

LEVELED BOOK • Y

In Huck's Shoes



Written by Lori Polydoros
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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Anything for Adventure

Clear the tables, chop the onions, bake the bread—Miguel Ventura was tired of all the work he had to do in his family's sandwich shop.

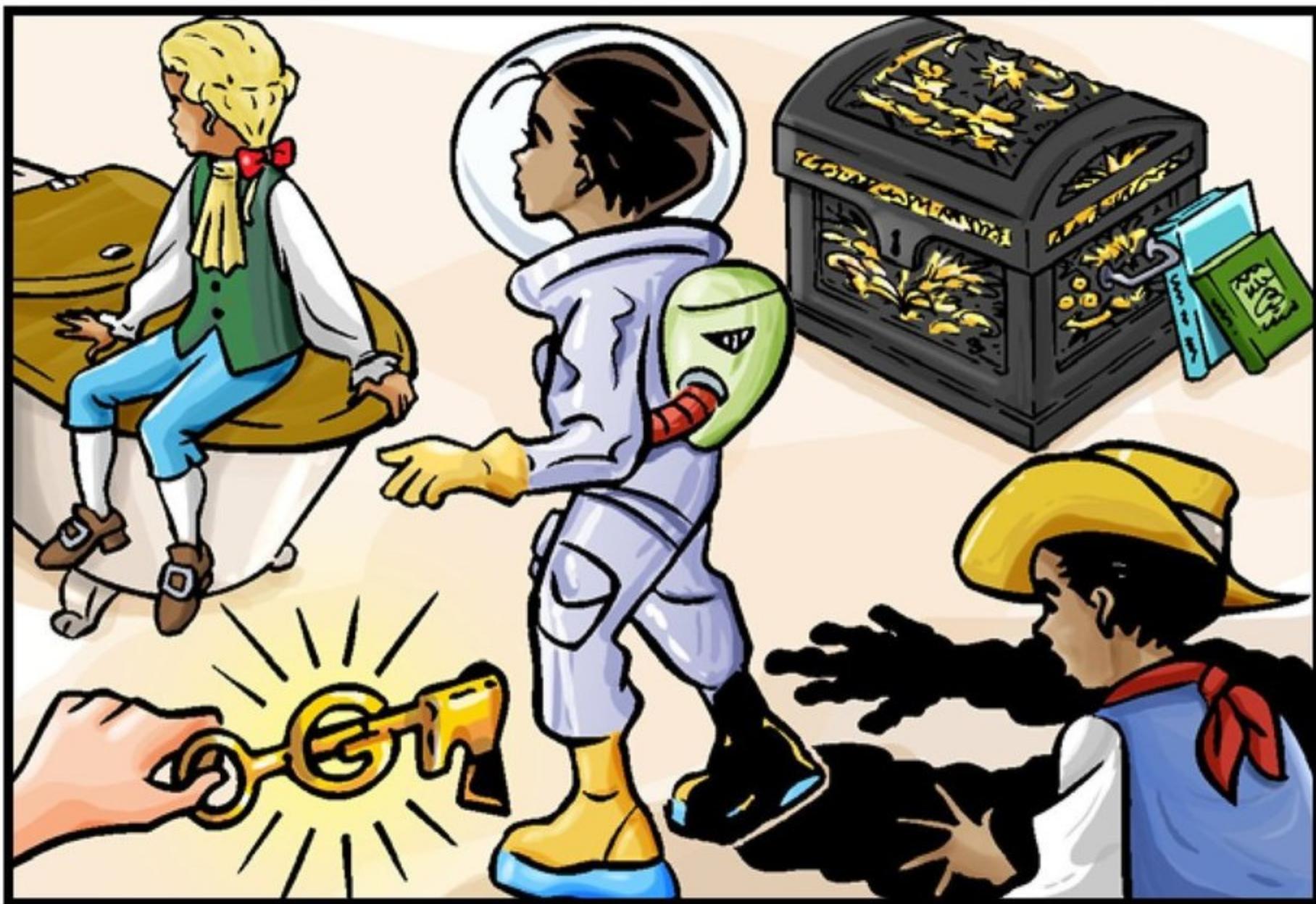
"It's not fair. I'm only eleven," he said to his Mom. "Saturdays are supposed to be fun."

"Sorry, Miguel," she said, "but you're the oldest. Teresa's only seven." His little sister zipped across the shop bouncing a ball.

