When is there strength in NUMBERS?

KEY IDEA No matter who you are, life will present you with challenges. Perhaps you'll face danger from a natural disaster. Perhaps you'll find you have more work than you can do. Or maybe you'll be asked to carry emotional burdens that seem impossibly heavy. Will you be strong enough to take on every challenge alone? In "The Horse Snake," a community depends on teamwork to face a threat that is too big for just one person.

LIST IT With a group of classmates, make a list of goals and challenges that would be easier to meet if you worked with a team rather than by yourself. Discuss why teamwork would help bring success in each situation.

LITERARY ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE NONFICTION

Narrative nonfiction tells true stories about events that really happened. To make these events interesting, writers use many of the elements found in short stories, such as a conflict, or struggle between opposing forces; suspense, or the feeling of excitement or tension that makes you eager to find out what happens next.

"The Horse Snake" is a type of narrative nonfiction called a memoir, in which the writer tells true stories from his or her life. As you read, notice how the author explains the conflict and creates suspense.

Reading Skill: Trace Chronological Order

Often, writers of narrative nonfiction present events in the same order in which they happened in real life. This is called chronological order, or time order. To recognize time order, look for clue words that tell when events occurred, such as a few seconds later, shortly after midnight, or the next day. As you read, use a timeline to track the order of events and the time of day each event occurred.

Vocabulary in Context

The author uses the listed words to help show the fear caused by a dangerous snake. To see how many you know, complete each phrase with the correct word from the list.

WORD LIST

- assume
- nocturnal
- gait
- petrify
- stealthily
- succumb

1. One look at the deadly snake could _____ anyone.
2. It was a _____ animal, so it was seldom seen in daylight.
3. We must _____ responsibility for killing the snake.
4. To be safe, make sure you approach the snake _____.
5. So you don't scare it, walk with a quiet, careful _____.
6. After a hard fight, you might get the animal to _____.

Author Online

Village Life

Growing up in a small village in Vietnam, Huynh Quang Nguyong was tending rice fields by the time he was six years old. He also watched over his family's water buffaloes, including his favorite, Tank. There were no stores, cars, or televisions in the village. For entertainment, Huynh, his family, and his neighbors listened to one another tell stories. When he was older, Huynh received a scholarship to Saigon University, and he left home. He planned to return to his village as a teacher.

Distant Memories

Instead, Huynh was drafted into the army of South Vietnam in the 1960s. After being paralyzed by a bullet, he traveled to the United States for treatment. Huynh never returned to Vietnam. However, his memoirs, poems, and plays brought his memories of Vietnam and the stories he heard there to audiences in the United States.

Wildlife in the Highlands

"The Horse Snake" is a chapter in Huynh's memoir The Land I Lost. The memoir is set in Huynh's childhood village, which was surrounded by jungle on one side and mountains on the other. Huynh describes the realities of living close to fascinating and dangerous animals.

For more on Huynh Quang Nguyong, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.
THE HORSE SNAKE
Huynh Quang Nhuong

Despite all his courage there was one creature in the jungle that Tanx always tried to avoid—the snake. And there was one kind of snake that was more dangerous than other snakes—the horse snake. In some areas people called it the bamboo snake because it was as long as a full-grown bamboo tree. In other regions, the people called it the thunder or lightning snake, because it attacked so fast and with such power that its victim had neither time to escape nor strength to fight it. In our area, we called it the horse snake because it could move as fast as a thoroughbred.

ANALYZE VISUALS
What does this photo suggest about the importance of the horse snake in relation to the village?

1. a full-grown bamboo tree: Actually, a bamboo tree can grow as tall as 300 feet!
The men went to bed and the women prepared to stay up all night. My mother sewed torn clothing and my grandmother read a novel she had just borrowed from a friend. And for the second night in a row, they allowed my little sister and me to stay awake and listen with them for as long as we could. But hours later, seeing the worry on our faces, my grandmother put aside her novel and told us a story:

Once upon a time a happy family lived in a small village on the shore of the South China Sea. They respected the laws of the land and loved their neighbors very much. The father and his oldest son were woodcarvers. The father was quite old, but he still could carry a heavy load of wood.

One day on his way home from the jungle he was happier than usual. He and his son had discovered a wild chicken nest containing twelve eggs. Now he would have something special to give to his grandchildren when they pulled his whiskers and danced around him to greet him when he came home.

The father looked at the broad shoulders of his son and his steady gait under a very heavy load of wood. He smiled. His son was a good son, and he had no doubt that when he became even older still his son would take good care of him and his wife.

