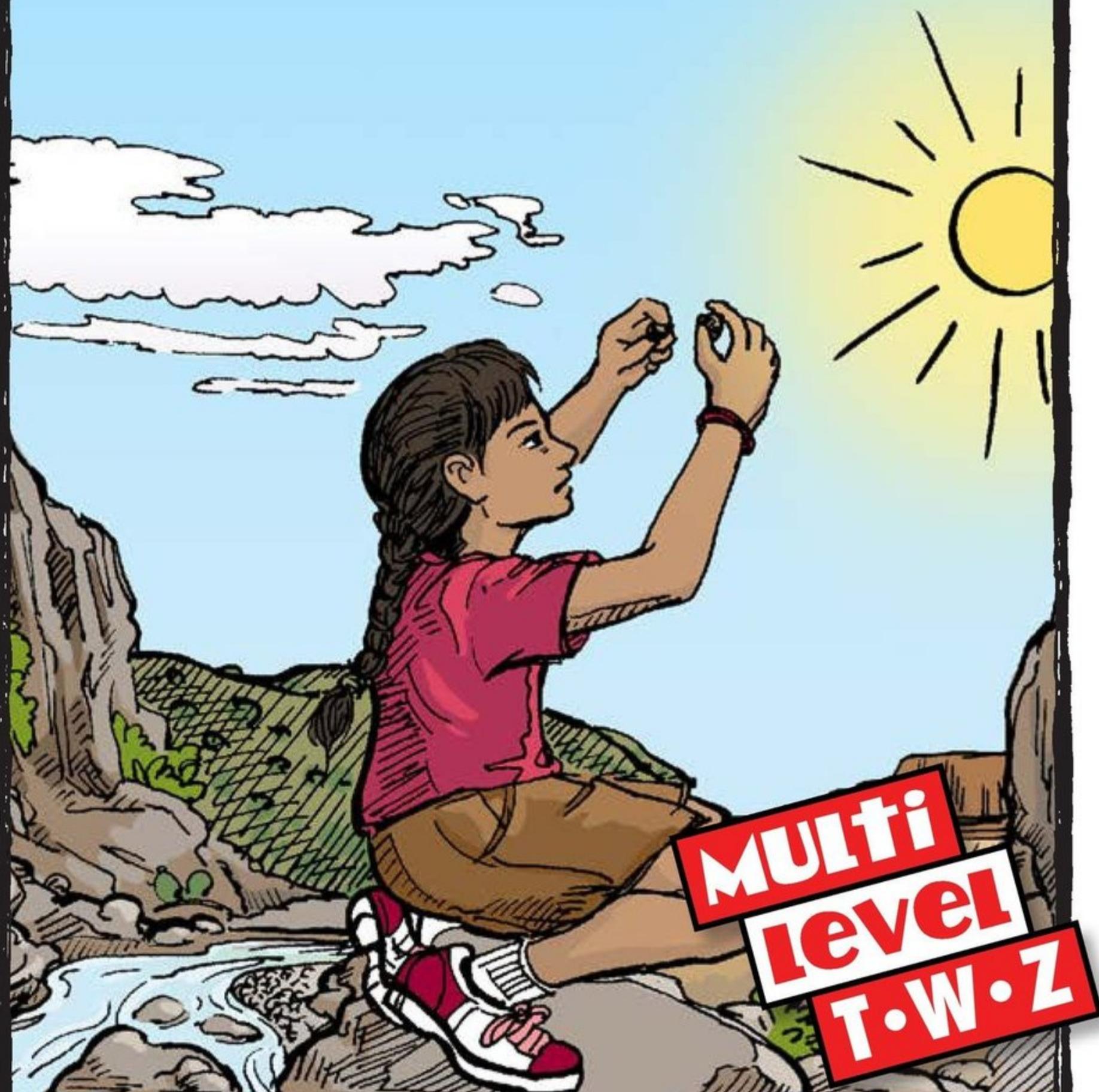


LEVELED Book • W

The Black Stones



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T•W•Z

Written by Dina Anastasio • Illustrated by Lisa Ing

The Black Stones



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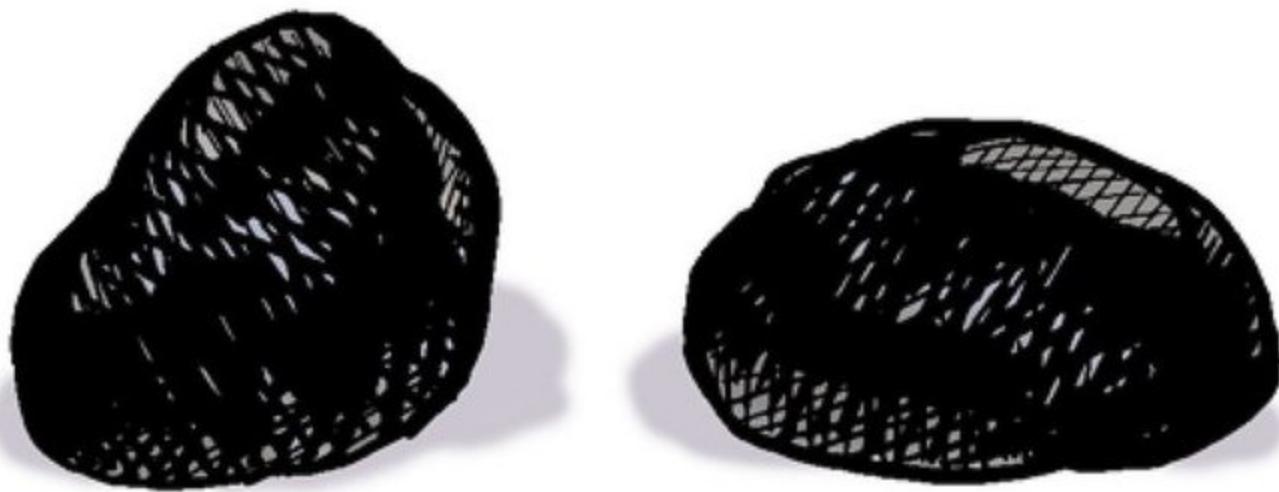
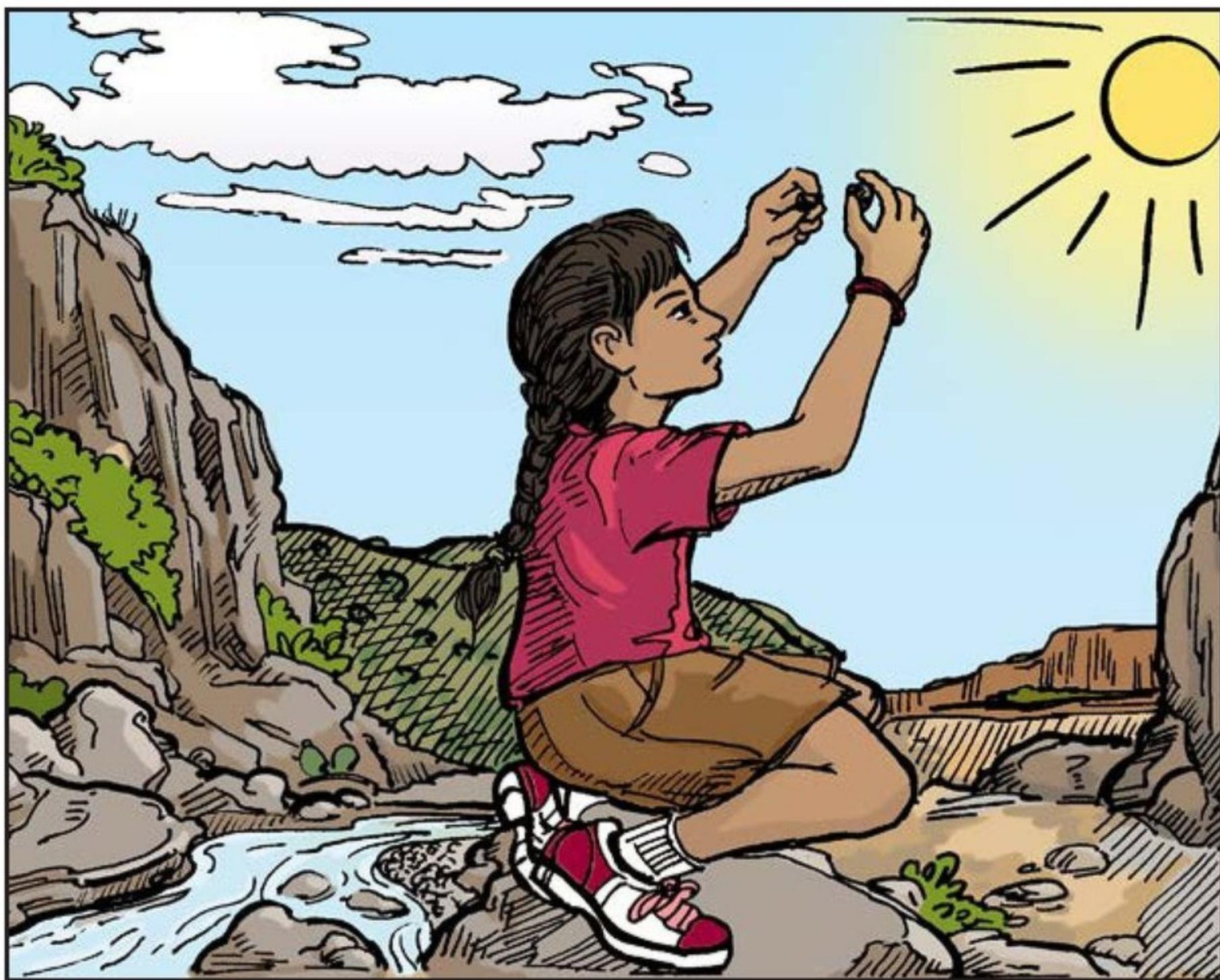


Table of Contents

The Stones	4
Volcanoes and Magic	8
The Experiment	12
Searching for Answers.....	16
Apache Teardrops	20
Glossary	24



The Stones

Tala glanced over her shoulder before she picked up the two small black stones near the river's edge at the base of **Apache** Leap Mountain. If her brother was watching, he'd want the stones for himself, and she wasn't about to give them to him. She had discovered them, and they belonged to her, not to him or anyone else.

Paco was busy tossing pebbles into the river, so Tala knelt down and picked up the black stones, which were as dark as a starless night. When she held them up to the sun, the light shone through the **translucent** stones, making them glow softly.

