

The Mysterious Map

A Story Studio Anthology by Young Authors (aged 5-13)

Story Studio is a charity that **inspires**, **educates** and **empowers** youth to be great storytellers.

We create innovative, 'fun-first' workshops that develop narrative capacity in youth, and celebrate young writers by crafting beautiful publications from their words.

This anthology is composed of stories written by children and youth across Canada, between the ages of 5 and 13 as a result of our June 2026 creative writing contest.

We asked young authors to write about a character who wakes up to find a mysterious map. We looked for forward-thinking tales that captivated readers with dynamic plots, compelling characters, and immersive settings.



THIS MONTH'S WINNERS

- **Ages 5-9 1st Place:** The Keys of ALCATRAZ by Mitchell (age 9)
- **Ages 5-9 2nd Place:** Scavenger Hunt? by Yiran (age 9)
- **Ages 10-13 1st Place:** The Map that Led to the Future by Stacy (age 11)
- **Ages 10-13 2nd Place:** The First Day of Summer by Mmesoma (age 13)

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Serendipity

By Avery, age 13

A light summer breeze blew across Reggie's face, the first of many to come. His eyes could barely open as his hand reached for his phone, however there was a sketch of a map in his hands instead. Sitting upright he took a closer look, on the far left was a house—a house that looked just like his? A path led into the forest and in the middle of the forest was a huge circle drawn in a dark bloody red. Looking outside, the sun barely fought its way through the night. He shrugged, might as well go out before anyone notices he's gone.

So he began his voyage. Quickly enough he found himself just where the map had told him to go; however there was nowhere to go. There was only a small river with flower petals floating on the murky waters. He put his hand into the river, maybe there was something hidden at the bottom, like hidden treasure! The petals began to crowd around his hand. Reggie pulled back but his hand was stuck like glue. The petals covered up his wrist, then his elbow—it was sucking him up! And then with all its force the murky river took hold of Reggie's whole body and dragged him under.

The next thing he knew he was in the sea. The water was so clear he could see his own reflection in them. Reggie's feet touched the sunset waves below him. His mind was in a daze, almost a dream. He began to walk as more flower petals surrounded him. The water crashed lightly against his eardrums.

A white figure appeared. It was a statue of a bare woman, her long hair dancing with the waves and her face curved into a smile, almost like she was alive. She sat on a marble pedestal with the name Serendipity engraved. Her hand was extended outwards, as if it was reaching for Reggie. He placed his hand on hers.

CRACK! Suddenly her fingers came to life. Her cold hands captured him in a tight grasp and the smile on her face contorted into a ravenous pair of pointy teeth. Her eyes flashed with hunger as the pressure grew on his fingers. His other hand desperately balled up into a fist and he struck her. She fell off her pedestal and there was a crack in the center. He kicked it, the crack grew larger and there was a world beyond it—his world! With all his might he kicked at it. Suddenly the statue’s hair strands wrapped around his neck. His lungs began to burn and his legs nearly gave up. One last hit and a strong force pulled him out.

He sat in the murky river once more, petals were stuffed in his mouth. As he coughed it out a person appeared from the shadows, it was his mom. She grabbed him and embraced him. He looked at his watch, his eyes widened, he had come here last morning—six days ago.

The End

The Treasure in the Castle

By Charley, age 10

“June!”

“JUNE!!!” June’s mom yelled.

“What?”

“You know what!”

“Fine, I’ll wake up!”

Today was the first day of summer break so June could wake up whenever she wanted. Although usually her mom made her wake up by 8:30am so June wouldn’t miss breakfast.

June reached for her glasses on her bedside table, but instead of touching them, she felt something that felt like paper. June sat up and grabbed her glasses, then examined the piece of paper. It was a treasure map!

June skipped down the stairs three at a time. She grabbed a granola bar and raced out the door.

“June? Where are you going? You’re going to miss breakfast!” June heard her mom say, although she ignored her.

"It says... turn left at the big oak tree." June read. Suddenly, there was a snicker from behind the tree. June turned and saw the school bully, Amanda Pollister, peering at her map and sneering.

"I can take that," Amanda said smugly.

"Um- Ijusthaveto... togotothebathroom." June said quickly. She was really scared!

June rushed off, hatching a plan on the way...

A few minutes later, June came back with the map in her pocket and the fake one she had just made in her hand. June had made sure that the path she drew was exactly the opposite of the real map. June was an excellent artist, and everyone thought so, including her parents, her teachers (especially her art teacher, Mrs. Bowlie) and her three best friends, May, July, and February (Febie).

