Scout's Honor

Short Story by Avi

When is a trip an ADVENTURE?



R3.6 Identify and analyze features of themes conveyed through characters, actions, and images.

Also included in this lesson: R3.2 (p. 362), **R3.8** (pgs. 362, 364), **W1.1** (p. 364), **LC1.1** (p. 364), **LC1.3** (p. 364)

KEY IDEA When we think of an **adventure,** we usually think of something big, like an African safari. But even a trip across town can be an adventure, if you're going somewhere you've never been before. In the short story "Scout's Honor," three boys get more adventure than they bargained for when they try to earn a new merit badge.

SKETCH IT How could a simple trip—a visit to a distant relative, for example—become an adventure? Think about what might happen and who you might meet along the way. Sketch a timeline with labels to show how you imagine your potential adventure.



LITERARY ANALYSIS: CHARACTER AND THEME

When you read a story, you often feel as though you are experiencing the events along with its **characters.** Characters can often help reveal the **theme,** or message about life, that a writer wishes to share with the reader. You can find clues to the theme in

- what the characters say and do
- what lessons the characters learn
- whether the characters change in any way

As you read "Scout's Honor," study the characters to see how they help express the story's theme.

READING STRATEGY: PREDICT

Predicting what will happen next is one of the things that makes reading exciting. When you **predict,** you use details and clues from a story to make a reasonable guess about events in the story that haven't happened yet.

As you read, use a graphic organizer like the one shown to record important details and clues and what you predict will happen based on the clues.

Clues	Predictions
The narrator has never left Brooklyn before. →	He might get lost.
→	

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Avi uses the words listed here to help tell the story of a camping **adventure.** To see how many you know, place each word under the heading "Know Well," "Think I Know," or "Don't Know." Then write a brief definition of each word you know.

WORD LIST

congeal, discard, khaki, retort, retrieve, simultaneously

Know Well	Think I Know	Don't Know

Author Online

CALIFORNIA

A Struggle to Write



Avi
born 1937

From an early age, Avi loved reading. Writing, however, was difficult for him. He had trouble with English classes in school, and some of his teachers thought he was not intelligent. He received failing grades at his first high school and then went to a different one, where he got help from a writing tutor. Avi recalls that the tutor told him, "You know, you're really very interesting. If you wrote better, people would know about it." From that point on, Avi says, "I wanted to write."

Learning from His Mistakes

As an adult, Avi discovered that his problems with writing were partially caused by a learning disability called dysgraphia (dĭs-grăf'ē-ə). People with dysgraphia reverse letters, misspell words, and confuse left and right. Now, Avi often shows his book manuscripts, "which are covered in red marks," to students with learning disabilities. He hopes that by showing students that even a best-selling author makes mistakes, he might inspire them to believe that they, too, can write.

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR
For more on Avi, visit the **Literature Center** at **ClassZone.com.**

SCOUT'S HONOR

AVI

Back in 1946, when I was nine, I worried that I wasn't tough enough. That's why I became a Boy Scout. Scouting, I thought, would make a man of me. It didn't take long to reach Tenderfoot rank. You got that for joining. To move up to Second Class, however, you had to meet three requirements. Scout Spirit and Scout Participation had been cinchy. The third requirement, Scout Craft, meant I had to go on an overnight hike in the *country.* In other words, I had to leave Brooklyn, on my own, for the first time in my life.

