

TAMI GREENE

WHISPER CREEK



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Chapter 1

Challenging Words & Vocabulary List

The student should read aloud these words and definitions. These words are included in this chapter, and the underlined words are also practiced in the correlating course book.

onslaught [ON-slot] - fierce or powerful attack

ominous [OM-in-us] - threatening, like something bad will happen

ravenous [RAV-in-uhs] - extremely hungry and eager for food

panorama [pan-uh-RAM-uh] - a complete view in every direction

adequate [AD-uh-kwuht] - sufficient quality or quantity to meet a specific need





Anya couldn't remember ever being this cold. Frigid, persistent wind beat against her, making her shiver and hunker down further into her scarf to ward off the onslaught. The gusts through the forest sounded like a howling pack of ravenous wolves.

She gazed at the panorama of trees around her, trying not to imagine ominous glowing eyes or sharp teeth hidden just out of sight in the growing darkness. *I hope it's the wind making that noise and not something else*, she thought nervously, glancing at her father, who was trudging along ahead of her.

The tops of the towering pines swayed, and their snow-laden boughs creaked and groaned, reminding her of the sound of her mama's rocking chair back home. Oh, how she would love to be sitting in front of the fireplace right now as Mama knitted a blanket for the new baby. *No*, she reminded herself, squaring her shoulders. *This was my decision. I convinced Mama and Papa that, at twelve years old, I could be brave and helpful on this expedition. I can't back down now.*

Looking back, Anya saw her seventeen-year-old brother several steps behind. He pulled off his mittens and moved his hands quickly, conveying a message she understood. Dmitri had lost his hearing after having scarlet fever when he was young, and Anya had used sign language her whole life to communicate with him. With a nod, she faced forward again.



"Papa!" Anya called loudly above the cry of the wind. Her father turned, though she could barely see him through the swirls of snow. "Dmitri thinks we should look for shelter soon!" Her tone was urgent and pleading.

Nikolai Belsky had a solid build and a weathered face that reflected the hardships of his early life in Russia. He had journeyed to America seeking a better future. Anya thought she saw him nod in the distance as his gruff voice reached her ears. "Yes, he's right. I didn't know we would hit weather like this so late in the winter."

Moving back toward his children, he signed to Dmitri, "Keep watch for a safe place to camp and wait out the storm."

CRACK! Anya's head whipped around to face the loud sound, and she watched a heavy, snow-laden branch break off a tree trunk and fall to the ground with a muffled thud, sending up puffs of white flakes. She trembled from cold and fear.

Nikolai reached her and put an arm around her shoulders. "It will be over soon," he said reassuringly. "Storms can't last forever."

Though extreme weather changes were common in Alaska, they were a new and unsettling experience for Anya. However, her father's words encouraged her, and she began to walk once more.

Onward they went, keeping a sharp eye out for an adequate place where they could stop for the night. The blowing snow stung their faces with icy needles, and the overcast sky made it hard to know if they were even moving in the right direction.

Another splintering crack split the air around them. Out of the corner of her eye, Anya watched a giant pine tree topple toward them in what seemed like slow motion. Fear rooted Anya to the spot, but Nikolai jumped into action. In one powerful motion, he pushed Anya and Dmitri backward, sending them sprawling into a snowbank.

It took a moment for Anya to scramble to the surface and brush the snow out of her face.



"Are you hurt?" Dmitri signed with concern on his face. She shook her head quickly, and they both looked over at the tree that had fallen right next to them. Papa was trapped beneath some long limbs that pinned him to the ground, but to their great relief, the heavy tree trunk hadn't crushed him.

"Papa!" Anya cried as Dmitri rushed over and began working to free him. "Are you all right?"

"My leg," Nikolai groaned, the pain evident in his voice.

"We'll get you out of there," she said firmly as she joined her brother, digging and pulling on the branches. "How bad is it?"

"I think it's broken," her father admitted.

Anya signed the news to Dmitri, fighting to stay calm despite a sinking feeling of dread. How would they get Papa out of here with a broken leg?





God, please help Papa, Anya prayed in her mind. Help us know what to do and not be scared.

Before she even opened her eyes, she noticed the wind was calmer now. When she looked up, though, the surrounding trees were still wildly swaying. She realized that the fallen tree was protecting them from the weather.

A wave of her hand drew her brother's attention. "I don't think we have to move. We can stay right here in the shelter of the tree for the night."

Dmitri looked around, then signed back, "Good idea. We can start a fire, too. Maybe the smoke will help someone find us."

They settled Papa into place, building up a pile of snow beneath his leg to elevate it above his heart and hopefully keep the swelling down. Grabbing the wool blanket from his backpack, they wrapped him up snugly to trap as much body heat as possible.

The siblings then crawled beneath pine trees to find dry sticks and branches. Using a flint and steel, Dmitri attempted to start a fire. One spark finally fell into the pile of pine needles and began to smoke. Soon the fire was blazing, warming the air around their protective tree and giving them comfort as the darkness fell.

Papa closed his eyes in exhaustion, and Anya looked at Dmitri worriedly. "What are we going to do?" she signed.

Optional Discussion Questions

1. Anya thought to herself, "This was my decision. I convinced Mama and Papa that, at twelve years old, I could be brave and helpful on this expedition." In what ways has Anya already been brave and helpful on this adventure?
2. What survival and first aid skills did Anya and Dmitri demonstrate in this chapter?