His dad unlocked the front door, saying, "She's right, we need you to help out."

The pit of Miguel's stomach ached—and not from hunger. Adventure and freedom seemed a million miles away. "Unless . . ." he whispered, looking toward the shop's backroom.





A few months ago, Miguel had climbed an old, red ladder that led up to a loft in the backroom. He had discovered a chest full of enchanted books that belonged to his great-grandpa George, a magician called The Great Gallardo.

Somehow, after reading a passage from one of the magical books, Miguel had been transported into the story as one of the characters. Through the Great Gallardo's books, Miguel had met Benjamin Franklin, battled a terrifying space monster, and become a cowboy in the Old West!

Miguel raced to the backroom and climbed the ladder, skipping the broken rung. He had just enough time before the lunch rush to discover his next adventure.

Being Huckleberry

The old skeleton key stuck out of the lock in the magical black chest, and Miguel turned it with a click. He grabbed the first book, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and he couldn't wait to see which of Tom's classic adventures he'd be pulled into. A feather marked page 91, and a sentence jumped out at him like it was in three dimensions. Miguel read aloud. "They shoved off presently, Tom in command, Huck at the after and Joe at the forward."

The words of the next sentence danced around on the page . . . *folded arms, Tom amid ships, and gave with stood and gloomy-browed orders low, his a stern whisper in.*

Miguel closed his eyes to fight off the dizziness as cool air whispered across his face.





“Bring her to the wind!” a voice shouted.

Miguel opened his eyes to find himself sailing down a river, rowing at the left oar!

“I’m Huck Finn!” he yelled, looking down at his bare feet and scraggly pants.

“That ye be!” the boy at the **bow** called. “Now bring her ‘round!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” Miguel smiled ear-to-ear, breathing in adventure with every breath.

Tom Sawyer was short and wore a black **bandanna** on his head. The tall, skinny kid at the **stern** was Tom’s friend, Joe Harper. In the story, Miguel remembered that the three boys ran away to become pirates on Jackson’s Island.

The boys rowed quietly past a distant town lit by a few glimmering lights.

Finally, Tom called out, “I am the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main!”

“I am the Terror of the Seas!” yelled Joe.

Both boys looked at Miguel, who swallowed hard.

“And Finn, the Red-Handed, what do ye say for yerself?” Tom asked.

“I . . . I . . . say THERE GOES JACKSON’S ISLAND!” Miguel called as the current swiftly swept them by it.

Tom scrambled about the raft, shouting orders, “Act lively now, mates!”

Miguel rowed hard along the tree-covered island until his arms ached, and the raft finally grounded itself on a **sandbar**.

Tom and Joe created a roaring fire. “For the feast!” Joe said. Both boys revealed two succulent hams that they had borrowed for the trip.

“What’s in yer bag, Huck?” Tom asked.

Miguel suddenly became aware of the weight on his back.



"A skillet!" said Joe as he opened Miguel's bag. "To fry the bacon!" Joe continued as he tossed in slices of ham. As they sizzled over the flames, Miguel's stomach grumbled.

"We will be the grandest sort of pirates," Tom said, pacing and marching around the fire. "Doing as we please. Maybe we'll bury some treasure tonight, so the ghosts will watch over it."

The wind howled. Tom howled back.

"No responsibilities!" said Joe.

"No waking up in the morning, doing chores, going to school or to church," Tom said. "More of a carefree life for you, Hucky?"

"I am Finn, the Red-Handed, and it's a pirate's life for me!" Miguel's duties back at his family's shop vanished as he curled up next to the campfire. He let go of his wakefulness, and let in the freedom of his new life as a pirate.

Skeeter Fever

The **eerie** silence of the woods woke Miguel in the morning. Joe was sprawled against the log next to him, but Tom was nowhere to be seen.

Miguel thought of his family, and a slight pain clenched his heart. He'd never been gone this long before in one of the Great Gallardo's books, and although he was enjoying his newfound freedom, he hoped that time passed differently when he was away. He didn't want his parents to worry.

"Huck!" Tom ran up to him. "Look what I discovered on the raft!"

Miguel did not move as Tom held up a leather sack, the size of a marble bag.

With trembling hands, Miguel tugged open the bag and gasped. Twenty gold coins! Miguel asked, "Do you know who they belong to?"

"This raft must have belonged to some *real* pirates," Tom guessed with awe.





Uh-oh. Miguel did not remember this storyline from the book.

