

The Cat and the Tunnel

A Reading A-Z Level V Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,551

LEVELED BOOK • V

THE CAT AND THE TUNNEL

Connections

Writing and Art

Write three paragraphs that explain your opinion on why things are mysteriously appearing before the characters. Use details from the text to support your thoughts.

Social Studies

Research an interesting tunnel. Make an informational brochure for the tunnel, including its location, size, and purpose.

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Written by Rus Buyok • Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright

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Glossary

commotion (<i>n.</i>)	confusion; noisy activity (p. 6)
disgruntled (<i>adj.</i>)	unhappy or discontented (p. 4)
fray (<i>v.</i>)	to unravel or get worn at the edge, usually as a result of rubbing (p. 5)
glorious (<i>adj.</i>)	wonderful or stunningly beautiful (p. 14)
phenomenon (<i>n.</i>)	a remarkable event or occurrence; someone or something that is very impressive or popular because of an unusual ability or quality (p. 10)
pummels (<i>v.</i>)	hits or strikes something over and over (p. 8)
raucous (<i>adj.</i>)	very noisy, disorderly, rough or harsh (p. 13)
reverberations (<i>n.</i>)	repeated sounds that bounce off surfaces; echoes (p. 11)
summoned (<i>v.</i>)	called someone or something (p. 10)
transition (<i>n.</i>)	the passing from one stage, place, or condition to another (p. 6)
visualizes (<i>v.</i>)	forms a picture or image of something in one's mind (p. 11)
weathered (<i>adj.</i>)	changed in appearance or condition because of exposure to natural forces, such as rain or wind (p. 9)

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Focus Question

What is the tunnel and where does it lead?

Words to Know

commotion	raucous
disgruntled	reverberations
fray	summoned
glorious	transition
phenomenon	visualizes
pummels	weathered

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Correlation

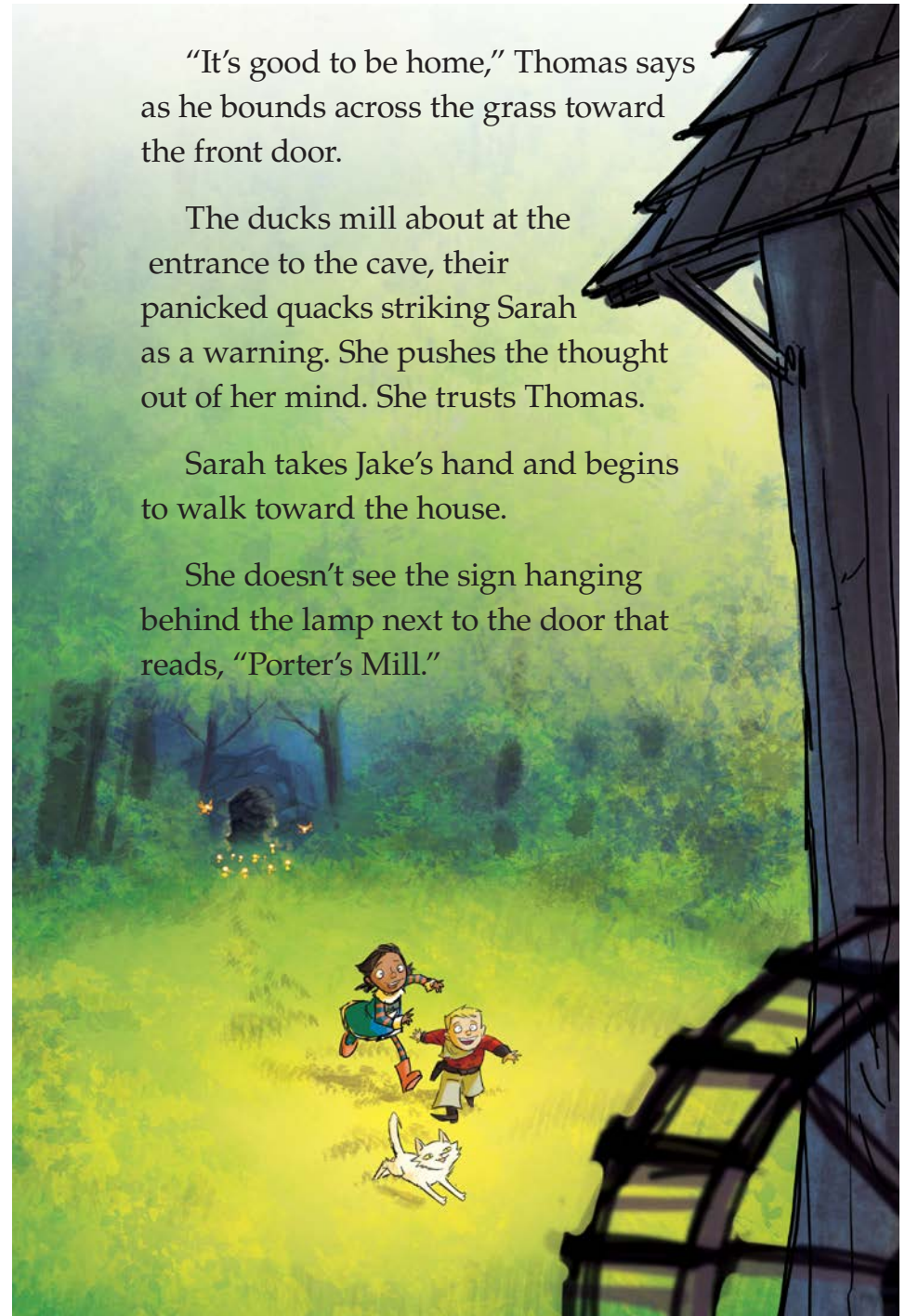
LEVEL V	
Fountas & Pinnell	R
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40