As he was thinking this he saw his son suddenly throw the load of wood at a charging horse snake that had come out of nowhere. The heavy load of wood crashed into the snake's head and stunned it. That gave them enough time to draw their sharp woodcutting knives. But instead of attacking the horse snake from the front, the elder shouted to his son to run behind the big bush of elephant grass nearby while he, who was a little too old to run fast, jumped into the front end of the bush. Each time the snake passed by him the old man managed to hit it with his knife. He struck the snake many times. Finally it became weak and slowed down, so he came out of his hiding place and attacked the snake's tail, while his son attacked the snake's head. The snake fought back furiously, but finally it succumbed to the well-coordinated attack of father and son.

When the snake was dead, they grabbed it by the tail and proudly dragged it to the edge of their village. Everyone rushed out to...
see their prize. They all argued over who would have the honor of carrying the snake to their house for them.

The old woodcutter and his son had to tell the story of how they had killed the snake at least ten times, but the people never tired of hearing it, again and again. They all agreed that the old woodcutter and his son were not only brave but clever as well.

Then there the villagers decided that when their chief, also a brave and clever man, died, the old woodcutter was the only one who deserved the honor of replacing him.

When my grandmother finished the story, my little sister and I became a bit more cheerful. People could defeat this dangerous snake after all. The silent darkness outside became less threatening. Nevertheless, we were still too scared to sleep in our room, so my mother made a makeshift bed in the sitting room, close to her and our grandmother.

110 When we woke up the next morning, life in the hamlet had almost returned to normal. The snake had not struck again that night, and the farmers, in groups of three or four, slowly filtered back to their fields. Then, late in the afternoon, hysterical cries for help were heard in the direction of the western part of the hamlet. My cousin and my father grabbed their knives and rushed off to help.

It was Minh, a farmer, who was crying for help. Minh, like most farmers in the area, stored the fish he had caught in the rice field at the end of the rainy season in a small pond. That day Minh’s wife had wanted a good fish for dinner. When Minh approached his fish pond he heard what sounded like someone trying to steal his fish by using a bucket to empty water from the pond. Minh was very angry and rushed over to catch the thief; but when he reached the pond, what he saw so petrified him that he fell back, speechless. When he regained control he crawled away as fast as he could and yelled loudly for help.

The thief he saw was not a person but a huge horse snake, perhaps the same one that had squeezed the old horse to death two nights before. The snake had hooked its head to the branch of one tree and its tail to another and was splashing the water out of the pond by swinging its body back and forth, like a hammock. Thus, when the shallow pond became dry, it planned to swallow all the fish.

120 All the villagers rushed to the scene to help Minh and our village chief quickly organized an attack. He ordered all the men to surround the pond. Then two strong young men approached the snake, one at its tail and the other at its head. As they crept closer and closer, the snake assumed a striking position, its head about one meter above the pond, and its tail swaying from side to side. It was ready to strike in either direction. As the two young men moved in closer, the snake watched them. Each man tried to draw the attention of the snake, while a third man crept stealthily on its side. Suddenly he struck the snake with his long knife. The surprised snake shot out of the pond like an arrow and knocked the young man unconscious as it rushed by. It broke through the circle of men and went into an open rice field. But it received two more wounds on its way out.

130 The villagers hurried all the women and children to form a long line between the open rice field and the jungle and to yell as loudly as they could, hoping to scare the snake so that it would not flee into the jungle. It would be easier for the men to fight the wounded snake in an open field than to follow it there.

But now there was a new difficulty. The snake started heading toward the river. Normally a horse snake could beat any man in a race, but since this one was badly wounded, our chief was able to cut off its escape by
The hunting party surrounded the snake again, and this time four of the best men attacked the snake from four different directions. The snake fought bravely, but it perished. During the struggle one of the men received a dislocated shoulder, two had bruised ribs, and three were momentarily blinded by dirt thrown by the snake. Luckily all of them succeeded in avoiding the fatal bite of the snake.

We rejoiced that the danger was over. But we knew it would only be a matter of time until we would once again have to face our most dangerous natural enemy—the horse snake.

**Narrative Nonfiction**

- **Why is this a turning point of the conflict between the people and the snake?**

**Comprehension**

1. **Recall** Why is the horse snake more dangerous than other snakes?

2. **Clarify** Why does the grandmother tell the story about the father and son who face a horse snake?

3. **Represent** Reread lines 106–110. Use details from the selection to draw what Minh sees when he goes to his pond.

**Literary Analysis**

4. **Understand Chronological Order** Over what period of time do the events in this selection take place? Use your timeline to figure it out. Then note when most of the events occur.