Chapter 21

Challenging Words & Vocabulary List

The student should read aloud these words and definitions. These words are included in this chapter, and the underlined words are also practiced in the correlating course book.

disinclined [dis-in-KLIHND] - unwilling or hesitant

canoe [kuh-NOO] - a narrow boat moved by the use of paddles

meandering [mee-AN-duhr-ing] - in a winding direction

lackey [LACK-ee] - a person who runs errands for another

exuberantly [eg-ZOO-buhr-ent-lee] - in an energetic way

Review

The student should read aloud this review section.

composed - calm and in control of one's emotions

miniature - very small

harassed - threatened or bothered with words or behavior

inaudibly - in a way that cannot be heard

sabotage - to destroy or damage on purpose



“Look,” Jack began in a hushed voice, pointing to the river’s meandering path through the landscape below. “The river flows along the same general route shown by Etok’s map. Following it downstream will be the quickest way to put distance between us and my uncle’s men. And the best part—we won’t leave any footprints for them to follow.”

Anya and Dmitri leaned forward, tracing the long curvy line of glinting water with their eyes.

“Do you mean . . . you want us to swim down the river?” Anya asked, disinclined to jump into the cold water.

“No, I was thinking we could build a simple raft,” Jack said. “Eight, maybe ten logs lashed together with a little rope. It doesn’t have to be . . .”

His voice trailed off as he squinted. “Hold on; we may not have to make a raft.”

The others followed his line of sight to a small bend in the river where the undergrowth thinned. There, half-hidden in the foliage, was a long, curved shape made of wood.

“A canoe,” he breathed. “There’s a canoe!”

While Jack pointed enthusiastically, Anya frowned.

“That boat belongs to someone,” she protested. “We can’t just take it. You said you were going to be honest.”

“We aren’t stealing it, just borrowing it,” Jack countered. “Maybe it was left by Etok, and that’s why he hinted that you should climb up here for a better view. It could also belong to Jacob, who lives downstream and is the only person I’ve seen traveling on this section of the river.”



“Do you know Jacob personally?” Anya asked skeptically. “Is he someone who wouldn’t mind letting us use it?”

Jack gave a slight nod. “I’ve met him a couple of times. He mostly keeps to himself, but he’s decent. When I got caught in a storm, he gave me some food, so I think he’d be okay with us using the canoe if he knew about our troubles, especially if he saw that my uncle and his lackeys were involved. He doesn’t care much for them.”

Anya glanced nervously at the boat. “So we borrow it and hope for the best?”

“Yes, and we’ll return it,” Jack assured her. “We’ll be going right by Jacob’s place, and we can explain it to him. We’re not stealing, Anya. We’re surviving.”

Dmitri gestured for their attention. “What if those men see us when we climb down the cliff?” he inquired.

The three of them looked back toward the meadow. One man—likely Nash—was waving his arms wildly at the other two.

“They’re still distracted,” Jack said. “But not for long. Let’s go.”

The trio began their careful climb down, and Kodiak encouraged them with an exuberantly wagging tail.





At the bottom, they left the main trail and tromped through the dense undergrowth to the riverbank. The scenery there was beautiful, and not just because it was their path to freedom. The bright morning sun glinted along the crests of the ripples in the water caused by a small flock of ducks gracefully gliding across the surface.

Anya took a deep breath, relishing the aroma of damp earth and new growth.

Reaching the weathered canoe first, Jack flipped it right side up. He then inspected it carefully, tracing his fingers along the wooden frame to check for any cracks or leaks. Satisfied with its condition, he motioned for Dmitri to help him carry the canoe to the water's edge. Anya picked up the long paddle that had been tucked beneath the boat.

Excited, Kodiak danced and spun circles around them, licking each person's hand in turn. Her infectious energy warmed Anya's heart and made her smile.

"You ready for an adventure, girl?" she said, ruffling the fur on Kodiak's head. "You know, I think I am too."

She couldn't quite put her finger on why, but something about this felt exciting, even electrifying—more so than anything they had done in Alaska so far.

Jack took over the seating arrangements. "We need to keep our weight balanced in the center of the boat so we don't tip," he instructed. "Dmitri, you take the front. Anya, sit in the middle and keep the dog calm. I'll sit in back and steer."



Dmitri nodded his understanding, and Anya noticed a glimmer of excitement in his eyes as he carefully stepped into the canoe, crouching low to keep the boat from rocking too much.

Anya went next, hesitating when the boat tilted to the side as she stepped into it. She quickly shifted her foot to the center of the canoe and moved to the middle spot.

“Come, Kodiak!” she called, patting her leg encouragingly. After a moment of hesitation, the husky leaped into the canoe with more enthusiasm than grace. She circled around, then flopped at Anya’s feet, panting loudly as her tail thumped against the bottom of the boat.

Jack pushed the canoe out of the shallows and jumped inside as though he had done so many times.

The crystal clear water carried them away from the shore and, gratefully, away from Silas Grady’s henchmen.

“It’s so beautiful,” Anya murmured after she found a comfortable position and settled into place. The view from the water was a whole new perspective, and it was breathtaking. “Let’s try to stay out of trouble for at least the rest of the day, okay?” she half-joked.

“Where’s the fun in that?” Jack answered with a laugh.

Optional Discussion Questions

1. Although Kodiak is just a dog and not a main character, she still plays an important role in the story. Describe her contribution to the group so far.
2. The children decide to use the canoe they have discovered. How will it be helpful to them?
3. The group discusses the idea of borrowing the canoe for survival vs. stealing it. What are your thoughts on this, and did they do the right thing?

WHISPER CREEK

An unexpected accident leaves twelve-year-old Anya and her older brother, Dmitri, traversing the Alaskan wilderness with a single goal: find their father's friend Etok. They have a map, a letter, a small pouch containing a mysterious object, and a knowledgeable guide named Jack who promises to help them to their destination. Yet the beautiful Alaskan landscape can be unforgiving, and they've been warned to watch out for "The Snake"—a man nobody wants to cross. Aside from requiring great courage, their journey will bring lessons about trust, honesty, kindness, and forgiveness.