"Hey, let me see!" her brother called.

Tala groaned and clutched the stones tightly in her fist. She thought that if she were quick enough, she might be able to hide them from her annoying twin before he reached her.

Tala hugged her knees and listened to her brother's footsteps as he jumped from rock to rock, moving closer and closer. The louder he got, the louder her heart beat in her chest. She was already angry, knowing that he would behave like a blood-sucking leech, the way he always did.

When he was behind her, she rose suddenly and started to walk away without a backward glance.

"Come on!" Paco said. "Show me what's in your hand."

Tala knew that if she showed the stones to him, her brother would beg and plead with her to give them to him, and he would keep on begging until she became furious or gave in.

Tala swung around to face him. "These stones are mine!" she shouted. "I found them, and I'm keeping them, no matter what you say."

"Just show them to me!" Paco darted forward and grabbed her fist, then tried to pry it open.



"Mom!" Tala cried, struggling to pull her fist away while tightening her grip on the stones.
"Mom! Paco's bothering me again."

Mrs. Yates sighed and raised herself from the flat rock where she had been sitting quietly for the last half hour, thinking about how challenging her life had become. The death of her husband three years ago had been difficult. Watching their children take the anger and resentment they felt over his death and turn it against each other was even harder. She knew that she needed to find a way to bring Tala and Paco together, but nothing she had tried so far had worked. The twins hadn't been fighting, which was unusual for them, but things were back to normal now—they were at it again. *If only they could learn to get along*, she thought. *If only they could be friends*. She hurried down to the river toward her children, whose yelling was getting louder.

Mrs. Yates dragged her twins apart and sat them down on a boulder, then placed herself between them, letting them calm down before she said anything. She waited to see if either of them would apologize. Paco **fidgeted** nervously, and Tala kicked the toe of her shoe into the dirt, but neither of them said a word.

Tala clutched her stones tightly and thought about how the river had polished and smoothed them, slowly **eroding** the rough edges over time. Just thinking about how many years it took for water to polish stones like these distracted her from her anger for a moment—but only for a moment.

“I was the one who found the stones,” she said when she had calmed down a bit. “Paco tried to take them away from me. This argument is his fault. I didn’t do anything.”

“Yes, you did!” Paco insisted. “You wouldn’t even let me see them, not even for a second. I saw you holding them up to the light. Why wouldn’t you let me see what they looked like when the sun was shining through them? I just wanted to look at them.”

“They’re mine!” Tala shouted.



Mrs. Yates closed her eyes to gather her thoughts and to block the sight of her children's angry faces; she was exhausted by their fighting, and her heart felt heavy.

Volcanoes and Magic

"Your constant fighting makes me very unhappy," Mrs. Yates said softly. "You are brother and sister—twins even! You could be best friends for your entire lives if you would only try a little harder to get along, to be kind to each other. Will you try?"

Tala and Paco stared silently at the river, and Mrs. Yates could tell by the way their jaws tightened that they did not plan to get along—now or ever. They were more like each other than either of them knew, both tight knots of stubbornness, no matter what their mother did to loosen them. *Stubborn like their father*, she thought to herself. *At least they share that.*

She sighed and held out her hand. “Give me the stones, Tala,” she said.

“But it’s not fair,” Tala whined, still avoiding looking at her mother. Tala knew she’d start to soften if she looked her mother in the eyes, and she wasn’t ready to let go of her anger. She had a right to it. “I found them, not Paco. They’re mine.”

Mrs. Yates waited. Tala made a face, but she dropped the shiny black stones onto her mother’s palm.

“It’s okay to be angry,” her mother said. “Sometimes life seems very unfair. Sometimes the things we love get taken away from us, and there’s nothing we can do about it. That is why we must be thankful for our friends and family. They are more important than the objects we find in the world.”

Tala folded her arms and felt her whole body stiffen. Was it such a crime that she wanted to keep something she had found on her own? Her brother could find his own treasures. Why did he need to take hers?



A moment later, Mrs. Yates told them both to hold out a hand as she dropped one stone onto each child's palm. She expected each of them to complain that the other one got the better stone, but the twins were silent. The silence continued as she led them back up the trail to the car, and no one spoke on the drive home.

Tala and Paco may have been twins, but they saw the world very differently. Tala looked at the world as a scientist, which meant everything was a question that led to interesting facts and theories. She wanted to know why the sky turned orange at sunset and how a seashell produced a sound when she held it to her ear. Paco, on the other hand, saw the world as a magical place filled with poems waiting to be written. He admired the beauty of an orange sunset and the mystery of a seashell's sound.



Paco wondered if his stone could transport him into magical worlds. Maybe if he rubbed it three times a genie would appear, or perhaps it was a good-luck charm that would protect him all his life.

When Tala looked at her dark stone, questions bubbled up in her mind: *How long had the stone been there? How old was it? Had it been formed by hot lava shooting out of a volcano?*

Of course, the twins argued about what it was and what it wasn't, and who was right and who was wrong, and—

"Stop it!" Mrs. Yates shouted when she just couldn't stand to listen to them **bicker** for one more minute.

"But it's a **volcanic** glass rock," Tala insisted. "It came from inside the earth, and was cooled, and—"

"You're wrong!" Paco yelled. "It's a magical good-luck stone."

Mrs. Yates groaned and led the twins to the computer, sat down between them, and turned it on.



