**1. Letter from Camp**

Dear Mom, Dad, Violet, and Max,

Well, I’m here at sleep-away camp. This is my third day here. I have five **bunkmates**. That’s what they call the kids who sleep in your cabin. My bunkmates are all pretty cool. One boy is named Pepe. He says his name is short for Pepperoni. I don’t believe him. He caught a snake with his bare hands, so I don’t care if he’s a liar. One kid is named Lincoln. He’s got one blue eye and one brown eye. He can ride a unicycle—at least, he says he can. Another kid is named Mike. He has the top bunk over mine. He seems normal except for one thing. He slept through the whole first night here. The rest of us stayed up and told ghost stories. One story was about a ghost who used to go to this camp. It’s probably not a true story. Another one of my bunkmates is named Justin. His last name is Case. He likes to say things like “Justin case, we get lost...” Or “Justin case we get hungry...” I would not want to have the name Justin Case!

Our cabin is number 42. It’s on a hill. It’s not too far from the **latrine**. That’s a camp word that means “bathroom.” There’s no bath. We have outdoor showers. I don’t think you can really get your feet clean on a mud floor. The cabin is a long walk from the **canteen**. That’s where we eat. Mom, I miss your cooking. Dad, I even miss your cooking. Last night, we had beans and some sort of green sauce. For dessert, we roasted marshmallows.

I told everybody that I had a sister named Violet. They thought that it was terrible to be named after a flower. Actually, Justin Case was the one who made fun of it. But he has no right to talk about weird names.

It’s really dark here at night. There are no lights. I mean it’s really, really, dark. The air smells funny like a mix of Christmas trees and dirt. I like it.

I hope Max doesn’t miss me too much. He would love to run around here chasing chipmunks and things. Well, I’m going to sign off. Please write. Send food.

From, Alex

**2. Thirty Minutes Alone**

Miguel hated the half hour before his older brother got home from high school. The house was too quiet, and he felt alone. He didn’t like feeling that way. In fact, he had insisted to his parents that he would be fine and that he didn’t need a babysitter after school. He was old enough to take care of himself. It was only a half hour.

On that day, he did what he usually did. He turned on the television, loud. He laid out the snacks that he and his brother would eat. Their parents had a strange rule about not eating alone, so he had to wait until Manolo got home, even if he was starving. He wasn’t allowed to cook either, so any snacks he put out had to be cold. And he had to call his mom at the store, just to let her know that he was home.

The phone rang. It was his mother. “Is Manolo home yet?” She sounded worried. The store where she worked was almost an hour away. “Get into the basement!” she said. Miguel could tell she was trying to sound calm.

“What’s the matter, Mom? You know Manolo won’t be home for another twenty minutes.”

Manolo had a car now that he was 17 and no longer rode on the school bus. “Get down…” Then the line cut out. Miguel ran to the window.

Even though it was only four o’clock, the sky had turned black. Hail hit the roof and the front yard. Every few seconds, lightning lit up the landscape. In one flash, he saw the swirl of a tornado. It was headed straight for their house. Then he saw Manolo’s car, about a half mile away. He was driving fast. “Hurry up, Manolo!” Miguel whispered to himself. He looked back at the twister, then again toward the road.

Manolo was almost at the driveway. He opened the door. In the strong wind, it battered against the side of the house. Manolo rushed in.

Without talking, the two of them headed for the basement. They knew what to do. They huddled together and listened to the roar overhead. It seemed to last forever.

**3. Cloning Around**

**Should people be allowed to clone themselves or others?**

In 1997, scientists made a lamb named Dolly by cloning an adult sheep. *Cloning* is a process in which cells from the body of one living thing are used to make an exact copy of it. Since Dolly, scientists have cloned cattle, pigs, and other animals.

Some scientists would like to try to make clones of human beings. They could create a new baby from the cells of a person, they say. Someday, just a few of your cells could be used to make a copy of you. You could have a younger identical twin.

Should scientists be allowed to clone humans? All over the world, people are wrestling with that question. Read these arguments. Then decide for yourself.

**Yes! Scientists Should Clone People.**

Cloning humans would help us learn. We could learn more about how people develop. That could lead to preventing and curing diseases.

Scientists could learn how to clone parts of the human body. People who need new body parts would be able to get them. For example, a person with a bad heart could get a heart from a clone.