"It's good to be home," Thomas says as he bounds across the grass toward the front door.

The ducks mill about at the entrance to the cave, their panicked quacks striking Sarah as a warning. She pushes the thought out of her mind. She trusts Thomas.

Sarah takes Jake's hand and begins to walk toward the house.

She doesn't see the sign hanging behind the lamp next to the door that reads, "Porter's Mill."





Finally, they see a different kind of light illuminating the tunnel walls—daylight. Sarah breaks into a sprint and leaps into the **glorious** day, shielding her sensitive eyes. The air smells of grass and other green things.

When she can see again, Sarah realizes that she's standing in a forest clearing. A swift stream burbles around the edge, flanked by the tallest trees she's ever seen. Before her is a large, wooden house with colored glass in the windows and a water wheel spinning lazily in the back.



"Well this is a fine predicament you've gotten yourselves into," says the cat as it trots beside Sarah. On her other side, Jake giggles, as he does every time the cat speaks.

They have been marching for some time through the charred remains of the fields. After the village burned, the creatures surrounded Sarah, Jake, and the cat, and started silently shuffling them along.

"How was I supposed to know?" Sarah whispers, keeping an eye on the creatures. They haven't actually stopped them from talking, but something tells her they don't really like it.

"You wouldn't know a trap if it came up and smacked you on the face—I can say that with confidence," the cat snaps. Sarah rubs her cheek and feels her face grow hot. Jake snickers.

"If you're so smart, what were you doing there?" Sarah asks.

"Following them! *Why* is my own business," the cat says, flicking its tail and flattening its ears. "Young man, if you laugh at me one more time, I swear I'm going to give you such a swipe."

"You're a talking cat! That's amazing!" Jake says, too loudly for comfort. Sarah glances around and gets the sense that if these creatures could scowl, they would be doing it now.

"I've always been able to speak—just the cat part is new. It's not like I had a choice in the matter." The cat huffs and shoots Sarah a **disgruntled** look before pausing to scratch its ear with its hind leg.



They continue down the tunnel at a steady pace, the ducks with glowing bills doing their best to waddle along, and then flapping over the trio to light the way ahead. The **raucous** light coming from the ducks comforts Sarah just as Qynn's flashlight did in the Cave of the Lost.

Sarah hopes Qynn is okay, wherever she is.

They continue for a long time—what seems like days to Sarah. The tunnel twists and turns, sometimes sloping up or down. Sarah asks where they are going, but Thomas says they should trust the tunnel to take them where they need to be.

Jake seems oblivious to the dangers or strangeness, which is good, Sarah thinks. Only occasionally does he ask her if she thinks Odie is okay. He even asks Thomas if he knows where the dog is, but Thomas doesn't know.

The ducks are incessant. What started out as adorable quacking has become the most obnoxious sound ever.

Sometimes, Sarah looks behind them and thinks she can see the writhing of the creatures following, but they never come into the light.



"I wish we had some light," she says, and just then she hears the sound of quacking. Then, she sees a warm yellow glow before them that grows until it almost hurts her eyes.