5. **Make Inferences** Minh does not directly state what he was doing during the battle with the horse snake. Reread lines 12–149. What do you think his role was in the battle? Support your inference with evidence from the selection.

6. **Analyze Narrative Nonfiction** In “The Horse Snake,” each of the two forces that are in conflict has some advantages over the other. On a scale like the one shown, note the different qualities that make the snake and the community strong. How does the balance of qualities create suspense?

7. **Draw Conclusions** What role did teamwork play in defeating the snake? Use evidence from the selection to support your answer.

**Extension and Challenge**

8. **Creative Project: Music** Moviemakers often use music to add suspense to their films. If you were directing a movie of “The Horse Snake,” what kind of music would you want to accompany each scene? Think about what instruments and rhythms should be used. Consider at what points the music should be loud or soft. As the director, write recommendations to your composer.

9. **Social Studies Connection** Read “Le Mat Village Heeds On to Snake Catching Tradition” on page 133. Then do research to find out more about village life and cultural traditions in Vietnam. Display your findings in a poster.

**Research Links**

For more on Vietnam, visit the ResearchCenter at ClassZone.com.
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**
Choose the letter of the word or phrase that is not related in meaning to the other words:
1. (a) pace, (b) step, (c) gait, (d) feet
2. (a) stealthily, (b) secretly, (c) swiftly, (d) swiftly
3. (a) frighten, (b) petrify, (c) confuse, (d) horrify
4. (a) sunny, (b) nocturnal, (c) moor, (d) dark
5. (a) take on, (b) move on, (c) undertake, (d) assume
6. (a) succumb, (b) reject, (c) refuse, (d) throw away

**VOCABULARY IN WRITING**
If you lived in the village, what fears would you have about the horse snake? Write a paragraph telling what you think. Use at least two vocabulary words. Here is an example of how you might begin.

**EXAMPLE SENTENCE**
I would be most fearful of the horse snake entering my home **stealthily** during the night.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: WORD ORIGINS**
Many words that we use every day have interesting histories. For example, the vocabulary word petrify can be traced back to a Latin word that means “rock.” If you saw something that petrified you, do you think it would make you freeze in place like a rock?

Dictionaries often provide information about a word’s origin in an **etymology** at the end of the dictionary entry. Etymologies can help you understand the meaning of an English word by relating the unfamiliar word to something you know. The etymology is in brackets in the entry shown.

**balloons** (bôl’ənz) n. 1. a. a small ball or bubble. [From Italian **balloone**.] b. an air-filled bag or baglike structure. [From Italian **balloone**.] c. a. a bag or baglike structure filled with gas or air. [From Italian **balloone**.] d. a. a bag or baglike structure filled with gas or air. [From Italian **balloone**.]

**PRACTICE** Look up the etymology of each word in a dictionary. Then write the origin of each word and explain how the history will help you remember the meaning.
1. algorithm
2. hippopotamus
3. radar
4. safari

**RADIO TRANSCRIPT**
In “The Horse Snake,” villagers fight off a large snake that threatens their community. In the following radio transcript, you’ll read about a modern Vietnamese village that prides itself on its tradition of catching snakes.

**RADIO THE VOICE OF VIETNAM**

**Le Mat Village Holds On to Snake Catching Tradition**

Le Mat on the outskirts of Hanoi has long been famous for its tradition of catching snakes. Le Mat villagers, regardless of their age and gender, all know how to catch snakes. Although the trade is fading and many villagers now make a living from other jobs, local people’s skills and love for catching snakes remain strong. Many can talk with visitors for hours about their village’s unique tradition.

Legend has it that snake catching in the village dates back to the 11th century. King Ly Thai Tông’s daughter was carried away by a giant snake when she was on a boat on the Vuong River. The king announced that anyone who found the daughter’s body would be rewarded.

A villager from Le Mat, Hoang Duc Trung, went to the part of the river where the princess was taken away. Trung killed the snake and brought back the princess’s body. The king kept his promise and rewarded Trung, but he refused the reward and just asked the king to allow Le Mat’s poor villagers to reclaim and settle in the area west of Thang Long Citadel. Under the leadership of the young man, villagers were able to turn a swampy area full of wild grass and poisonous snakes into a fertile and prosperous land. This is now the area of Ngoc Khai, Lien Chai, Cung Vai, and Kim Ma in Hanoi. Hoang Duc Trung taught the villagers how to catch snakes and was recognized as the Genie of Le Mat. . .

Le Mat villagers know well the difference between poisonous and harmless snakes. They also know the characteristics of each snake species, and they all agree that snakes that do not react quickly are the most dangerous. Despite the passage of time and changes in their lives, Le Mat people still love their special tradition and continue to catch any snake they see.