The Experiment

As the computer started up, the twins started to argue about what website they would look at first.

“We need to go to a website about **talismans** first,” Paco insisted, but his sister shook her head out of frustration.

“That will take forever, and we won’t find anything about these particular stones,” she said. “We need to start with a site about volcanoes—”

“That is so boring—”

“They’re my stones, so—”

“Hey!” Their mother held her hands up.
“May I ask the two of you for a favor?” she said.

The twins waited.

“I would like you to do an experiment, as a gift to me. I would like you both to research your stones without arguing, just this once. I’ll work with you to find the answers, but no fighting. I want you to understand that life is much more peaceful if you work together to solve your problems. Okay?”

Tala and Paco looked at each other for several seconds, and then they shrugged. “Okay,” they agreed reluctantly.

"What do you think we should search for first?" Mrs. Yates asked.

"I know exactly what we should do," Paco said. "We should . . ."

The look on his mother's face made him stop. Maybe there was a better way to do this experiment.



“You can decide,” he said to his sister, who immediately suggested searching for the name of the stones. “Let’s type the words *volcanic glass* into the **search engine** and see what websites come up.”

“I don’t care about volcanoes,” Paco said. “Let’s type in *good-luck stones*.”

“*Volcanic glass!*”

“*Good-luck stones!*”

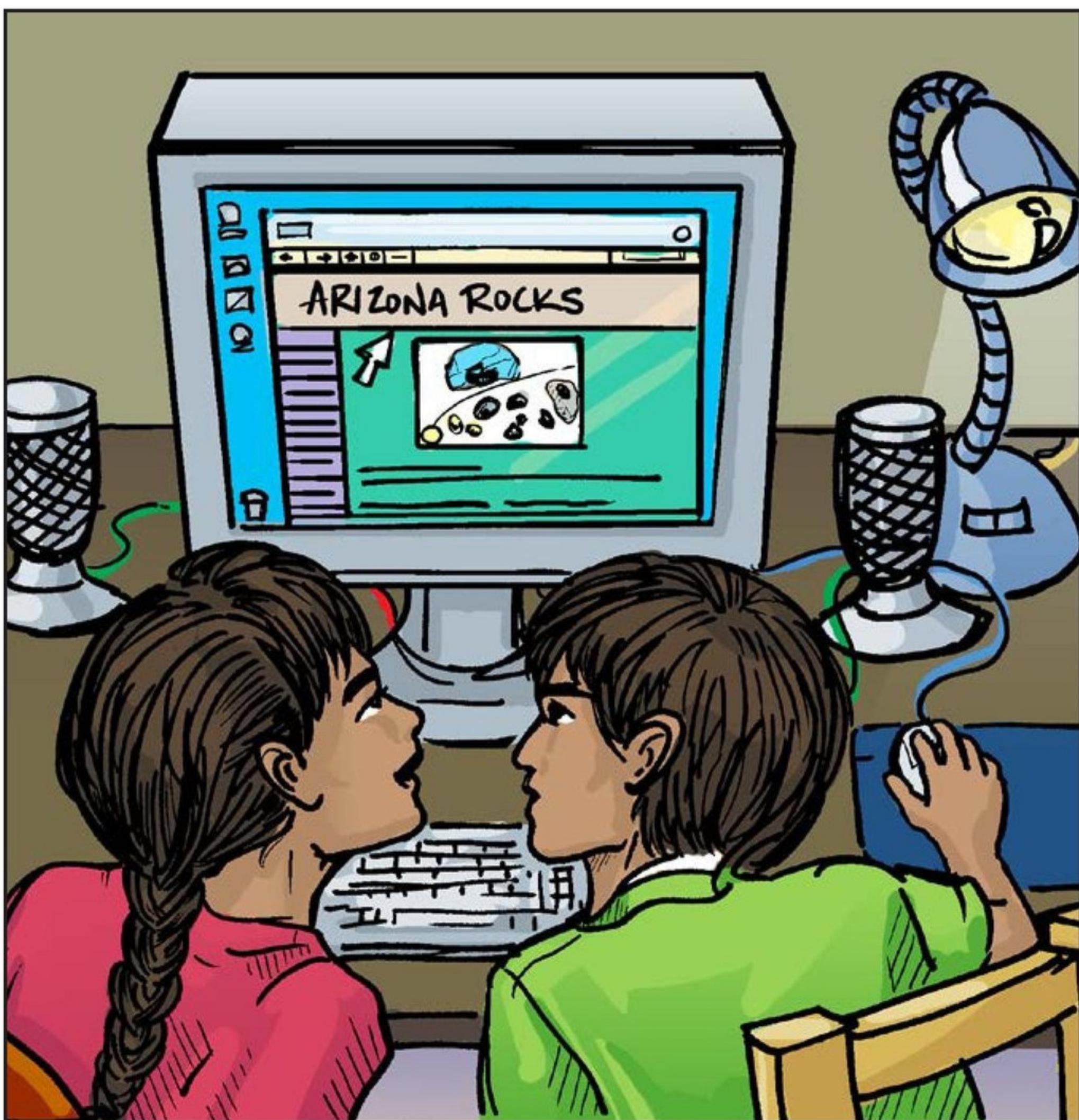
Mrs. Yates put a gentle hand on each of their shoulders, and when they were quiet, she made a suggestion.