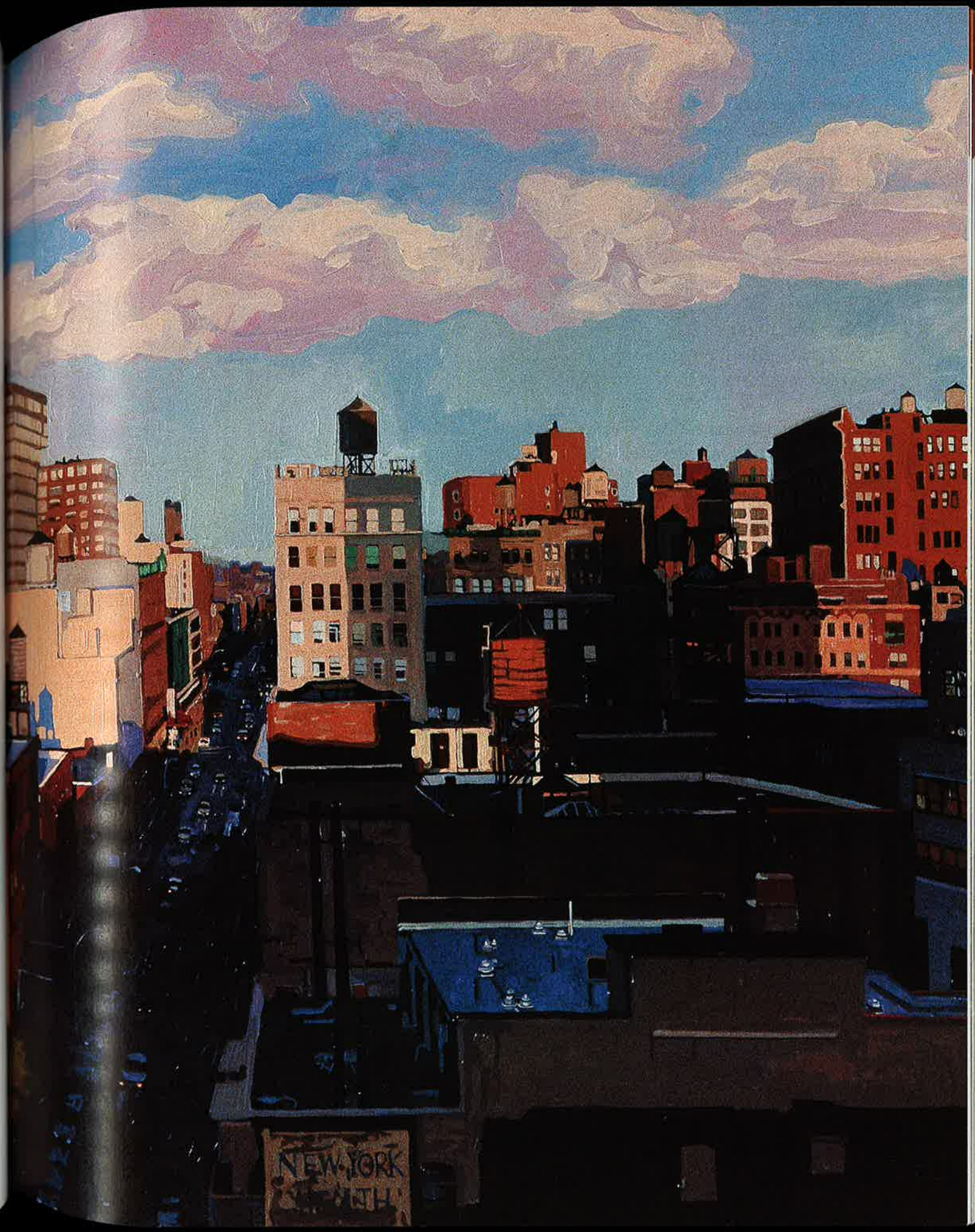
Since I grew up in Brooklyn in the 1940s, the only grass I knew was in Ebbets Field[1] where the Dodgers played. Otherwise, my world was made of slate pavements, streets of asphalt (or cobblestone), and skies full of tall buildings. The only thing "country" was a puny pin oak tree at our curb, which was noticed, mostly, by dogs. A

ANALYZE VISUALS
What sense do you get of the city of Brooklyn from the **details** in this painting?

A **PREDICT**
Reread lines 7–13. Make a prediction about how easy camping will be for the **narrator.**

1. **Ebbets Field:** The Los Angeles Dodgers were the Brooklyn Dodgers until the late 1950s. They played in the Ebbets Field stadium.

11th Floor Water Towers Looking East (2005), Sonya Sklaroff. Oil on panel, 48″ × 48″. Private Collection. © 2005 Sonya Sklaroff. www.goartonline.com.


NEW YORK
14TH

I asked Scoutmaster Brenkman where I could find some country. Now, whenever I saw Mr. Brenkman, who was a church pastor, he was dressed either in church black or Scout **khaki.** When he wore black, he'd warn us against hellfire. When he wore khaki, he'd teach us how to build fires.

"Country," Scoutmaster Brenkman said in answer to my question, "is anywhere that has lots of trees and is not in the city. Many boys camp in the Palisades."

"Where's that?"

"Just north of the city. It's a park in Jersey."

"Isn't that a zillion miles from here?"

"Take the subway to the George Washington Bridge, then hike across."

I thought for a moment, then asked, "How do I prove I went?"

Mr. Brenkman looked deeply shocked. "You wouldn't *lie,* would you? What about Scout's honor?"