Making a clone of a person could be a wonderful thing. Parents whose child dies could use cells to create a new baby. The baby would be like the child they lost.

Some people aren't able to have babies. People who want to be parents could make a clone instead. Then they would have a baby of their own.

Many people have done a lot for peace or science. A clone might be able to continue the good work.

**No! Scientists Should Not Clone People.**

Making clones of people is wrong. We were not meant to make new humans in the lab.

Experiments on humans are dangerous. We don't know what could happen. Cloned babies might have problems. They might not be able to live full lives.

A person should be made from two parents. A clone would be made from only one parent.

A human clone would not be exactly like the original. Many things affect how a person is. What happens in your life affects who you are. No two babies have the exact same experiences. Cloning a child who died would not mean getting that same child back.

Some people might clone for the wrong reasons. For example, they might want to make thousands of clones of super strong people to use in armies. Cloning is too risky.

**4. Fat and Fed Up**

"Would you like fries with that?"

If that is a question you hear at every meal, you might want to rethink your diet.

You might think about getting a lawyer, too.

In 2002, Caesar Barber decided to sue McDonald's, Wendy's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Burger King. Barber was dangerously overweight. He was 56 and had suffered two heart attacks. He blamed the fast-food chains for his health problems.

"I think all the food I ate from McDonald's and all the three other chains- with the calories, with the grease-was like a time bomb exploding in my arteries," Barber said.

Many people saw the lawsuit as a bit of a joke. But the food industry isn't laughing. Even though Barber's case was dismissed in court, more lawsuits are coming.

In the United States, 64 percent of adults are overweight. More than 15 percent of children are too heavy. Being overweight can lead to serious health problems, even death. Americans are becoming supersized. Some people think the food industry is to blame.

**Yes! It's the Food Industry's Fault**

Everyone knows that smoking can cause illness and death. For that reason, lawyers have sued the big tobacco companies. One of those lawyers was John Banzhaf. Now he's going after the huge fast-food industry.

Banzhaf wants fast-food chains to warn people about the dangers of fat- filled fries and supersized sodas. He wants fast-food restaurants to offer healthful menu choices. He wants schools to stop selling sodas. And he plans to sue to make those changes happen.

"For a large number of people, a steady diet of fast food is almost as harmful and as difficult to resist as heroin is to an addict," says Banzhaf.

**No! It's Your Own Fault for Eating Too Much Junk**

"An expensive waste of time!" That's what a Burger King spokesman calls lawsuits such as Barber's.

Florida Congressman Ric Keller wants to pass a law to put a stop to them. Suing fast-food companies "would make the lawyers' bank accounts fatter," Keller says, but it "won't make anyone skinnier."

It is, Keller says, "a matter of personal responsibility." People have only themselves to blame if a fast-food diet makes them fat.

As Keller says, "Nobody is forced to supersize their fast-food meals."

**5. No Way Out**

The homework was easy enough--write a report about a human rights leader. Jack decided on Gandhi. He headed to the library after school. The library was new. It was full of stacks of books, like the old library.

It also had rows and rows of workstations. The steps were stainless steel. The windows had blinds that opened and closed with the sun. Plants were in every corner. Dozens were carefully placed along the tops of the shelves, like an overhead garden.

In the centre was a glass elevator. It was shaped like a spaceship. It reminded Jack of old episodes of Star Trek.

“Beam me up, Scotty,” he said to himself as he pushed a button.

He rode to the top floor. There was a video room, with viewing stations. There was even a cafeteria. Jack didn’t really like to read. It surprised him that the library felt like

a cool place to be. He walked through the stacks. He took a few books from the shelves. They weren’t about Gandhi. Those were probably in another section. These were about aircraft. He read captions under pictures of bi-planes. He learned about the early fliers, called barnstormers. He read whole chapters about how planes lifted off.

He didn’t notice the growing quiet. The noise in his stomach interrupted his concentration. He was hungry. He realised that dinnertime had passed. He headed toward the elevator. It was shut off for the night. The only light was coming from the street lamps outside the window. It cast a silver glow on the place. He was there alone. And there seemed to be no way to get out.