“How about both?” she said. “And how about we add where you found the stones as well?” she said as she typed the words *volcanic glass good-luck stones Apache Leap Mountain* into the search engine and waited to see what would happen. Mrs. Yates knew that the more specific the search, the more likely they were to get the information they wanted.

When the list of search results appeared, Paco and Tala studied them together, reading the website names and short descriptions. One of the descriptions used nearly all of the terms they had used in their search.

They both pointed to the screen and said, "Let's go to that one," at exactly the same time. Paco and Tala looked at each other in surprise. They had agreed on something.

While the website loaded, the phone rang, and Mrs. Yates went to answer it, leaving Tala and Paco alone. They both wondered if they could get along without her.



Searching for Answers

The website showed several images of rocks that looked like the shiny stones Tala had found. Paco and Tala compared their stones to the ones on the page in front of them and grinned.

“That’s our stone!” they said at the same time, but this time they didn’t look at each other; they just smiled to themselves. They wouldn’t have admitted it to each other, but working together really was kind of fun.

The twins sat up straight and silently read the words on the monitor together.

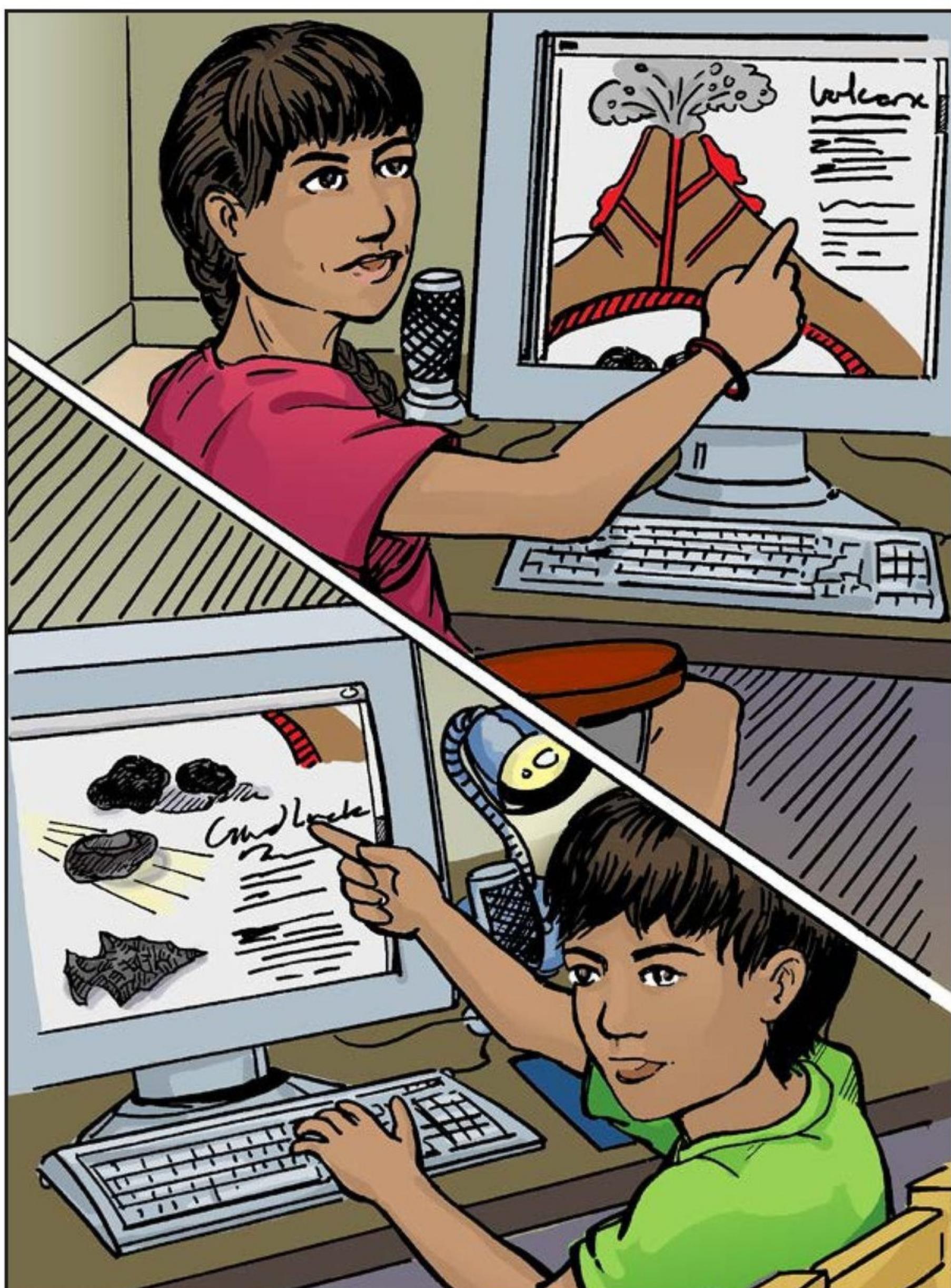
“I told you!” Tala shouted, poking her brother. “Our stones came from inside the earth. They are **obsidian** from a volcano. So I’m right!”

Paco was too busy reading a different part of the page to listen to his sister, and when he was finished, he said, “I’m right! I told you these stones were good-luck stones!”

