

GETTING A HEAD START ON THE OREGON TRAIL

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It was a lovely spring day, but the Bunny family was sitting inside. Benny and Bonny were looking at screens.

Grandpa Bunny was grumpy. "You kids should play outside! When I was little, kids played outside all the time." He said.

"But outside is boring," Benny replied.

"What would we do?" Bonny asked.

"Why anything you like," Grandpa said.

"You need less screen time and more green time in nature!"

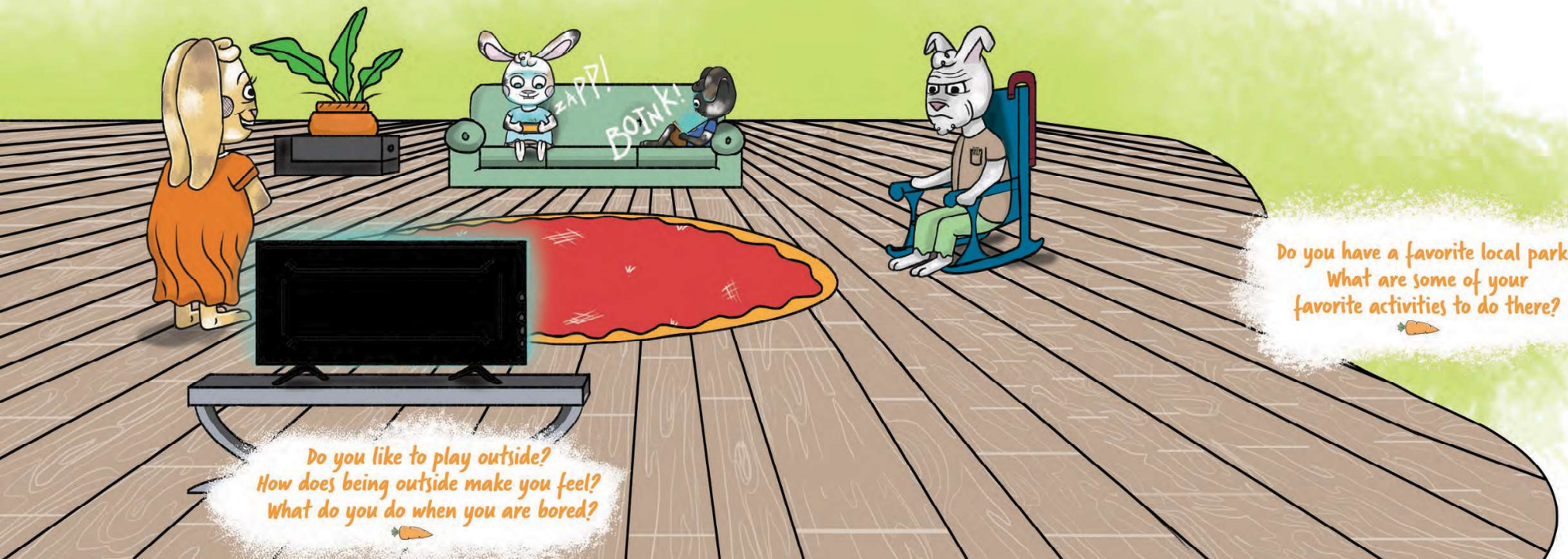
Momma Bunny laughed. "Grandpa, you spend all day inside now! We can all go to the park for fresh air and fun."

"Good luck getting these kids to walk all the way to a park!" Grandpa complained.

"We can walk that far!" Bonny insisted.

"What would we do at the park?" Benny asked.

"We can take a healthy picnic lunch. Then we can meet new friends, play new games and learn new skills," Momma replied.



Do you like to play outside?
How does being outside make you feel?
What do you do when you are bored?

Do you have a favorite local park?
What are some of your
favorite activities to do there?

The Bunnies started walking, but Benny and Bonny grew bored.

"Are we there yet?" Benny whined.

Grandpa snorted. "When I was a kid, I could walk as far as the Oregon Trail."