"Thank you," Amanda said snootily with a hint of sarcasm once June gave her the fake map. After Amanda had skipped away, June immediately got to work.

"Now, as I was saying, turn left at the big oak tree."

June did a series of twists and turns, but then reached a problem: St. Ben's river!

"How am I going to get across?" muttered June. She was about to give up when she found a gigantic tree lying on the ground that was sturdy enough to walk on. June had seen people walk around on tree bridges in her favourite movies.

"If only I could move this thing, I could get across the river, as the map says. Wait a minute! The map has a drawing of a bridge! Hmm... this map is probably from a long time ago."

June paced at the front of the tree, thinking of ways to move the tree. In frustration, June whacked the tree as hard as she possibly could towards the river.

She gasped in surprise when the tree whipped up and fell perfectly into place on the two riverbanks of St. Ben's river.

“Magic,” June whispered, eyes wide. She tiptoed across the tree proudly. When June reached the riverbank, she did another series of twists and turns. June reached a clearing and oohed with amazement. There, standing majestically in the summer sunshine, was a shimmering castle.

Standing at the golden gate was a fluffy white cat grooming itself. It seemed almost as grand as the castle.

June ran to the cat to pet it; she loved cats. The second June raced towards it, though, it went into full protection mode and leaped at June.

“AAARRRGGGHHH!” June shrieked. She made a dash for the gate, and luckily for her, it wasn’t locked. When June got in, she discovered the gate was very simple; she could easily lock the angry cat out.

June slowly opened the door to the castle and ran up the stairs. She had no time for being amazed by all of the self-portraits of kings and queens.

When June reached the top step, she fell right through, into a spacious room, where a large chest was sitting, wide open.

June grinned. She had found the treasure in the castle!

The End

The History of the Mona Lisa

By Damien, age 10

I woke up after a fun sleepover with my friend Osian. That's when Osian noticed a strange piece of paper on the corner of my bed. It was a map that I had never seen before. I ran downstairs and asked my mom if she had seen the map before? "What map?" my mom said. "The map on the paper," I said. She said, "that paper is just blank!"

I thought she was pranking me, so I went to my neighbour and asked her as well, but she said the same thing as my mom.

Now this was getting really strange. Me and Osian wondered where the map led to. We decided that we were going to follow it that night. We packed flashlights and water. After everyone had fallen asleep, we set off to follow the map. It led us to a familiar place along a creek. That's when we noticed an entrance to a cave that we had never seen before. The map led straight into the cave. We pulled out our flashlights and entered.

There was fog everywhere and made it hard to see. It smelt like sour milk and rotten cheese. Finally, the cave ended and we emerged into a forest. I looked back and the entrance was no longer there. We were trapped. Suddenly, I noticed some skulls beside a tree which sent a shiver down my spine. We continued to follow the map that led us on the path through the dark forest. Then we noticed a snake-like animal sign on the map.

All of a sudden, we heard branches breaking in the forest. I looked up, there was a huge snake staring down on us. We looked at each other and knew that we had to run.

We sprinted down the pathway until we found a hut. We pounded on the door. A man with a pointy blue hat opened the door. He looked like a wizard. He let us in and put a force field around the hut to protect us from the snake. He told us that he could make a special potion that could make us invisible. The only problem was he needed one ingredient called the blue fungus, a one of a kind blue mushroom from the forest. But he was too old to get it. Apparently only kids could pick it safely. He told us that there was one just outside in the backyard. We snuck outside and grabbed the mushroom. We had to be very quiet so that the snake didn't hear us.

We ran inside and handed the mushroom to the wizard. He said, "For your safety, go stand by the chairs while I brew the potion." Suddenly, a metal cage fell down on us. We were trapped!

"What is happening?" I said.

"You gave me the last ingredient that makes me the most powerful wizard in the world," the wizard said. Me and Osian looked at each other. We saw a rock on the ground, which gave me an idea. If I could throw it at a shelf and tip the contents off and into the pot it may change the potion and make it less powerful.

When the wizard was looking away, I took a chance. I threw the rock and it hit the shelf exactly where I wanted. Chemicals spilled down into the pot. The wizard turned back around and took a big gulp.