"Yes, sir," I replied meekly. B

My two best friends were Philip Hossfender, whom we nicknamed Horse, and Richard Macht, called Max because we were not great spellers. They were also Scouts, Tenderfoots like me.

Horse was a skinny little kid about half my size whose way of arguing was to ball up his fist and say, "Are you saying . . . ?" in a threatening tone.

Max was on the pudgy side, but he could talk his way out of a locked room. More importantly, he always seemed to have pocket money, which gave his talk real power.

I wasn't sure why, but being best friends meant we were rivals too. One of the reasons for my wanting to be tougher was a feeling that Horse was a lot tougher than I was, and that Max was a little tougher.

"I'm going camping in the Palisades next weekend," I casually informed them.

"How come?" Max challenged.

"Scout Craft," I replied.

"Oh, *that,*" Horse said with a shrug.

"Look," I said, "I don't know about you, but I don't intend to be a Tenderfoot all my life. Anyway, doing stuff in the city is for sissies. Scouting is real camping. Besides, I like roughing it."

"You saying I don't?" Horse snapped.

"I'm not saying nothing," I said.

khaki (kăk′ē) *n.* cloth made of light yellowish brown cotton or wool

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



Brooklyn is one of New York City's five major sections, or boroughs. It is located south of Manhattan.

B PREDICT

What do you predict will happen? Record this and your other predictions in your graphic organizer.



Lafayette Street Morning (2005), Lisbeth Firmin. Oil on panel, 16″ × 16″. Courtesy of Klaudia Marr Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

ANALYZE VISUALS
Explain in what ways this painting does or does not match your mental picture of the **narrator** leaving for the camping trip.

They considered my idea. Finally, Horse said, "Yeah, well, I was going to do that, but I didn't think you guys were ready for it." C

"I've been ready for *years,*" Max protested.

"Then we're going, right?" I said.

They looked around at me. "If you can do it, I can do it," Max said.

"Yeah," Horse said thoughtfully.

The way they agreed made me nervous. Now I really was going to have to be tough.

We informed our folks that we were going camping overnight (which was true) and that the Scoutmaster was going with us—which was a lie. We did remember what Mr. Brenkman said about honesty, but we were baseball fans too, and since we were prepared to follow Scout law—being loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, *and* reverent—we figured a 900 batting average[2] was not bad. D

C CHARACTER AND THEME
Reread lines 31–54. What do you learn about Horse and Max based on what they say?

D CHARACTER AND THEME
Why do the boys think it is okay that they are telling a lie?

2. **900 batting average:** In baseball, a batting average is the number of times a batter gets a hit compared to the number of times he bats. A batting average of .900 is nearly perfect, since it means the batter gets a hit 90% of the time. The boys use this term to mean that since they have followed most of Scout law, they are above-average Scouts, even if they tell a lie.

So Saturday morning we met at the High Street subway station. I got there first. Stuffed in my dad's army surplus knapsack was a blanket, a pillow, and a paper bag with three white-bread peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches—that is, lunch, supper, and Sunday breakfast. My pockets were full of stick matches. I had an old flashlight, and since I lived by the Scout motto—Be Prepared—I had brought along an umbrella. Finally, being a serious reader, I had the latest Marvel Family comics.

Horse arrived next, his arms barely managing to hold on to a mattress that seemed twice his size. As for food, he had four cans of beans jammed into his pockets.

Max came last. He was lugging a new knapsack that contained a cast-iron frying pan, a packet of hot dogs, and a box of saltine crackers—plus two bottles. One bottle was mustard, the other, celery soda. He also had a bag of Tootsie Rolls and a shiny hatchet. "To build a lean-to,"[3] he explained.

Max's prize possession, however, was an official Scout compass. "It's really swell," he told us. "You can't ever get lost with it. Got it at the Scout store."

"I hate that place," Horse informed us. "It's all new. Nothing real."

"This compass is real," Max **retorted.** "Points north all the time. You can get cheaper ones, but they point all different directions."

"What's so great about the north?" Horse said.

"That's always the way to go," Max insisted. E

"Says who?" I demanded.

"Mr. Brenkman, dummy," Horse cried. "Anyway, there's always an arrow on maps pointing the way north."

"Cowboys live out west," I reminded them. They didn't care.

On the subway platform, we realized we did not know which station we were heading for. To find out, we studied the system map, which looked like a noodle factory hit by a bomb. The place we wanted to go (north) was at the top of the map, so I had to hoist Horse onto my shoulders for a closer look. Since he refused to let go of his mattress—or the tin cans in his pockets—it wasn't easy. I asked him—in a kindly fashion—to put the mattress down.