**6. Green Machines**



 

 



*Will a hand-cranked laptop open new windows on the world for kids in poor countries?*

**Low-cost laptops to help improve education for world’s poor.**

Can you imagine a day when every student has a laptop computer? Nicholas Negroponte can. He hopes to make that happen with the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) program. The **nonprofit organization1** he founded aims to provide laptops to elementary students in poor countries. If everything goes according to plan, by 2007 up to 7 million children in Thailand, Nigeria, Brazil, and Argentina will have their own laptops. After that, the organisation hopes to bring the program to China, Egypt, and Mexico.

The program is starting small. Beginning October and into November [2006], 500 children in Thailand will receive computers. Thailand’s Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra recently promised that every elementary student in his country will receive a free computer "instead of books." Textbooks can be expensive, but the new laptops might cut those costs. The computers are designed to connect to the Internet. "Books will be found and can be read on computers," Thaksin says.

**1 nonprofit organisation**: organisation not existing or carried on for the purpose of making money

Nicknamed "the green machine," each computer will initially cost about $140, but OLPC’s goal is to reduce the cost to $100. The machine was designed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Media Laboratory to meet the needs of developing countries. For instance, the laptops run on electricity produced by hand cranks. That is important because some people in poor areas lack electric power.

The laptops don’t appeal to developing nations only, however. A number of U.S. educators are also interested in the machines. They see the laptops as useful tools for children whose families can’t afford computers.

**7. The Scavenger Hunt**

Every year, Sophie’s troop held a scavenger hunt. The theme this year was to locate an alphabetical list of things related to music. As usual, the troop split into four teams. Each team had one parent and four scouts. Last year, Sophie’s team had followed the list in order, starting at the top.

The rules of the game said that if two or more teams had found the same object, it didn’t count. Last year, when the theme was math, everyone had collected an **abacus1**, beads, and calculators. So to make it more interesting, and to be sure they reached the end of the list, they decided they would start from the bottom--at *Z*. Then they’d make sure to have things that the other teams had not found. They had just eight hours to collect as many of the 26 items as they could. There wasn’t a prize, but it was still fun to compete.

Jill’s mom was in charge of the list. “*Z*!” she shouted. She was a cheerleader type and always like to show her enthusiasm. “Who can think of a *Z* for music?” Marisa shouted, “**Zither2!**” Then Anna said, “My father has a zither.” For *Y*, they finally settled on “yodel” and decided they would simply yodel. *X* was easy--a **xylophone3**. They retrieved one from Jill’s little sister’s toy box. For W, they found a wind chime and for *V* they took the violin that Amy played in the school orchestra.

“Would it be cheating if we turned the xylophone upside down for *U*?” Jill asked. The group agreed that this was a great idea. The rules didn’t seem to cover everything. *T--*a trombone, *S*--a song sheet and *R*--a recorder. Their packs were getting heavy.

By lunchtime, they had a picture of a pipe organ (for *P* and *O*), a needle from an old record player, a pair of **maracas4**, and a **lute**5**.** They had skipped *Q*, not sure if a quail song would qualify. (Besides, they didn’t know where to find a quail.) Just 10 more things to find--and just two hours left. In Amy’s attic, they uncovered a kazoo and a jukebox on the cover of an old album. At the library, they borrowed books on Icelandic music and holiday songs. Then the timer went off. It was time to meet the other teams.

**1 abacus:** a device used for counting and math figuring **2 zither:** a stringed instrument **3 xylophone:** an instrument made of metal or wood strips that produce a tone when hit with a mallet **4 maracas:** a rhythm instrument that makes a swishing sound from seeds in a hollow gourd **5 lute:** a guitar-like stringed instrument that is played by plucking

**8. Twins’ Luck**

Mateo’s apartment was on the second floor of the building, over the bakery. The house always smelled of sugar and vanilla, even though his mother cooked spicy foods at home, like curries and chilli foods**.**

Mateo was ten and had a twin brother named Marcos. They did not look much alike. Marcos was short, with wide hands and thin hair, like an old man. He couldn’t speak and could walk only by dragging his left foot behind him. He never got far. When they went out, he used a wheelchair .