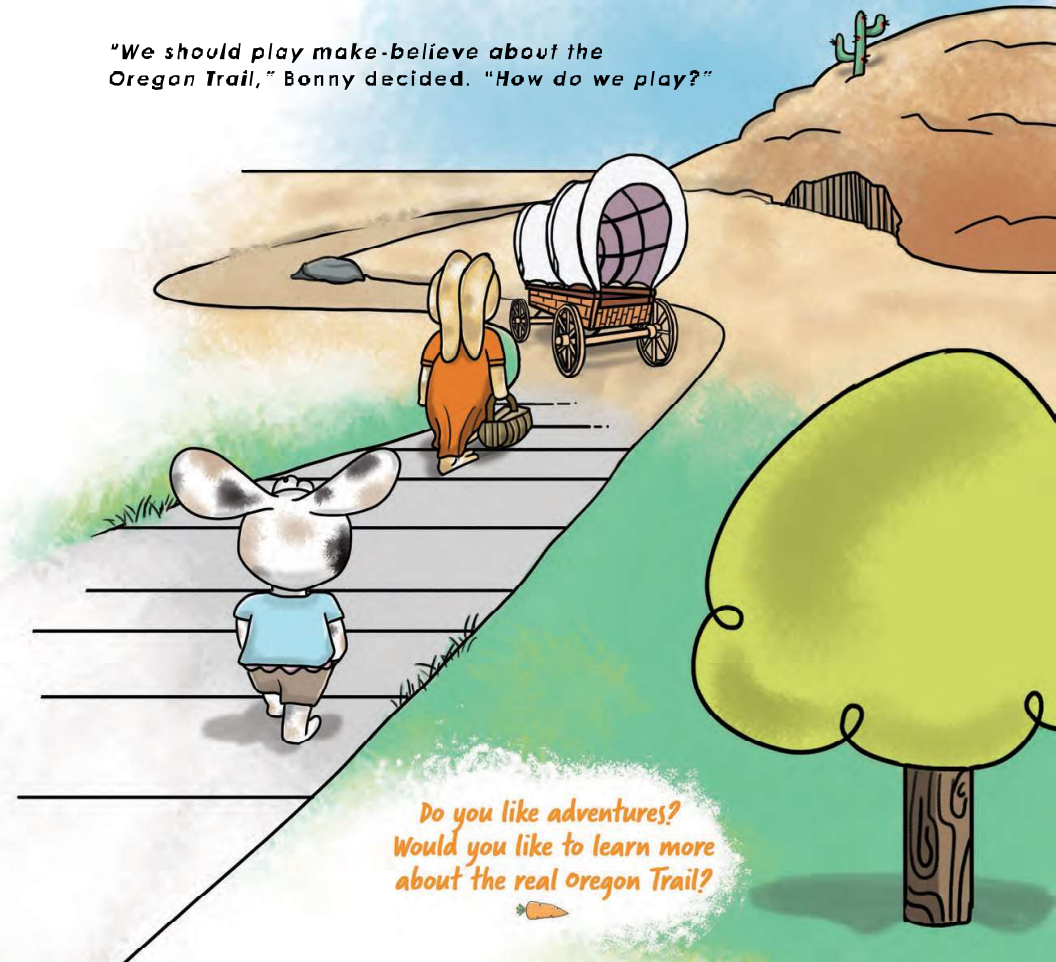
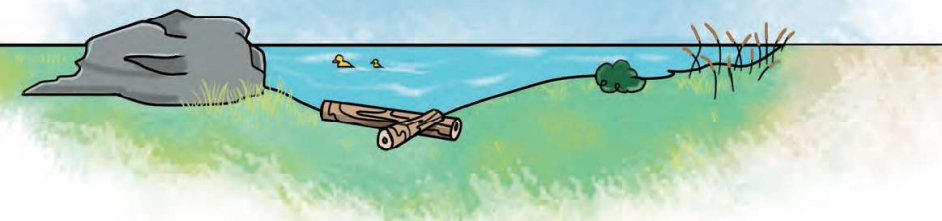
"What is that?" Bonny asked.

"The Oregon Trail was a long path to a faraway place," Grandpa explained. "Families went together."

"It took months and was a big adventure," Momma added.

"I like adventures," Benny said.

"We should play make-believe about the Oregon Trail," Bonny decided. "How do we play?"



Do you like adventures?
Would you like to learn more
about the real Oregon Trail?



Once at the park, The Bunnies set out a picnic. They passed healthy foods to each other, taking turns and sharing. Momma had made fruit and vegetable smoothies that were different colors.

"We will need lots of energy and nutrition to make-believe about the Oregon Trail," Momma said.

"We will never finish the trail with too many sweets" Grandpa added, around a smoothie mustache. "Those are sometimes foods"

The kids tried the smoothies and then smiled around smoothie mustaches.