"I love this place!" Jake calls over the quacking. As her eyes adjust, Sarah sees they've run right into a flock of ducks with brightly glowing bills. They waddle about the tunnel floor, seemingly happy as can be. Sarah can't help but laugh at their adorableness.

One of the ducks nips at Thomas's tail, and he growls. "Let's keep moving."



"This place has changed so much since I was last here," it continues. "Everything is starting to **fray** around the edges, which would explain why Mother sent us."

"You're just talking in riddles," Sarah says.

"I hoped you'd have figured it out by now—it's me, Thomas," the cat says with a smile, as much as a cat can smile.

"Aren't you a boy like me?" Jake asks.

"I was, more or less, until I went through the ornate door behind Sarah and your sister. I didn't think I could go through, but here I am, transformed into a cat. I'm guessing you have more questions."

"That's an understatement," Sarah says.

“Let me see if I can answer them all. You’re in a new world, and the ornate door brought you here. I’m guessing, given your costume, you were thinking about cats at some point during the **transition** between your world and this world, hence the change in my appearance as I followed you. You haven’t realized this yet, but in this realm, you have immense power. The kind of power that could make your wildest dreams come true—the kind of power that will allow you to find your mother. I’m here to help make that happen.”

“You know where my mom is?” Sarah squeals.

“Do you know where Odie and Qynn are?” Jake asks.

“Not exactly, but I have a good idea of someone who does—getting to her won’t be easy or safe, though.”

“I don’t feel very safe as it is, so if it will get me closer to my mom, I’ll give anything a try.”

“That’s what I wanted to hear,” Thomas hisses happily. “These things are actually extremely stupid. I’m going to cause a **commotion**, and when they’re distracted, you and Jake can make a break for it. They’re dumb, but they’re fast, so as soon as you’re free and I give you the word, imagine you’re running into a cave—a long, deep, dark cave.”

“We need a cave-in,” Thomas shouts, his voice echoing. “Imagine the tunnel behind us collapsing. Hurry, they’re coming!”

Even though she can’t actually see anything, she **visualizes** the passageway, their footsteps like thunder shaking the walls. Cracks form and split wide as the weight of the ground above forces the rock to give way. She imagines each step sending powerful **reverberations** behind them and immediately hears the rumbling caused by their steps increasing. Stone breaks and shatters like gunshots and the tunnel behind them collapses.

Sarah slows to a walk and then stops completely, her chest heaving as she tries to catch her breath.

“That was exciting! Let’s do it again,” Jake says beside her.

“I’d rather not,” Sarah says. Sarah starts to run again, but slower this time.

“We can’t stop. They’re even faster in the dark,” Thomas says in front of them. “The collapse will only slow them down for a while, and we have a long way to go. Keep moving!”

As she holds this image in her mind, she feels the ground begin to rumble slightly, and then more violently. There before her, rising out of the ground as if **summoned**, is the cave entrance she just imagined.



If the creatures weren't right behind them, she would stop to marvel at the **phenomenon** that just took place. Instead, she follows Thomas as he darts into the darkness. They're running blind now, Sarah hoping none of them trip or smack their heads in the enveloping blackness.



"I don't get it," Sarah says.

"Just trust me—you trust me, right?" Sarah isn't sure, but she wants to—she has to. What choice does she have other than remaining a prisoner of these terrifying creatures?

Sarah nods, and Thomas's tail flicks back and forth.

"Get ready to run," Thomas says. He springs up to Sarah's shoulder and then explodes toward the largest, meanest looking creature—hissing, claws extended, tail puffed to three times its normal size.

The other creatures seem frozen in shock as the fluffy white cat **pummels** the thing with his paws. The creature's tentacles begin to swat wildly, but Thomas is a white blur.

The other things begin to swarm over each other to help their fellow creature until they become a mass of dark, writhing tentacles interspersed with glimpses of white fur.



Sarah grabs Jake's arm and starts to sprint in the opposite direction. At first, the creatures don't seem to notice, but a quick glance behind shows that at least a few have turned away from the chaos caused by Thomas. Sarah's legs are already burning after the long day of marching.



A white streak zips past Sarah and Jake, and she hears Thomas yell, "NOW!"

Without stopping, Sarah begins to imagine a long, dark cave. The Cave of the Lost comes to mind, and Qynn's quacking duck light, and how terrified they'd been of the children's laughter and footsteps. That was nothing compared to now.

Sarah can feel that the creatures are at their heels, even though they move silently. She imagines the entrance to the cave, **weathered** rocks and gray-green lichen, the cool air just beyond the mouth promising a long, safe darkness.