Some days, while he was getting ready for school and while his father and mother were getting Marcos ready for the day, Mateo wondered what it would be like to be Marcos. They would bathe him and dress him. They would put him in a soft chair in front of the television. Then his father would leave for work and his mother would feed him a soft- boiled egg or a bowl of corn mush. She would put a bell at his side in case he needed anything. All his needs would be taken care of by someone else.

Mateo wondered how the two of them, who started out together, had wound up so different. Was it luck? Why wasn’t life fair? When he was younger, he thought that Marcos was the lucky one, getting so much attention when *he* had to do things for himself. Mateo’s parents never seemed to have time for him. Mateo never got to stay home and watch cartoons all day. Then one day, it hit him. The idea surprised him because he couldn’t see how he hadn’t realised it before. Marcos wasn’t as lucky as Mateo thought.

**9. Magic in the Classroom**

On her first day at school, Emma wore a tutu, a red cape, and a pair of swim goggles that she kept over her eyes. Mr. Stephens said we were not under any circumstances allowed to make fun of her. “Emma is different,” he said in that exasperating tone adults use to explain things while not explaining them at all. “She needs your support and understanding, and I will not tolerate bullying in my classroom.”

Of course that didn’t stop Sarah, who, as everyone knows, is a bully. The other day, Sarah turned to me and said, “Oh, Samantha, you’re the best writer in our class. I only wish I could write as well as you do.” She smiled sweetly at Mr. Stephens, who just happened to be passing by with our homework assignments. As soon as he turned his back, though, she stuck her finger right between my ribs and wiggled it. “Teacher’s pet,” she said. And then she looked away, tossing her hair. I still have a bruise.

So I wasn’t surprised when Sarah offered to take Emma on a tour of the school. I was sure that this was phase one of her full‐on attack against Emma and that bizarre outfit.

Because Mr. Stephens is an adult and all adults think Sarah is perfect, he agreed. “Sarah, I think that’s a wonderful idea. Very thoughtful of you.”

This was not a good sign. Sure, Emma seemed weird, but she certainly didn’t deserve to be subjected to Sarah alone. *One‐on‐one*. And so I did something that would lead to one of the

most fantastical, amazing experiences of my life. I raised my hand. “Mr. Stephens, would you mind if I went too? I’d love to get to know Emma better.”

Mr. Stephens smiled. “Of course, Samantha. I have such wonderful students!” Sarah glowered at me, but I didn’t care. “Come on, Emma. Follow me!” I said. Emma trailed behind me. “So, where are you from?” I asked her. “Here and there,” she said.

“What do you like to do for fun?” I asked. I was struggling to find a conversation. “Magic,” Emma replied. *Sheez,* I thought to myself. *This was not going to be easy.* “Magic?” Sarah cried. “Maybe you could magic yourself some new clothes!” She laughed. Emma’s nose crinkled.

“I bet they kicked you out of your last school,” Sarah continued. “I wouldn’t be surprised if...” “Enough, Sarah,” I said. Her high‐pitched squealing was getting to me. And this is where things began to get strange, unbelievable, and downright *magical*. Emma began muttering something quickly. She was so quiet that if I hadn’t seen her lips move,

I would have doubted that she was saying anything at all. She began moving her hands in small circles, and she stretched her head back so that I was sure she could see whatever was behind her.

“Stop it,” Sarah said. “Stop it, stop it, stop it!”

Up until that point, I had been too busy watching Emma to notice what was happening to Sarah. She was hunched over, resting her elbows on her thighs. She was taking deep breaths. And then – and this is the absolute truth – frogs began jumping out of her mouth. Little ones at first, yellow and red frogs splotched with black polka dots, and then big ones, bullfrogs and warty toads that skipped out of her mouth and tumbled onto the floor.

I stared at Sarah without blinking. Hundreds of frogs had fallen out of her mouth and onto the floor. Then, suddenly, Emma snapped her fingers and all of the frogs disappeared.

“What’d you do to me?” Sarah asked fearfully. “Nothing,” Emma shrugged. “What are you talking about, Sarah?” I giggled. “I didn’t see anything.” Sarah went home from school early that day. She told Mr. Stephens she didn’t feel well. The next day, she came to school wearing a tutu, a red cape, and swim goggles. She

turned to Emma with a smirk. “You’re not the only one with tricks up your sleeves,” she said. “Some things never change,” I whispered to Emma. She smiled. I had a feeling this was going to be a great year.