"Who knew fruits and veggles could be so fun?" Bonny asked.



What are some of your favorite healthy foods? What are some of your favorite fruits and vegetables?



"What should we do next in our make believe game?" Momma asked.

Grandpa scratched his chin and thought.
"When families used to leave for Oregon, the trail was hard and wild. Only those with many skills could make it."

"We have lots of skills!" Benny said.

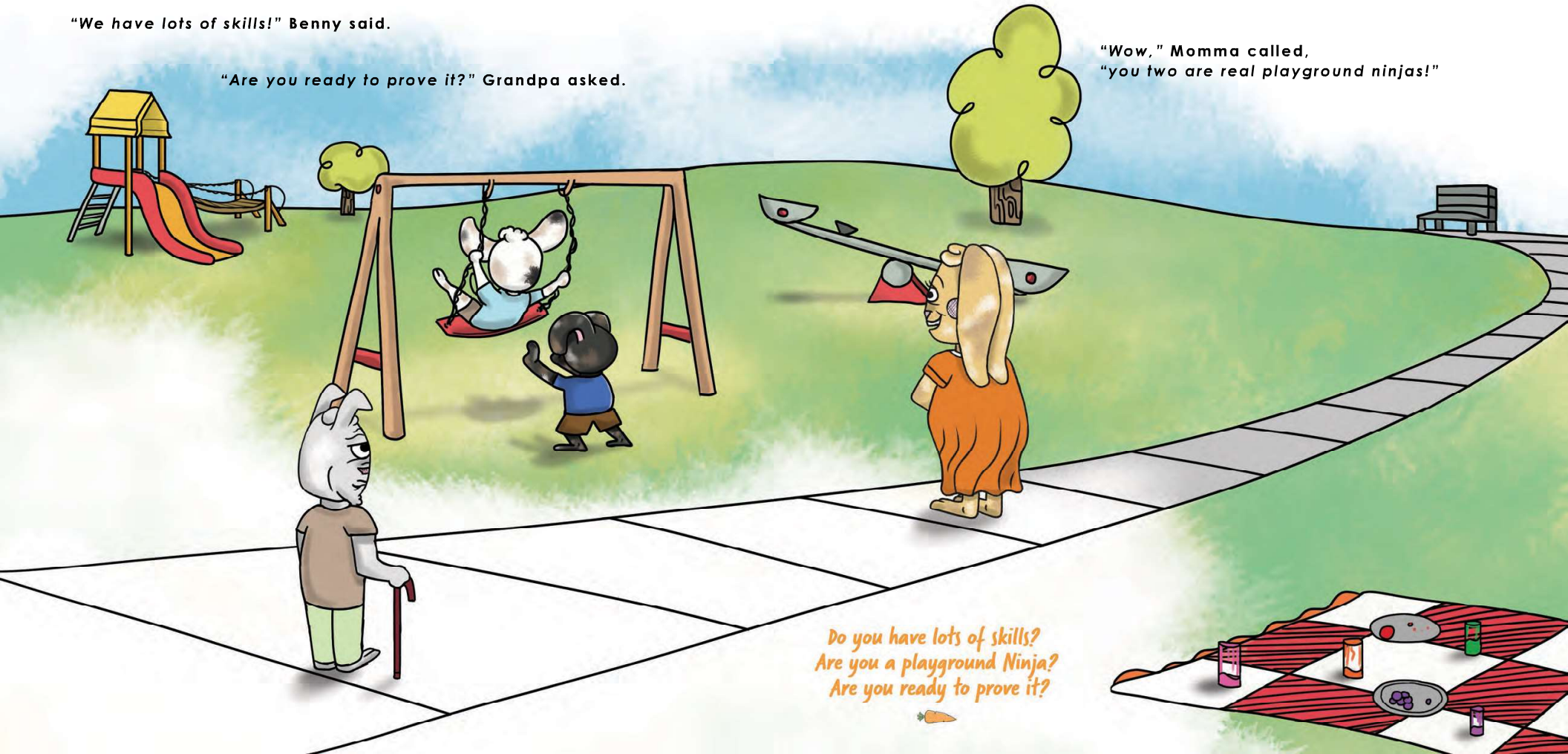
"Are you ready to prove it?" Grandpa asked.

"Sure!" the kids hopped up. "How do we prove it?"