Suddenly, he said, "What are you fine gentlemen doing today?" Apparently, the new chemicals made the wizard nice. I said, "Can you please get us out of here? The keys are beside the door." He grabbed the keys and let us out. We ran out the back door and sprinted away where the map led us to a red X-marks the spot. That's when I noticed a strange painting on a nearby tree. I turned the painting over. On the back it said The Mona Lisa.

Right beside the Mona Lisa was a portal. We jumped through and it brought us home. We showed our parents the painting and we all decided to bring it to the Louvre for display. The Mona Lisa has been in the Louvre ever since.

The End

Il Creatore Del Mare

By Gemma, age 13

I squint my eyes, the warm glow of the summer sun waking me up.

“Thank goodness school’s over...” I smile to myself, but stop short. Immediately, I spot a curled piece of parchment on my nightstand.

“What’s this?” I ask myself, reaching for the ancient looking paper. As I pick it up, lights emit from the parchment, revealing a world that I’ve never seen before!

I glance across the room, my open door showing my half-asleep parents. Did they put this here? I’ve never seen it before...

As I’m about to call for my mom, the lights from the map become brighter.

“Mom...?” I shout, but she doesn’t hear me. I’m not even in my room anymore.

The world is swirling around me, soft purples and blues flooding my vision while wind musses up my soft brown hair, creating an unwanted mullet.

Suddenly, it freezes. There’s no more swirling, no more gusts of wind; just me standing alone in a vibrant green forest, golden rays of sun glinting through the tall trees.

“H-hello?” I stutter, walking a few steps through the mysterious forest, still clutching the foreign map in my hands.

SNAP!

I jump, spinning quickly to view what's behind me.

"I mean you no harm, visitor." A gentle voice squeaks.

I look around frantically, desperate to find this voice. Eventually, my eyes settle on a small fluffy creature—somewhere between a skunk and a rabbit.

As the creature advances slowly, its black beady eyes are fixated on mine.

"W-what are you?" I ask, stumbling backwards, tripping on a log.

The creature scuttles closer, placing its two front paws on my arm.

"I am l'occhio dei creatori. I'm here to—"

I pause, putting a hand out in front of me, "I'm sorry," I laugh, "You're the eye of creators? That's the Italian translation. We aren't even on Earth! Where are we?!"

L'occhio dei creatori tilts its head. "Italian? Who's that? No, we are in the land of the sea. And we need your help."

"Help? My help? Why me? What galaxy are we even in? How are you even able to speak?" I shout, rising to my feet quickly, tilting the map every which way to make sense of it.

"Please calm down, Ms. Lucille." L'occhio dei creatori pleads. "You have something that my people need to defeat the emperor. That map."

I look down. "Alright, here! Have it. Can I go back to Earth now, Flower? And how do you know my name?" I exclaim, shoving the map in the skunk-rabbit's face.

"I have my ways...But I'm not Flower—fine, if you say so. The thing is, you're the only one who can decipher that map. It's written in weird hieroglyphics, called English?" Flower whispers.

“Great. Sounds easy.” I nod, picking dried leaves out of my hair. “Flower, what exactly is that walking rock ahead?” I ask skeptically.

As Flower’s expression turns grim, the sunny sky turns dark and gray.

“That... is the Emperor’s army.” Flower mumbles, “And they know we’re here.”

The End

History During Summer Break: The Duel in Rome

By Jonathan, age 12

After a depressing school year full of homework, I hoped the teachers would show mercy and give less to do this summer. I was wrong. I had fifteen essays to write during summer. I lay in bed miserable, unable to sleep – thinking only of how much I wanted to have a break from the miles of homework, a break from this cruel world. I was so tired, and summer hadn't even started yet. I closed my eyes, and had a restless sleep. Before I knew it, my alarm clock broke the silence, blaring like an air raid siren.

I slapped the alarm clock so hard it went flying off the nightstand and landed on the floor with a thud. When I picked the alarm clock I noticed a map chained to the table. On the chains there was an iron plate with a message carved on it: "Forbidden from society since the first of humanity, if disturbed consequences will be severe."

I should have been worried, but instead I grabbed the map.

"This could be my only hope to escape all this homework," I thought.

Suddenly all I saw was black – like I was drifting through space. I felt a huge slap on my face, the type my teacher would do if people cheated on a test. Then I fell unconscious.

When I came to, Roman soldiers were staring at me. The tallest one, who must have been the commander, shouted in my face, “GET OFF YOUR BUM AND MARCH, YOU LAZY BRAT.”