“See that?” Tala said as she pointed to the part of the page she was reading, and Paco followed her finger to the words *volcanic glass* and read that part of the page. Then he focused his sister’s attention on the words *good-luck stones* and watched as she read.

"It looks as if we were both right," Paco said.

"Yes," his sister agreed. "These stones are probably thousands of years old. They came from inside the earth, and they have brought luck to many people."

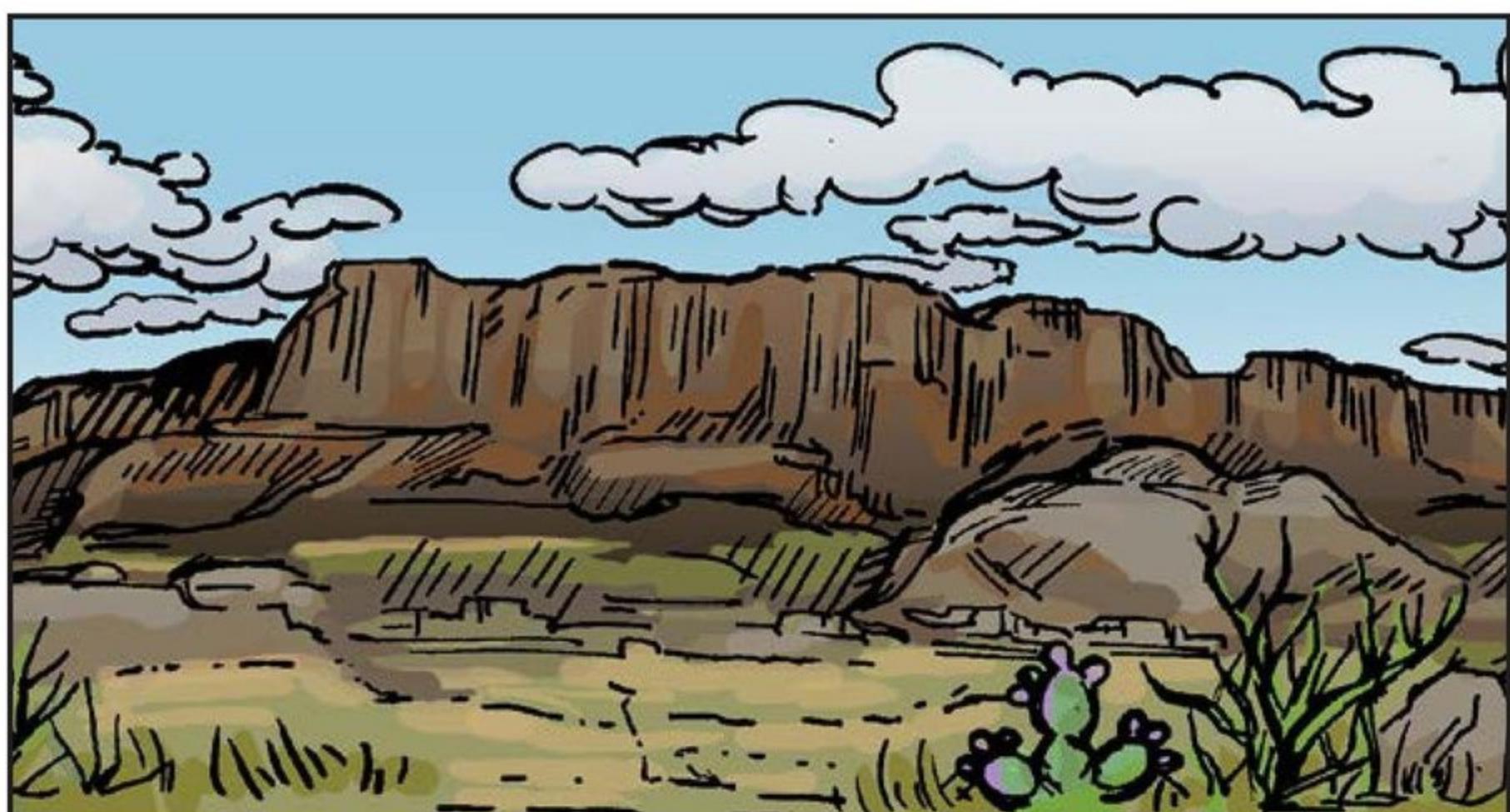


"Let's read more about the legend of the Apache Tears," Paco said.

The twins went back to the search page, typed in *Apache Tears*, and waited as several results came up. One website mentioned the Pinal Apache, which was a name once given to a band of Apache from the part of Arizona where Tala and Paco lived.

"Let's try that one," Paco said, and when his sister agreed, he was happily surprised. He began to realize that he was tired of fighting with her about every little thing.

This webpage showed an illustration of an Apache warrior above a poem called "Apache Tears." Tala and Paco read the poem on the webpage slowly and carefully, and when they were finished, they read it again.