"Show us on that playground," Grandpa said.

The kids ran to the playground and tried everything.

"Wow," Momma called,
"you two are real playground ninjas!"



Do you have lots of skills?
Are you a playground Ninja?
Are you ready to prove it?



Benny and Bonny ran back to Momma and Grandpa, breathing hard.

"We did everything! What next?" Bonny panted.

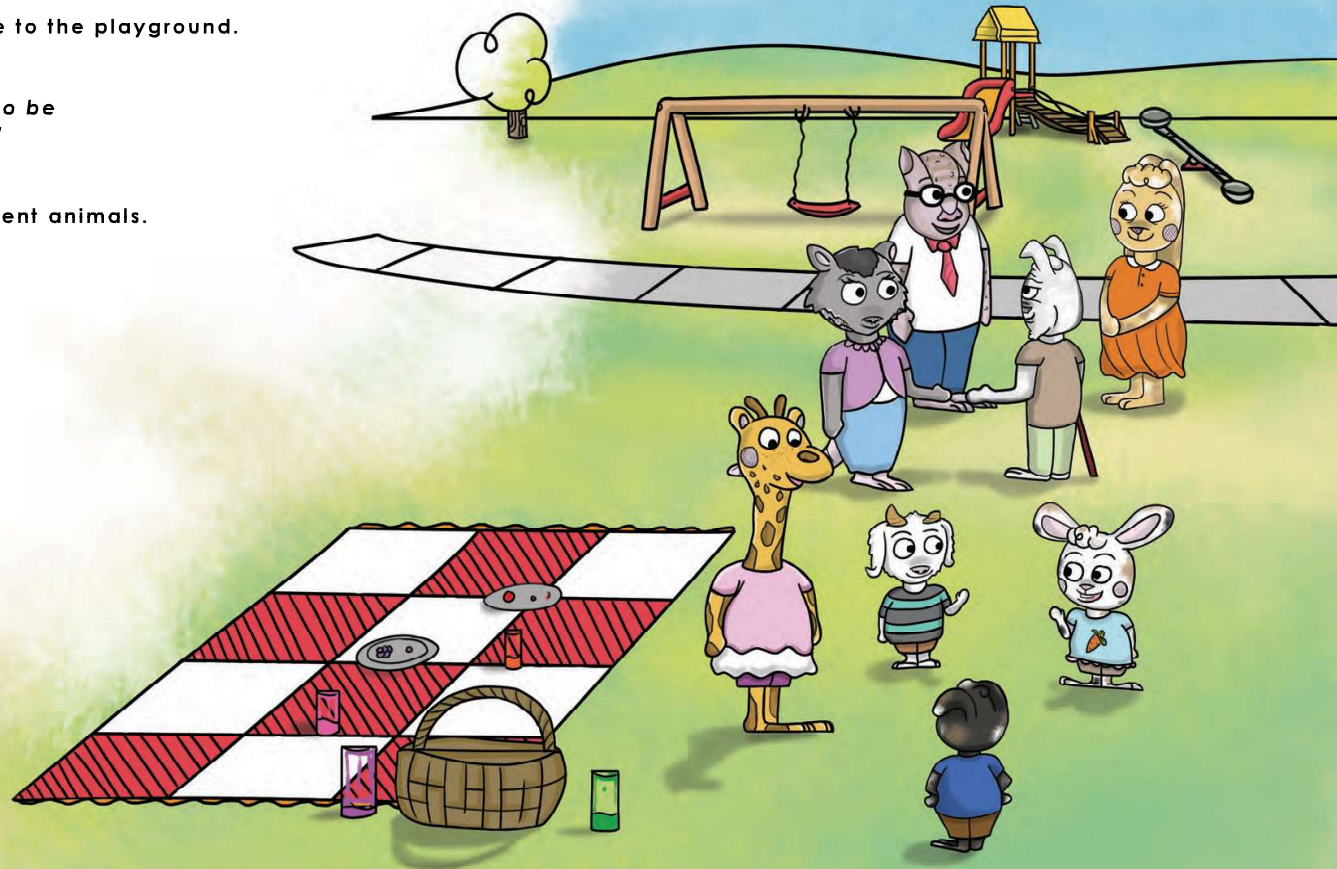
Grandpa scratched his chin again. Another family came to the playground.

Grandpa spoke. "On the Oregon Trail, families needed to be friendly. Find a game to play with these other children."

