me neither!

Narrator: Oscar looks over at his new friend.

Oscar: Hey, Jennie, you really know your way around the city. You'd make a good tracker.

Jennie: Thanks. It's because my mother was a baker. Bruno and I used to go with her to deliver her cakes and cookies.

Bruno: I love cookies.

Narrator: Oscar puts Bruno's hat back on

his head.

Oscar: Me too, pal.

Jennie: Me three!

Narrator: They all laugh together, but Jennie and Bruno quickly fall silent.

Bruno: My mama got sick. She in heaven.

Narrator: Jennie glances at Oscar and he can see the pain in her eyes.

Oscar: My papa's in heaven, too.

Jennie: Our father died right after Bruno was born, in an accident. Mama died six months ago. I promised her I'd keep an eye on Bruno, no matter what.

Narrator: Oscar thinks of his own promise to Papa, to watch over the farm. He wonders if Papa can forgive him for breaking it. Then he wonders if he can forgive himself.

Jennie: That's how we ended up living the way we do. I couldn't let us go to the orphanage.

Oscar: I understand. I've heard stories.

Narrator: Oscar looks at Bruno, who seems so sad Oscar's heart squeezes tight.

Oscar: You know what, Bruno? I bet up in heaven, my papa and your parents are good friends.

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READ-ALoud (CONTINUED)

Narrator: The boy brightens right away.

Bruno: Like us!

Narrator: Jennie and Oscar laugh at Bruno beaming at them from under his fancy purple hat. But then they hear:

Otis: Hey! You there!

Narrator: Oscar looks up to see Otis—the yellow-eyed boy from the train station—and his gang. Otis carries a painting in a fancy gold frame. Each of his boys carries a large sack overflowing with things that clearly don't belong to them.

Jennie (whispering): Oh no...



Narrator: Oscar pulls Jennie closer to him and holds Bruno tight.

Otis: Look who it is, boys—it's Jennie. Glad we found you.

Jennie: Hi, Otis. Gregor. Tom.

Gregor (concerned): Where ya been, Jennie?

Tom: Are you and Bruno okay?

Narrator: Otis shoots a glare at Gregor and Tom, and they both take a step back.

Otis: This is a big night for us—we won't have to work again for a year. But we need more hands.

Narrator: Oscar tightens his grip on Jennie and Bruno. Otis gazes at him with his rattlesnake eyes.

Otis: Who's this, Jennie?

Narrator: Jennie starts to shake. Oscar takes a deep breath and steps forward.

Oscar: I'm a friend of Jennie's and Bruno's.

Narrator: Otis gazes at Oscar from head to toe, then looks back at Jennie.

Otis: Come on. Leave the baby with your buddy here. Let's go.

Bruno: I not baby.

Narrator: Otis laughs out loud. Gregor and Tom stay silent.

Otis: Tough kid. Fine. We'll take him along too.

Narrator: Although Jennie is still shaking, she throws her shoulders back.

Jennie: No. And you know what?

Narrator: Otis raises his eyebrows.

Jennie: I quit.

Narrator: Otis laughs, a strange high-pitched

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giggle that raises the hair on Oscar's neck.
Then his face goes dead.

Otis: No one quits my gang. You know that. *No one.* That's how this works.

Oscar: Leave her alone, Otis.

Narrator: Otis turns his menacing stare on Oscar once again. Then, suddenly, he remembers.

Otis: You! You still looking for your suitcases? You think Jennie's gonna get them back for you?

Narrator: Jennie looks at Oscar in confusion, and then, as she realizes that Oscar is the boy she tricked in the train station, her face crumbles.

Otis: You're with us, Jennie. Get over here. *Now.*

Narrator: Otis drops the painting and lunges toward Jennie.

Oscar: No!

Narrator: Before he can think about what he's doing, Oscar springs forward and gives Otis a hard push in the chest. Otis stumbles back, accidentally stomping on the painting, snapping it in half. Time seems to stop.

Otis: What have you *done*? Do you know how much that was worth?

Gregor: Maybe we can fix it, Otis—

Narrator: Otis snarls at Gregor.

Otis: You know how to fix a *painting*?!

Narrator: Gregor stares at the ground, saying nothing. Otis turns back to Oscar.

Otis: This is *your* fault!

Narrator: Otis smashes his rocklike fist into Oscar's nose and Oscar falls to the ground... When he finally opens his eyes again, a shadowy figure is coming toward him through a cloud of smoke. For a moment, he thinks it's Otis, but then—

Mr. Morrow: *Oscar!*

Narrator: A wave of relief washes over Oscar as Mr. Morrow dashes to his side. But the relief is quickly replaced by panic.

Otis: My mother! Where is she? Is she all right?

Mr. Morrow: She's safe at my house, north of here. She didn't want to leave the hotel without you but I promised I'd find you and sent her ahead.

Narrator: Oscar is astonished. Mr. Morrow smiles as he helps Oscar to his feet.

Otis: You stayed behind? To look for me?

Mr. Morrow: That's right. And now, Oscar, you and I have to get ourselves out of here. *Fast.*

Otis: But wait, my friends, Jennie and Bruno, they were just here, and that boy, Otis, from the train station, he—

Mr. Morrow: Oscar, I promise, we'll find your friends. I found you, didn't I? But first things first. We *must* go see your mother.

Narrator: Mr. Morrow puts his arm around Oscar and together they dash to a buggy waiting for them at the corner. Seconds later, the horse takes off in a gallop and they head north to safety. ■