"Real pirates?" Joe questioned, half-asleep.

Tom nodded. "Them pirates probably have been looking for their raft," Tom said. "It's only a matter of time 'til they find it."

Miguel's heart sank.

"We're gonna give everything back, right?" Joe asked, now awake.

"Heck, no!" Tom said. "We are pirates, too. We'll bury the gold at midnight tonight."

Gulp.

"Pirates have swords, knives, and guns," Joe muttered. "All we have is a pocketknife and a bunch of fishhooks."

"Yeah, but we got these." Tom pointed to his brain. "We're smarter than any pirate I've ever met."



After searching the island, they found a damp cave in which to hide their supplies. "All we need to do," Tom said, "is fill up the coin bag with rocks and put it back on the raft. Then, we'll take the raft a mile downriver."

"To make it look like the current swept it away," Joe said.

"They won't suspect it had been pirated," Tom said.

Something wasn't right. No gold or pirates existed on Jackson's Island in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. This just didn't make sense.



On their way back after grounding the raft farther down the river, a gunshot shattered the still air. "The pirates!" Tom whispered. "We've got to bury the **booty**!"

Using pieces of splintered **shale**, Tom, Huck, and Joe dug furiously in front of an ancient oak tree. Tom dumped the coins into his marble bag. He chucked it in the hole and filled it up.

A branch broke behind them. Miguel held up the lantern to find three of the ugliest pirates they'd ever seen! The first one was tiny, the second a few feet taller, and the third pirate stood as tall as a professional basketball player. All three of them were covered in red, pus-oozing mosquito bites!

"What'r ye laddies think yer up to?" The tall one scratched his neck and held out his sword.

Joe looked at Miguel, who looked at Tom.

"Just burying our cat," Tom said.

"Yer cat?" the medium one asked as he slapped his forehead.

"He died of the fever," Tom said.

"The *fever*?" questioned the short one, picking at a nasty bite on his chin.

"Mosquito fever," Joe chimed in, causing the three pirates to gulp.

"The rain's been fierce this year," Tom said.



"All them skeeters brought a nasty disease with 'em," Joe said.

"What kind of disease?" asked the medium pirate. "Cause we fell asleep last night, and those blasted bugs ate us alive!"

"It eats away your flesh first," Miguel said, without thinking, "then your organs." Maybe he was becoming a pirate, after all.

Tom and Joe almost laughed.

The pirates stood there, scratching every inch of exposed skin.

"But don't worry," Tom said. "You can stop the fever."

"How?" they shouted.

"By *not* scratching," Joe added.

The pirates froze. Then, the short pirate slapped his leg, the medium one rubbed his neck, and the tall guy scraped his arms against the bark of a tree. "We can't stop scraaaatchiiing!"

"I do know a way," said Tom, as he winked at Miguel and Joe. "Follow me."

They headed back to the sandbar where the pirates' raft was grounded on the beach again. "This yours?" Tom asked.

"Yep," the tall one said, as he danced around to stop from scratching. "We just found it after it drifted away from us a day ago."

Miguel eyed the small sack of marbles through the **slats** of the crate on the raft.

"Tell us how to stop the itch, boy." The short pirate clenched his teeth, and pointed a sharp knife at them.

"This is what you do," Tom said, taking the pirates down the beach.

Soon thereafter, the boys saw the pirates sailing away on the raft—their bodies coated in white sand!

"Now don't move," Tom shouted, "until the sun hardens that sand!" He laughed. "'Tis the only way to rid yerselves of the itch!"



They waited, in silence, until the pirates were out of sight.

"Shiver me timbers!" Joe shouted. "You did it, Tom!"

"The pirate king!" Miguel bowed down. "This is the greatest day of my life!"

"I couldn't have done it without me mates. Arrgh," he said, as they rushed through the trees to unbury their booty, dancing and singing their favorite pirate tune.

Back on Track

That night, the boys slept hard, dreaming of their **devious** pirate tricks. When they awoke, a strange swishing sound came from the river.

"What's that?" Miguel asked.

"Sounds like . . ." Joe started.

". . . the steamboat!" Tom finished.

Joe and Tom always finished each other's sentences because that's what good friends did. Miguel began to miss his own best friends.

Boom! A cannonball shot rang out from the steamboat.



“Someone has drowned!” Joe said as they listened carefully to people calling out from the decks of the steamboat.

“Not just anyone,” Tom said, smiling. “They think we’ve drowned!”