Benny and Bonny hopped over. This family was all different animals. They were Mother Possum, Mister Armadillo, Marvin the Goat and Ivy the Giraffe.

The four kids tried to decide on a game to play.

*Do you like to make new friends?
How do you introduce yourself?*



"Would you like to play with us?" Bonny asked.

"I am afraid of heights," Ivy said. "I stay on the ground."

"How can you be afraid of heights," Benny asked, looking up.
"You are so tall!"

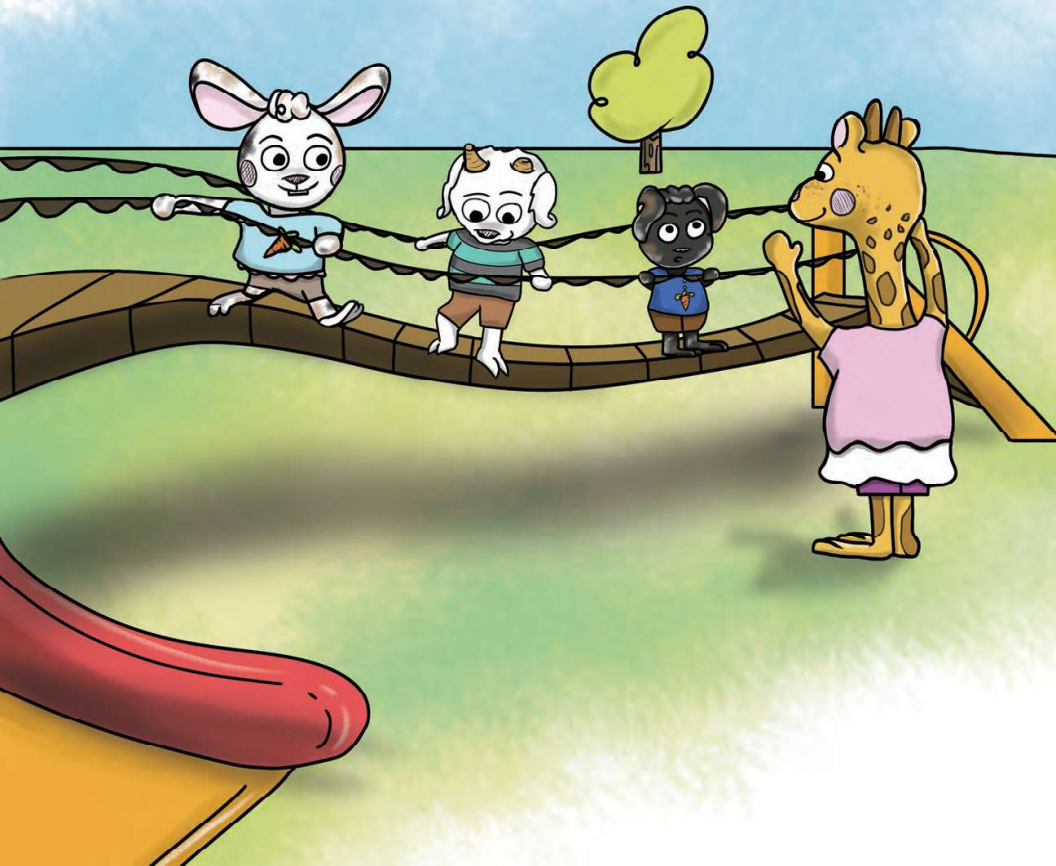
"I am clumsy," Marvin sighed, "I will slow you down."

"You are still growing," Mother Possum said.
"Maybe these bunnies will move slow with you so you can feel safe."

"We can move slow!" Bonny promised.
"That will be fun!" Benny agreed.

So the kids played very slowly together, with Ivy on the ground.

"I am a playground Ninja," Marvin called happily.



*What are you afraid of?
What are some ways to include our friends?*



The Bunny family was tired when they went home.