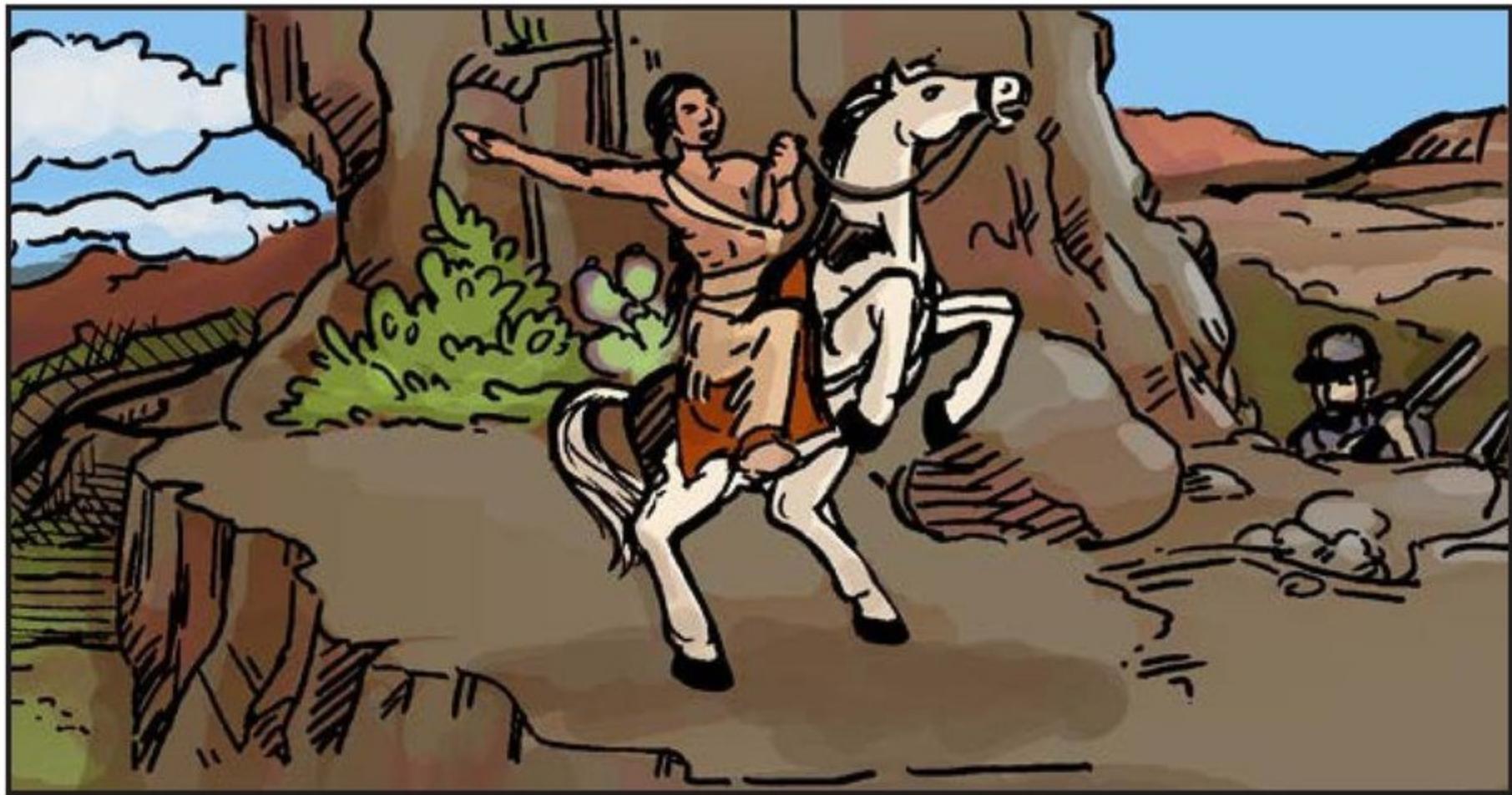


Paco noticed that his sister was rubbing her stone between her fingers as she read, and he wondered if she was making a wish. Tala didn't usually like legends—she enjoyed reading about science—but Paco could tell that his sister was very interested in this story.

He decided that he would read more about volcanoes and all the rocks that were inside the earth, and he would try to understand how the river changed rocks to smooth stones. Maybe he would come to understand why these things interested his sister so much.

For now, Paco and Tala decided to write down their own version of the legend so that they would have it to remember.

Apache Teardrops



The Legend of the Apache Tears

Long, long ago, before the white men came, the Apaches roamed free. But a time came when the white men began to move west in search of new land. Hoping to protect their lands, Apache warriors came out to meet them, but the white men killed many Apache warriors. Some were driven to the edge of a cliff. Rather than be captured, the Apache warriors jumped from the cliff to their deaths. When the Apache women heard of their warriors' deaths, they were filled with great pain and despair so deep that the Great Father embedded their tears into the black stones that rested in the river.

Whoever carries these stones will have good luck always, and whoever keeps these stones close will never again cry tears, for the Apache women have cried tears in their place.

Paco and Tala sat back and studied their stones in silence, lifting them to the light and gazing into their centers, thinking about the women who had cried for their men. A blanket of sadness covered them both. They shut down the computer and held their stones tight.

When their mother returned, they told her the legend of the Apache Tears, taking turns, without talking over each other. Mrs. Yates was touched to see how the story had affected her children.

