Name: _____ Date: _____

The Tutorial Turnip

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 823 words

Zadie had never read the directions for anything. When the new game, Kingdom of Crumbs, asked whether she wanted to learn the rules, she pressed the Skip button. Then she pressed it eleven more times, just to be sure. The screen blinked, the controller grew warm in her hands, and something yanked her forward by the thumbs. She landed on her back in a field of purple grass.

"Welcome, brave hero!" cried a small voice. It belonged to a turnip with leafy green hair, stubby legs and a name tag that said BARTLEBY. He was shaking with joy. "In three hundred and eight tries, not one player has stayed for my tutorial," he said. "But you cannot leave until you win the game, and you skipped the part about how to play. So you are stuck with me!"

Zadie tried to run, but her legs only walked in circles. She tried to jump, but nothing happened at all. Bartleby cleared his throat in an important way. "To jump in this kingdom," he explained, "you must shout BOING as loudly as you can." Zadie folded her arms and said that was the silliest thing she had ever heard. Then a river of lumpy gravy came bubbling down the path.

"BOING!" screamed Zadie, and she shot over the gravy like a cork out of a bottle. Bartleby rode along on her shoulder, cheering and losing leaves. After that, she listened a little harder. He taught her to duck by thinking about quacking, to open chests by asking them nicely, and to cross the Cheese Wall by nibbling a door right through the middle of it.

Next came the Marshmallow Bridge, which sagged if you walked on it while feeling grumpy. Zadie had a lot of grumpy left, so she sank to her knees halfway across. Bartleby began telling jokes. They were all about turnips, and every single one was terrible. By the third joke, she was laughing so hard at how bad they were that the bridge sprang up and tossed them both to the other side.

At last they reached the castle of the final boss, Baron Backstory. He was taller than a house and wore a crown made of old toast. "Nobody defeats me!" he boomed. "Many have tried to jump over me. Many have tried to throw pies at me. I only grow bigger!" Zadie looked up at him, and her thumb twitched, searching for a button that was no longer there.

"Wait," whispered Bartleby in a nervous voice, turning as pale as a parsnip. "Every time a player meets him, he starts to tell the story of his life. And every time, they press Skip." Zadie stared at the giant. His chin was wobbling. He did not look like a villain at all. He looked like someone who had been interrupted three hundred and eight times in a row.

So Zadie sat down on the castle steps, crossed her legs and said, "All right. Tell me everything." The Baron blinked. "Everything?" he asked. He began with the day he was a very

small Baron. He continued through his first crown, his second crown and a long, sad chapter about a spoon he lost behind a couch. It took nearly two hours, and Bartleby fell asleep.

When the story finally ended, Zadie had just one question. "Did you ever look under the couch cushions?" The Baron opened his mouth and then shut it again. He stomped across the hall, lifted a cushion as big as a mattress and pulled out a shining silver spoon. "My spoon!" he sobbed. He was so happy that he shrank to the size of a kitchen chair.

The little Baron sniffled and handed her a golden key. "Nobody has ever asked a question," he said. Zadie turned to Bartleby, who was suddenly very busy fixing his name tag. "What will you do now?" she asked him. The turnip shrugged. "Wait for the next player, I suppose. They will probably skip me." Zadie gave him a squeeze, turned the key and landed on her bedroom floor with a thump.

Her little brother Milo was sitting there with the controller in his lap. "This game wants to teach me stuff," he said, rolling his eyes. "How do you make it stop?" Before Zadie could answer, he pressed Skip, again and again and again. The screen blinked. The controller began to grow warm. Zadie did not try to grab it. Instead, she got a bowl of popcorn and pulled her chair up close.

A moment later, Milo appeared on the screen, flat on his back in the purple grass. A familiar turnip popped up beside him, shaking with joy. Bartleby looked out through the glass, spotted Zadie and gave her an enormous wink. "Welcome, brave hero!" he cried. "I hope you are comfortable, because today my lesson has a brand new joke section!" Zadie settled back to enjoy every minute.

Questions

1. Why was Zadie pulled into the game?

A. She broke the controller
B. She kept pressing Skip
C. Milo pushed her

2. How do you jump in the Kingdom of Crumbs?

A. Shout BOING
B. Press a red button
C. Think about quacking

3. What made the Marshmallow Bridge spring up?

A. Bartleby pushed on it
B. The gravy cooled down
C. Zadie started laughing

4. What did Zadie do that no other player had done?

A. She threw a pie
B. She listened to the Baron
C. She jumped over the castle

5. In this story, when Bartleby was turning as pale as a parsnip, he was

A. frightened
B. hungry
C. proud

6. Why does Zadie get popcorn at the end?

A. She is tired of the game
B. She plans to share it with the Baron
C. She wants to watch Milo learn

Words to know

controller: game hand pad
tutorial: how-to lesson
nervous: worried and jumpy
kingdom: a king's land
boss: hardest game enemy
sniffled: sniffed back tears

Answer key: The Tutorial Turnip

1. B. She kept pressing Skip
2. A. Shout BOING
3. C. Zadie started laughing
4. B. She listened to the Baron
5. A. frightened
6. C. She wants to watch Milo learn