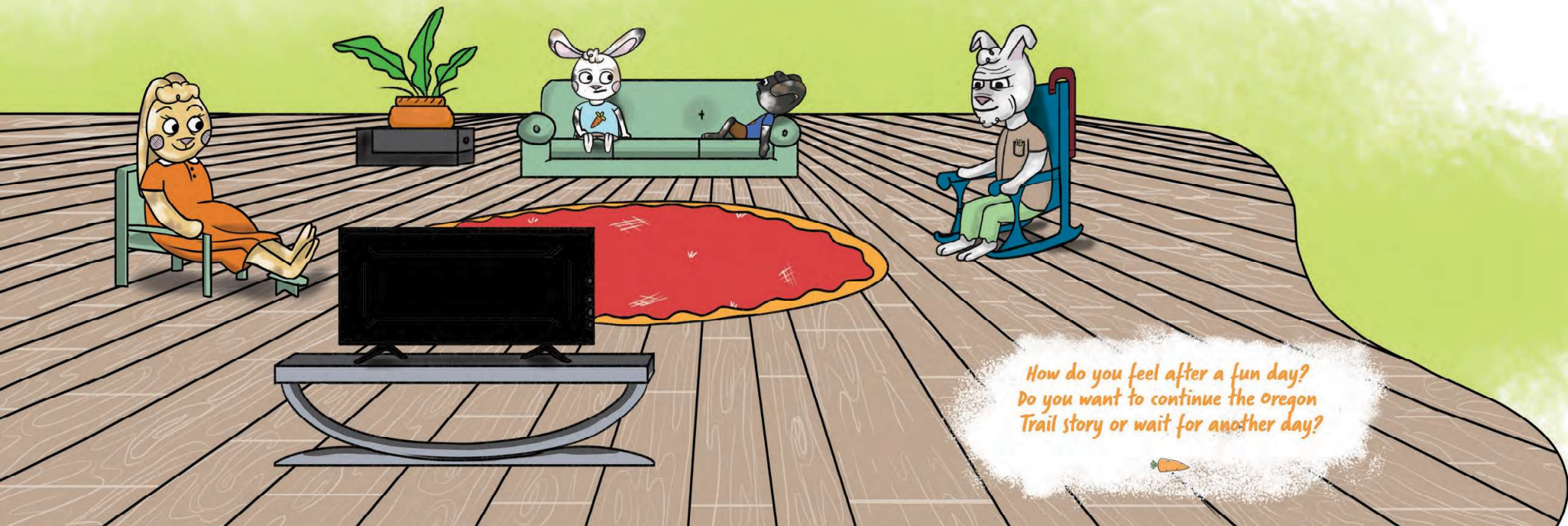
Grandpa yawned. "If you two kids want to stay inside next weekend, I could use a nap," he teased.

"Inside is boring," Benny cried. "We need our green time, not screen time!"

"Can't we meet our new friends again and play make-believe?" Bonny asked.

"It sounds like we better continue our Oregon Trail game," Momma said.

What a change had come over the Bunny family!



The next weekend, the two families met at a park with a splash pad. The four kids played wildly in the water, stomping, dancing, and using outside voices.

A family of squirrels arrived. The boy squirrel rushed into the water, jumping, kicking and splashing wildly. Everyone got wet, even the adults.

"I'm not playing Skipper!" the girl cried after he turned and splashed her.