No sooner did he find the station—168th Street—than our train arrived. We rushed on, only to have Horse scream, "My mattress!" He had left it on the platform. Just before the doors shut, he and I leaped off. Max, however, remained on the train. Helplessly, we watched as his

VISUAL VOCABULARY



compass *n.* a device used to determine geographic direction

retort (rĭ-tôrt') *v.* to reply, especially in a quick or unkind way

E PREDICT
The boys feel that they are prepared with enough food and supplies for their trip. How effective do you predict the boys' camping gear will be?

3. **lean-to:** a shelter with a flat, sloping roof.

horror-stricken face slid away from us. "Wait at the next station!" I bellowed. "Don't move!"

The next train took forever to come. Then it took even longer to get to the next stop. There was Max. All around him—like fake snow in a glass ball—were crumbs. He'd been so nervous he had eaten all his crackers.

"Didn't that make you thirsty?"

"I drank my soda."

I noticed streaks down his cheeks. Horse noticed them too. "You been crying?" he asked.

"Naw," Max said. "There was this water dripping from the tunnel roof. But, you said don't move, right? Well, I was just being obedient."

By the time we got on the next train—with all our possessions—we had been traveling for an hour. But we had managed to go only one stop.

During the ride, I got hungry. I pulled out one of my sandwiches. With the jelly soaked through the bread, it looked like a limp scab.

Horse, envious, complained *he* was getting hungry.

"Eat some of your canned beans," I suggested.

He got out one can without ripping his pocket too badly. Then his face took on a mournful look.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Forgot to bring a can opener."

Max said, "In the old days, people opened cans with their teeth."

"You saying my teeth aren't strong?"

"I'm just talking about history!"

"You saying I don't know history?"

Always kind, I plopped half my sandwich into Horse's hand. He squashed it into his mouth and was quiet for the next fifteen minutes. It proved something I'd always believed: The best way to stop arguments is to get people to eat peanut butter sandwiches. They can't talk.

Then we became so absorbed in our Marvel Family comics we missed our station. We got to it only by coming back the other way. When we reached street level, the sky was dark.

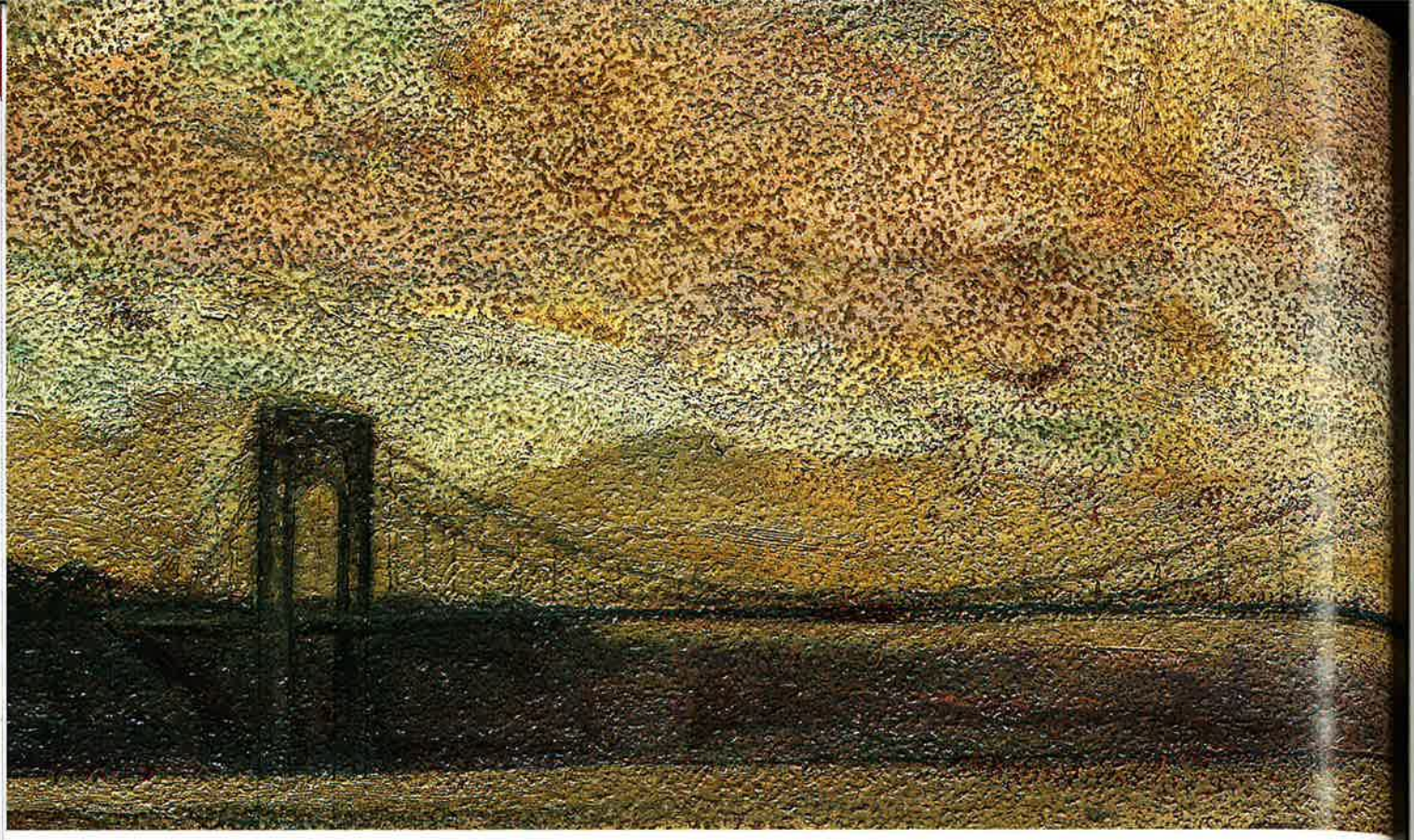
"I knew it," Max announced. "It's going to rain."