“Yes sir,” I replied. Another group of soldiers came in followed by the all and mighty Julius Caesar. He spoke like the politicians did but more confident and louder.

“We shall pick a recruit to fight in the colosseum to show our mighty army can fight anything,” Julia Caesar boasted.

Before I could even speak, the Commander shoved me forward and replied, “He will go and show how powerful the Roman empire is.”

The next day, when I stepped into the Colosseum, I was already nervous. I tried to comfort myself saying aloud, “Remember how you sent that 5th grade kid to the hospital in grade 3 with just your fists?”

But I knew it was hopeless. I was as good as dead. My opponent was as big as a bear.

If I was going down, then I might as well go down fighting, I reasoned. I charged the brute. But he just bashed his shield in my face, sending me flying back at least 4 meters. I landed hard on the sand. I tried to block his attacks, but one thrust of his spear and my low quality shield splintered into a million pieces.

“Great, the only thing defending me is gone, how can this get any worse?” I thought, as I ran around dodging his strikes.

I didn't know if it was luck or adrenaline kicking in but I slashed my sword in an arch and it cut a serious gash in his armor. He examined the damage, then charged me. He threw me to the ground and pressed his spear against my face.

Just when I was accepting my fate, I felt the same slap on my face. It was exactly the same as the one that teleported me here, Then I was back in bed. Then I heard the shouting of my mom, “GET DOWN HERE AND EAT YOUR BREAKFAST BEFORE I COME UP AND DRAG YOU DOWN.” That's when I finally realized I was safe and sound in my own home. It was all a dream and I wouldn't be dying anytime soon.

“All right!” I replied, as I walked downstairs in my comfortable slippers. I guess I’ll be spending the summer writing those fifteen essays after all. At least now, I have something to write about.

The End

The Portal

By Jonathan, age 10

Yesterday, I saw nothing on my table, but in the morning I found a map on my table. I was starting to wonder what just happened ? As I climbed off my bed I started preparing things for the morning. Things like brushing your teeth, eating breakfast, and all those things. I knew I had no classes in the morning but I didn't know that I was about to be on an adventure.

As I grabbed the map I was looking out to see if anyone was coming and I was unlucky because I heard my mom coming from the hallway so I tucked it under the blanket and she asked "what are you doing?" "You know we are very poor right" So I of course had to lie. So I lied in a quiet voice "nothing" " And yes I know we are very poor" I answered so she left.

Ten minutes later, I heard a knock on the door so I slipped the map under my pillow and in came my mom again! She was about to ask me how I was doing but I interrupted her halfway with a "no," so she left. I quietly closed my door again and folded the map until it was the perfect size for my pocket. I opened the door again not daring to make a sound as I went downstairs.

My dad said, "What are you doing?"

I lied, "I'm just going out, okay?"

As I opened the door, I took out the map and my dad looked out of the window and yelled, "Have a great time!"

I headed out with the direction to my friend Johnny's house. When I arrived I knocked on his door and what came out was not Johnny... It was his mom. I saw her and I wanted to ask her if he could play in the park with me but I said, "Can he go to my house to play for a while?"

She replied, "Sure, but no more than three hours!" As me and Johnny walked back to my house, I told him that I lied. Then I told him we were going to use the map I hid in my pocket. We started following it and we knew it was going to take long.

Later when we almost got to the X mark on the map we faced the ocean. We quickly spotted a rowboat and we climbed into it.

After 30 minutes of following the map we made it to an island where another map was on the ground. I tucked the old map into my pocket and I gave the new one to my friend so he can have a turn leading.

Later when we reached the end of the map, because it was a short one, I saw a button that said *do not press*. I, of course, had to press it and my friend yelled "NO!" but it was too late. I had already pressed the button. Just as I pressed the button the ground began to shake like an earthquake so I ducked, but my friend Johnny definitely did not practise for occasions like these. Instead of ducking, he ran around in circles and was yelling "AHHHHHHH!"

I rugby tackled him to the ground and he stopped screaming and instead whispered to me, "What are you doing?"

I replied "You know you need to duck on these occasions, right?"

He replied, "Yeah, I know." We went into the portal and when we walked back outside we were nowhere near the island and I looked at my watch and it said 1673.

I yelled "AHHHHHHH!" We are in pirate time and right in front of me was a ship. I hid behind a tree and hoped they didn't find me but Johnny had a different idea. He went to look for treasure and it was right behind him and he didn't find it.