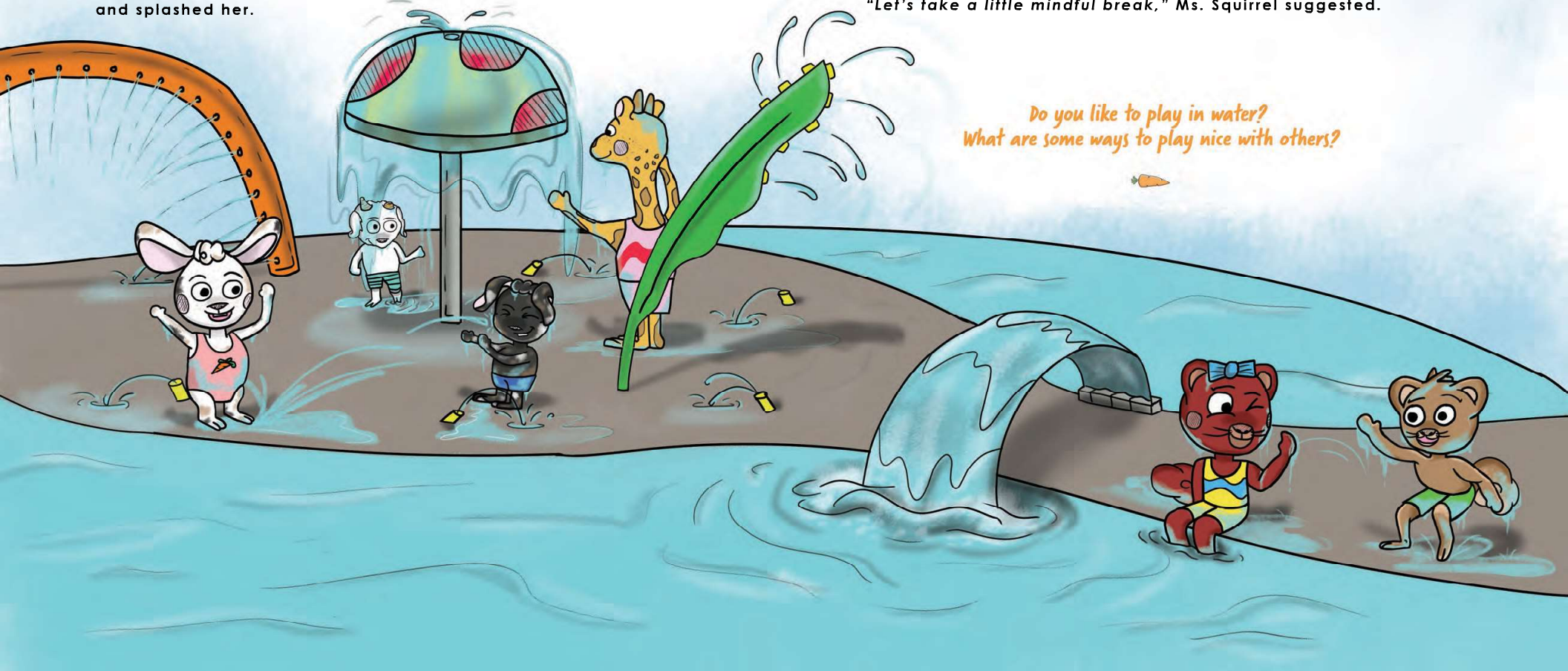
"You have to play Skyla!" the wild boy shouted back.
"You are already wet!"

Ms. Squirrel sighed. "You know better, Skipper. Only splash children who are playing, and be polite."

"Skyla never wants to do anything!" Skipper pouted.

"Let's take a little mindful break," Ms. Squirrel suggested.

*Do you like to play in water?
What are some ways to play nice with others?*



The Squirrels went to a grassy area. The other kids watched and grew interested.

Ms. Squirrel had an idea how the other children could join.

*"Mindfulness can be done in different ways," she told the children.
"Skyla is sitting, quiet and calm. Skipper prefers yoga."*

Two of the kids tried yoga with Skipper, and two tried sitting quietly with Skyla.

Mindfulness helped the children calm down.

Then Skyla suggested a group hike.

*Are you ever mindful?
Do you think yoga or sitting quietly sounds more fun?*



"Oh no! That sounds boring!" Skipper complained.