"Don't worry," Horse said. "New Jersey is a whole other state. It probably won't be raining there."

"I brought an umbrella," I said smugly, though I wanted it to sound helpful.

As we marched down 168th Street, heading for the George Washington Bridge, we looked like European war refugees.[4] Every few paces, Horse

4. **European war refugees:** people who fled Europe to escape World War II (1939–1945) and its effects.



cried, "Hold it!" and adjusted his arms around his mattress. Each time we paused, Max pulled out his compass, peered at it, then announced, "Heading north!"

I said, "The bridge goes from east to west."

"Maybe the bridge does," Max insisted with a show of his compass, "but guaranteed, *we* are going north."

About then, the heel of my left foot, encased in a heavy rubber boot over an earth-crushing Buster Brown shoe, started to get sore. Things weren't going as I had hoped. Cheerfully, I tried to ignore the pain.

The closer we drew to the bridge, the more immense it seemed. And the clouds had become so thick, you couldn't see the top or the far side.

Max eyed the bridge with deep suspicion. "I'm not so sure we should go," he said. F

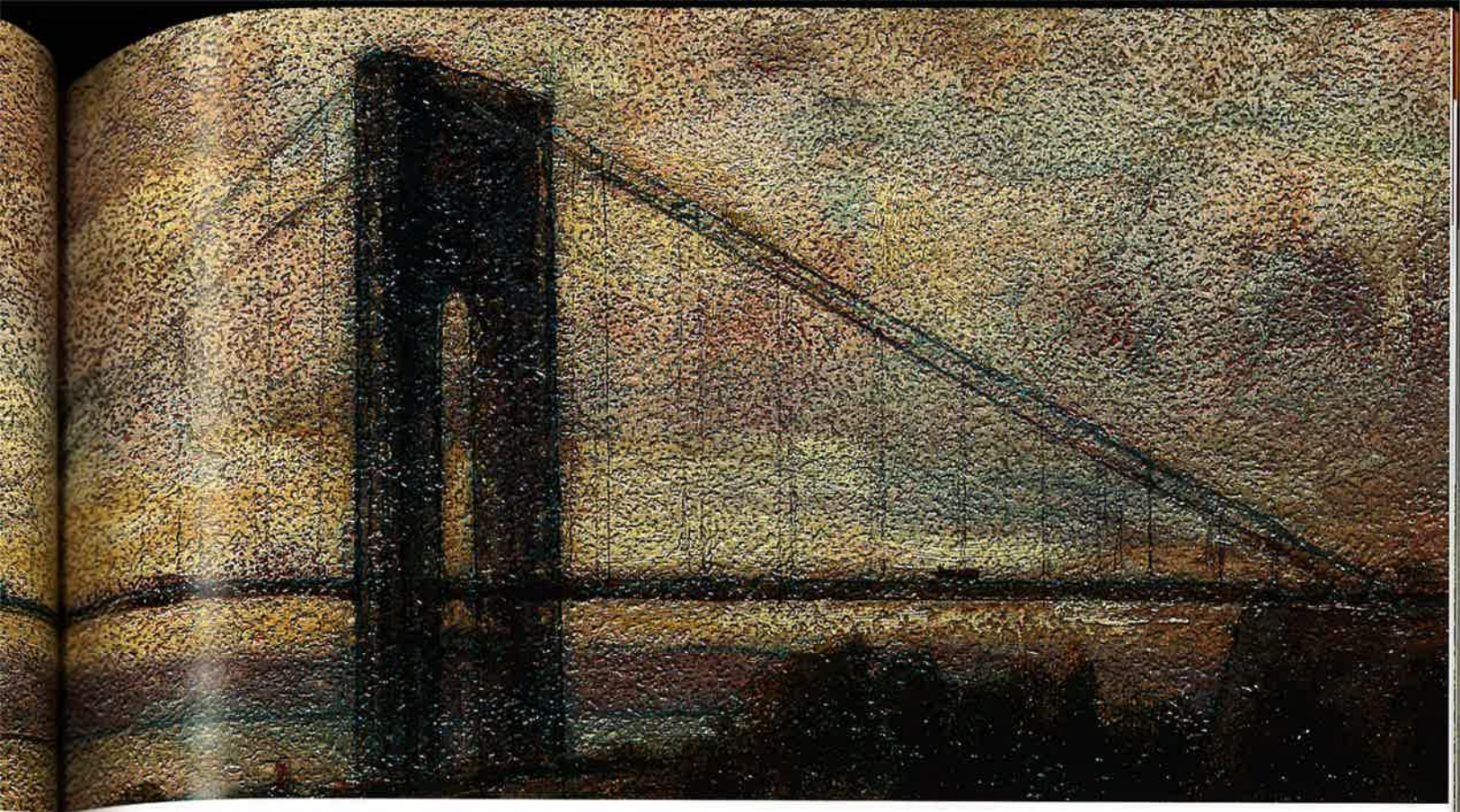
"Why?"

"Maybe it doesn't have another side."

We looked at him.

"No, seriously," Max explained, "they could have taken the Jersey side away, you know, for repairs."

F PREDICT
What do you predict the boys will do at this point?



Detail of *The George Washington Bridge Seen from the Upper West Side,* (ca. 1940), Louis Aston Knight. Oil on board, 10.8″ × 17″. Photo courtesy of Spanierman Gallery, LLC, New York.

"Cars are going across," I pointed out.

"They could be dropping off," he suggested.

"You would hear them splash," Horse argued.