Miguel remembered this part of the story well. Tom was just about to make the trip home to leave a note for Aunt Polly to tell her he was safe.

“We’re heroes!” Joe said.

“We’re the talk of the town!” Tom said.

That night, around the fire, Joe became homesick. “I just can’t let my ma suffer so.”

“Terror of the Seas!” Tom shouted. “There’s no stoppin’ us, now.” He whistled, **entranced** by the gold coins.

Joe looked at Miguel, who shrugged.

"Don't ya think, Hucky?" Tom said. "You've lived the carefree life. Tell Joe he doesn't need to go back."

Miguel had mixed emotions. He was having the time of his life, and yet part of him felt like Joe. He knew his parents would miss him terribly, and he missed them too, even his sister, Teresa.

Miguel hesitated.

"Huckleberry here thinks you ought to continue your newfound life as a pirate. Your family will go on without you," Tom answered.

Those words sent a shiver down Miguel's spine. Tom seemed to have forgotten about all of the people who loved him. With his scruffy clothes and matted hair, Tom Sawyer looked like he was turning into a full-fledged pirate!

Miguel worried that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* wasn't unfolding as it should. He had to remedy that, and quickly.

That night, after Joe fell asleep, Tom and Miguel huddled around the fire.

"I'm surprised you didn't help me convince Joe," Tom said. "You love freedom more than anyone I know, Huck."



"I . . . I think that . . ." Miguel said, "you don't appreciate what you have."

"What?" Tom's mouth gaped.

"Your Aunt Polly loves you," Miguel said. "Sure, you've got to get up and do chores and go to school, but she relies on you, Tom," Miguel said. "She wants you to be a better person."

"You sound like her right now." Tom turned away in disgust. "You **betray** the life of the pirate, Huck."

An owl hooted from the tree above. Miguel stood up and tossed a stone into the river. "It may not feel like it now, but things will get better, and you'll see how much your aunt's love means." Miguel sounded like his own mother, but he'd do anything to save *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

"Arrgh!" Tom spit into the fire. "I'm a good pirate, I am! And now that *everyone* thinks I'm dead, I can start over fresh."

"Things will work out if you let them know you're safe," Miguel said. "You'll have many adventures—believe me."

Tom looked up at the stars.

"And grownups can help you out in scary times," Miguel whispered. "Don't be afraid to ask when you need it."

"You've gone soft, Huck." Tom pulled his bandanna low over his eyes to sleep.

Miguel curled up, too, wondering if Tom would slip out that night to visit his family, like in the story.

A coyote howled, and Miguel opened his eyes in the darkness just before dawn. Joe snored next to him, but Tom had vanished in the night. Miguel found a rolled piece of bark that read:

Huck,

Thanks for the truthful words, wherever you got them. Life in the woods has made you wise, Finn the Red-Handed! Be back in a few days. Take care of Joe!

Tom

Miguel smiled. Now everything was back on track!

The trees began to blur so he closed his eyes. The warmth of the campfire faded, and Miguel realized that he was back in the loft. The smell of freshly baked bread made his heart flutter. Being a pirate was exciting, but Miguel was happy to be home.

“Miguel!” his Dad called. “Lunch rush is here! I need you to make a few bacon deluxe sandwiches for me.”

Miguel looked at his watch—realizing only minutes had passed since he’d come up to the loft. “Aye, aye, sir!” he answered. “I’ll do *anything* for a little adventure!”



Glossary

awe	a mixed feeling of wonder, fear, and respect (p. 10)
bandanna	a large handkerchief, usually with a colorful design, worn around the head or neck (p. 7)
betray	to be unfaithful, false, or disloyal (p. 21)
booty	money or goods taken illegally or from an enemy in a time of war (p. 13)
bow	the front, or forward, part of a boat (p. 7)
devious	not straightforward or in the proper way; shifty (p. 18)
eerie	causing fear (p. 10)
entranced	filled with wonder and delight (p. 19)
responsibilities	things a person is trusted to do (p. 9)
sandbar	a ridge of sand formed by water movement (p. 8)
shale	a rock formed by layers of clay, mud, or silt (p. 14)
slats	narrow strips of wood (p. 16)
stern	the back, or aft, part of a boat (p. 7)

Note: In Huck's Shoes is the second in a continuing series written by Lori Polydoros. Travel with Miguel Ventura and his family as they experience classic adventures.

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Level Y Leveled Book
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