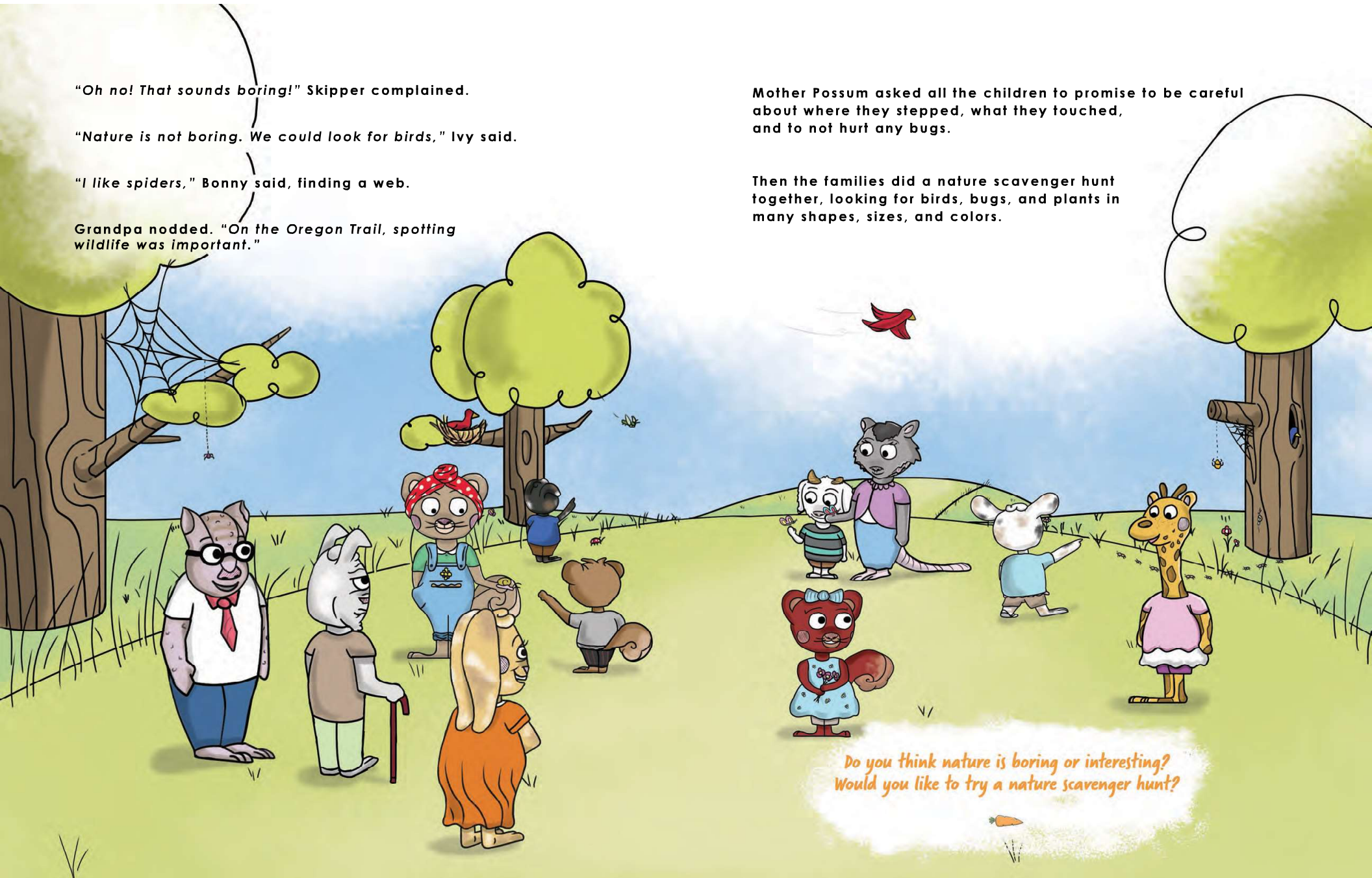
"Nature is not boring. We could look for birds," Ivy said.

"I like spiders," Bonny said, finding a web.

Grandpa nodded. "On the Oregon Trail, spotting wildlife was important."

Mother Possum asked all the children to promise to be careful about where they stepped, what they touched, and to not hurt any bugs.

Then the families did a nature scavenger hunt together, looking for birds, bugs, and plants in many shapes, sizes, and colors.



Do you think nature is boring or interesting?
Would you like to try a nature scavenger hunt?



The three families met on other weekends in more parks to play make-believe about the Oregon Trail.

In the fall, they explored around a lake. They looked for animal tracks in sand and watched for fish in the water. The kids held hands with the adults for safety near the water.

Leaves in the trees were changing colors and falling to the ground. The adults made a pile of leaves and the kids jumped and fell into the soft pile.

Ms. Squirrel gave the children mixed vegetables to feed ducks and fish with.



*What are some of your favorite fall activities?
What are some ways to be safe near water?*

The families even met in the winter to play outside. The days with snow were the most fun.

Skipper taught the other kids how to play squirrel tag to keep warm. Skyla and Ivy laid on their backs and looked up at clouds instead.

As spring drew near, the families realized they had visited all the local parks.

"We are all Park Rangers now," Grandpa announced.

"We surely walked and played our way all the way to Oregon by now!" Momma said. "You kids should all be proud."

*What are some of your favorite winter activities?
What is your favorite season?*



Momma Bunny thought for a moment. "Spring is nearly here. We can plant some seedlings and watch them grow."

"How long will that take?" Skipper asked, fidgeting.

"You will need to be patient," Ms. Squirrel soothed. "We can all still meet to play outside though."

"Maybe we should pretend we are walking to the Moon next," Grandpa suggested.

The kids liked that idea. They all ran to the playground to play make-believe about space.

*Would you like to get a Head Start
on the Oregon Trail as a family or class?
Do you want to join the fun?*