"I'm going," I said. Trying to look brave, I started off on my own. My bravery didn't last long. The walkway was narrow. When I looked down, I saw only fog. I could feel the bridge tremble and sway. It wasn't long before I was convinced the bridge was about to collapse. Then a ray of hope struck me: Maybe the other guys had chickened out. If they had, I could quit because of *them.* I glanced back. My heart sank. They were coming. G

After they caught up, Horse looked me in the eye and said, "If this bridge falls, I'm going to kill you."

A quarter of a mile farther across, I gazed around. We were completely fogged in.

"I think we're lost," I announced.

"What do we do?" Horse whispered. His voice was jagged with panic. That made me feel better.

"Don't worry," Max said. "I've got my compass." He pulled it out. "North is that way," he said, pointing in the direction we had been going.

ANALYZE VISUALS
What **mood,** or feeling, do the colors in this painting create?

G CHARACTER AND THEME
Reread lines 158–174. In what ways do the boys try to hide their fear from one another?

Horse said, "You sure?"

"A Scout compass never lies," Max insisted.

"*We* lied," I reminded him.

"Yeah, but this is an *official* Scout compass," Max returned loyally.

"Come on," Max said and marched forward. Horse and I followed. In moments, we crossed a metal bar on the walkway. On one side, a sign proclaimed: NEW YORK; on the other, it said: NEW JERSEY.

"Holy smoke,"[5] Horse said with reverence as he straddled the bar. "Talk about being tough. We're in two states at the same time."

It began to rain. Max said, "Maybe it'll keep us clean."

"You saying I'm not clean?" Horse shot back.

Ever friendly, I put up my umbrella.

We went on—Max on one side, Horse on the other, me in the middle—trying to avoid the growing puddles. After a while, Max said, "Would you move the umbrella? Rain is coming down my neck."