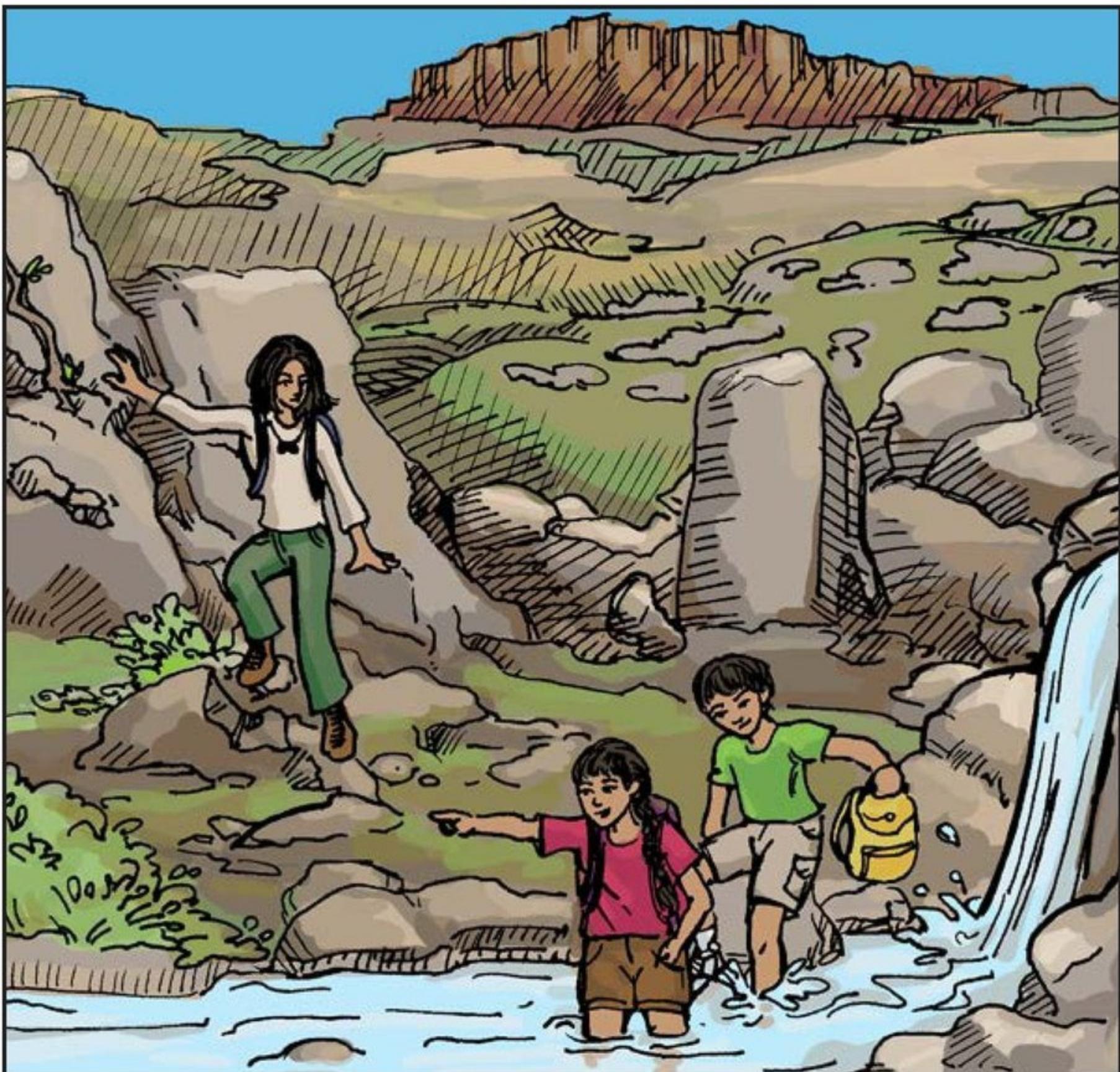
"Can you see the tear of an Apache woman?" Paco asked her as he held his stone up to the light and looked at it.



Mrs. Yates took the stone and held it up to the light. "I think I do see it," she said. "It's a tear for the man she lost, and it's a tear for the sad children he left behind." She gave the stone back to Paco, closed his fingers over it, and squeezed his hand lightly. "It's a tear that says 'I wish my children were happy.'"

Paco and Tala gave each other a long look. They understood that their arguing was only adding to their mother's grief over their father's death. They understood that their father was not coming back and that they needed to find a way to live in harmony as a family again.





That night, after talking it over, Paco and Tala gave their stones to their mother. At first, Mrs. Yates did not want to take them because the stones seemed to have made her children friends again. Finally, Paco and Tala convinced her that they wanted her to have the Apache Tears, so Mrs. Yates slept with the stones under her pillow that night, and the next day she went to a jeweler and had them made into a necklace. When the necklace was ready, she slipped it on and never took it off again. Apache Tears really had brought them all good luck!

Glossary

Apache (<i>n.</i>)	a member of a group of Native Americans in the Southwest; the language of these people (p. 4)
bicker (<i>v.</i>)	to argue about unimportant things (p. 11)
eroding (<i>v.</i>)	wearing away due to the action of wind, water, or ice (p. 7)
fidgeted (<i>v.</i>)	moved around restlessly (p. 7)
obsidian (<i>n.</i>)	a smooth, glassy rock formed when volcanic lava cools rapidly (p. 16)
search engine (<i>n.</i>)	computer software that allows users to search data on the World Wide Web (p. 14)
talismans (<i>n.</i>)	magical objects believed to hold protective spells or prayers (p. 12)
translucent (<i>adj.</i>)	not clear, but allowing some light to pass through (p. 4)
volcanic (<i>n.</i>)	of or relating to a volcano (p. 11)

The Black Stones
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