"We're supposed to be roughing it," I said.

"Being in the middle isn't roughing it," Horse reminded me.

I folded the umbrella up so we all could get soaked equally. Ⓗ

"Hey!" I cried. "Look!" Staring up ahead, I could make out tollbooths[6] and the dim outlines of buildings.

Ⓗ CHARACTER AND THEME
Reread lines 195–201. What do the boys' definitions of "roughing it" tell you about them?

ANALYZE VISUALS
What **details** do you notice in this painting of a campsite?

5. **Holy smoke:** an old slang expression meaning "My goodness."
6. **tollbooths:** booths at which drivers must stop to pay a toll, or small fee.



Tent (1984), Christopher Brown. Oil on canvas, 72″ × 96″. Private collection.

"Last one off the bridge is a rotten egg!" Horse shouted and began to run. The next second, he tripped and took off like an F-36 fighter plane. Unfortunately, he landed like a Hell-cat dive-bomber[7] as his mattress unspooled before him and then slammed into a big puddle.

Max and I ran to help. Horse was damp. His mattress was soaked. When he tried to roll it up, water cascaded like Niagara Falls.

"Better leave it," Max said.

"It's what I sleep on at home," Horse said as he slung the soaking, dripping mass over his shoulder.

When we got off the bridge, we were in a small plaza. To the left was the roadway, full of roaring cars. In front of us, aside from the highway, there was nothing but buildings. Only to the right were there trees.

"North is that way," Max said, pointing toward the trees. We set off.

"How come you're limping?" Horse asked me. My foot *was* killing me. All I said, though, was, "How come you keep rubbing your arm?"

"I'm keeping the blood moving."

We approached the grove of trees. "Wow," Horse exclaimed. "Country." But as we drew closer, what we found were **discarded** cans, bottles, and newspapers—plus an old mattress spring.

"Hey," Max cried, sounding relieved, "this is just like Brooklyn." ❶

I said, "Let's find a decent place, make camp, and eat."

It was hard to find a campsite that didn't have junk. The growing dark didn't help. We had to settle for the place that had the least amount of garbage.

Max said, "If we build a lean-to, it'll keep us out of the rain." He and Horse went a short distance with the hatchet.

Seeing a tree they wanted, Max whacked at it. The hatchet bounced right out of his hand. There was not even a dent in the tree. Horse **retrieved** the hatchet and checked the blade. "Dull," he said.

"Think I'm going to carry something sharp and cut myself?" Max protested. They contented themselves with picking up branches.

I went in search of firewood, but everything was wet. When I finally gathered some twigs and tried to light them, the only thing that burned was my fingers.

Meanwhile, Horse and Max used their branches to build a lean-to directly over me. After many collapses—which didn't help my work—they finally got the branches to stand in a shaky sort of way.

discard (dĭ-skärd') *v.* to throw away

❶ **CHARACTER AND THEME**
Max is relieved to find the campsite is full of garbage. Why?

retrieve (rĭ-trēv') *v.* to get back again

7. **Hell-cat dive-bomber:** a World War II plane that took off from and returned to an aircraft carrier.

"Uh-oh," Horse said. "We forgot to bring something for a cover."
Max eyed me. "Didn't you say you brought a blanket?"
"No way!" I cried.
"All in favor of using the blanket!"
Horse and Max both cried, "Aye."
Only after I built up a mound of partially burned match sticks and lit *them,* did I get the fire going. It proved that where there's smoke there doesn't have to be much fire. The guys meanwhile draped my blanket over their branch construction. It collapsed twice.

About an hour after our arrival, the three of us were gathered inside the tiny space. There was a small fire, but more light came from my flickering flashlight.
"No more rain," Horse said with pride.
"Just smoke," I said, rubbing my stinging eyes.
"We need a vent hole," Horse pointed out.
"I could cut it with the hatchet," Max said.
"It's my mother's favorite blanket."
"And you took it?" Max said.
I nodded.
"You *are* tough," Horse said.
Besides having too much smoke in our eyes and being wet, tired, and in pain, we were starving. I almost said something about giving up, but as far as I could see, the other guys were still tough. J
Max put his frying pan atop my smoldering smoke. After dumping in the entire contents of his mustard bottle, he threw in the franks. Meanwhile, I bolted down my last sandwich.
"What am I going to eat?" Horse suddenly said.
"Your beans," I reminded him.
Max offered up his hatchet. "Here. Just chop off the top end of the can."
"Oh, right," Horse said. He selected a can, set it in front of him, levered himself onto his knees, then swung down—hard. There was an explosion. For a stunned moment, we just sat there, hands, face, and clothing dripping with beans.
Suddenly Max shouted, "Food fight! Food fight!" and began to paw the stuff off and fling it around.
Having a food fight in a cafeteria is one thing. Having one in the middle of a soaking wet lean-to with cold beans during a dark, wet New

J PREDICT
Reread lines 262–264. Make a prediction about whether the **narrator's** statement will turn out to be true.

Jersey night is another. In seconds, the lean-to was down, the fire kicked over, and Max's frankfurters dumped on the ground.

"The food!" Max screamed, and began to snatch up the franks. Coated with mustard, dirt, grass, and leaves, they looked positively prehistoric. Still, we wiped the franks clean on our pants then ate them—the franks, that is. Afterward, we picked beans off each other's clothes—the way monkeys help friends get rid of lice.

For dessert, Max shared some Tootsie Rolls. After Horse swallowed his sixteenth piece, he announced, "I don't feel so good."

The thought of his getting sick was too much. "Let's go home," I said, ashamed to look at the others. To my surprise—and relief—nobody objected.

Wet and cold, our way lit by my fast-fading flashlight, we gathered our belongings—most of them, anyway. As we made our way back over the bridge, gusts of wind-blown rain pummeled us until I felt like a used-up punching bag. By the time we got to the subway station, my legs were melting fast. The other guys looked bad too. Other riders moved away from us. One of them murmured, "Juvenile delinquents." To cheer us up, I got out my comic books, but they had **congealed** into a lump of red, white, and blue pulp.

congeal (kən-jēl') *v.* to make into a solid mass

With the subways running slow, it took hours to get home. When we emerged from the High Street Station, it was close to midnight.

Before we split up to go to our own homes, we just stood there on a street corner, embarrassed, trying to figure out how to end the day gracefully. I was the one who said, "Okay, I admit it. I'm not as tough as you guys. I gave up first."

Max shook his head. "Naw. I wanted to quit, but I wasn't tough enough to do it." He looked to Horse.

Horse made a fist. "You saying I'm the one who's tough?" he demanded. "I hate roughing it!" K

K CHARACTER AND THEME
Reread lines 302–309. Pay attention to how Horse and Max react to the **narrator's** confession. In what ways have their attitudes changed?

"Me too," I said quickly.

"Same for me," Max said.

Horse said, "Only thing is, we just have to promise not to tell Mr. Brenkman."

Grinning with relief, we **simultaneously** clasped hands. "No matter what," Max reminded us.

simultaneously (sī'məl-tā'nē-əs-lē) *adv.* at the same time

To which I added, "Scout's Honor."

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why do the boys need to take a camping trip?
2. **Recall** What makes the **narrator** decide it is time to go home?
3. **Represent** Create a diagram of the boys' route to their campsite. Be sure to include all of the important places mentioned in the story.

Literary Analysis

4. **Predict** Review the graphic organizer you made as you read. Notice which events in the story you were able to predict. Which events were surprises?
5. **Compare and Contrast Characters** Compare and contrast the three boys. In what way is the **narrator** different from his friends? Support your answer with examples from the story.
6. **Examine Character's Impact** The narrator exhibits many different qualities: ambition, fear (of being thought a coward), and courage. Explain how these qualities affect the plot and the resolution of the conflict.
7. **Analyze Character and Theme** Fill in a chart like the one shown with information about the story's characters. Record each character's important statements and actions, what lessons he learns, and how he changes. Then, restate the story's message as a theme statement.

	Narrator	Horse	Max
Statements/ Actions	"I like roughing it."		
What He Learns			
How He Changes			

Theme Statement:

8. **Evaluate Plot** Did you find the boys' **adventure** of going to the "country" believable? Consider what they bring with them and what they do.

Extension and Challenge

9. **SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** Read the requirements for earning the Wilderness Survival Merit Badge on page 365. Choose three of the requirements. For each one, state whether the boys in "Scout's Honor" met that requirement. Explain why or why not.

CALIFORNIA

R3.2 Analyze the effect of the qualities of the character (e.g., courage or cowardice, ambition or laziness) **on the plot and resolution of the conflict.**

R3.6 Identify and analyze features of themes conveyed through characters, actions, and images.

R3.8 Critique the credibility of characterization and the degree to which a plot is contrived or realistic (e.g., compare use of fact and fantasy in historical fiction).