After two minutes, he found the treasure and told me to go into the portal. I looked both ways and no one was there so I ran straight into the portal. When we went back to our time, I put the treasure into the ship and shared exactly half of it with Johnny. He was lucky.

Later when we arrived at Johnny's home, he took his half, and I went to my home. When I went home I took my treasure and yelled "I'M BACK!" I dumped the gold onto the floor.

The End

The Treasure of the Sacred Land

By Julien, age 12



I woke up to find that I'd been evicted. In order to get my house back I had to sell everything I had. I lost my job, and I couldn't even get enough money to buy back my house. But there is one last chance. To get enough money I grab a map that my grandfather gave me. And I head to the treasure of the sacred land.

I called four of my friends to come with me. I head off to the airport. Unfortunately I missed my flight so I have to wait. While I'm waiting I decided to get some food for the

trip. My friends tell me that I might go broke if I pay for everybody. But if the treasure isn't real I might be in trouble. But I shake it off.

I arrive in the Bahamas ready to search for the treasure. But half the map is faded, so I take it to a collector's shop and ask the man to complete the map for you. He completes the map but decides to keep it to find the treasure himself. After defeating him in a battle I get back the completed treasure map. But the sun is down and it's too dark to continue the search for the treasure.

I woke up the next day to find my map had been stolen by bandits. My friends and I head out to find the intrepid band of thieves. Eventually I found the bandits. They're holding the map in their hands whispering about something. I jump the bandits. But they draw their weapons at me. The bandits take all my stuff and knock me out.

I woke up in a dungeon, dank, musty, cold and of course... Filled to the brim with stone walls. My friends were in neighbouring cells. I bang on the bars pleading to be let out. But the bandits have the keys to the dungeon and there's no way to convince them to take the keys off, so I must take it from them. But how.

I pull out my notebook and send a note to my friends via paper airplane. They read the plan and begin. My strongest friend pushes a brick to your side. I pick up the brick and start breaking down the bars. One of the guards notices and starts yelling at me. I take a step back then yank the keys from the guard. I slid the brick back to my friend. Then I slipped the key to my other friend. He unlocks the door to his cell then negotiates with the guard. Finally we're let out and I take back my stuff. I leave with my map in hand... map... map... my map is... gone.

I look for my map but then see it. In the hands of a scavenger.

I track down the man. Eventually I found him. I try to negotiate for the map but the man won't give it. So I try to take it from his hands but he has a weapon. Suddenly he trips

over a vine and falls into the river... Luckily he can swim. He runs away leaving me with the map.

I follow the map to a dried out desert. Finally I've found it... the special treasure... "WH-WHERE is the treasure," I ask myself. Was my grandpa hallucinating... having a mirage perhaps... It was a desert after all. I lie down in shame, that's when I see it on the floor a sparkle. Maybe all hope hasn't been lost. I dug in the area and finally I found it. The treasure of the sacred land has been found.

The End

Think Before You Act

By Kuzhali, age 12

Fern listened to her Guider, Sorrel.

“Both of you have earned yourselves rest. You No to-be work until next week.”

Sandy, Fern’s sister, flicked her tail happily. Sandy’s Guider, Sky, led Sandy toward the camp. “C’mon.”

Fern followed, eyes drooping, Sorrel at her tail. Though she was excited about a break from her work, she was exhausted. It had been a long day.

Their camp, which was a clearing, was surrounded by brambles, with one small opening. Inside, there were three dens: one for the Guiders, one for the to-bes, and one for nursing mothers and pregnant queens. The to-bes’ den was made from weaved brambles.

Fern headed over to her den, and flopped down next to Sandy.

Sandy waved her tail in greeting. Dropping the mouse in her jaws, she asked, “Want to share?”

Fern nodded, taking a hungry bite.

Sandy followed suit.

After finishing the mouse, Fern stretched. “I’m going to sleep,” she mewed. Pushing into the warm den, she loafed into her warm moss bed.

Fern was dreaming. Fresh, green grass tickled her paws. The air was filled with scents. Fern watched as a mouse ran up to her paws. She killed the prey. She tasted it. It was delicious! "Wow!" Fern exclaimed.

Fern yawned. She noticed the sun was already high in the sky. Why is it so late? "Oh! Right!" She exclaimed out loud. "I don't have work!"

She groomed herself, then headed out of camp. The sun was shining warmly, and she purred. This is just like my dream... She suddenly tripped over something. Looking down, Fern noticed a piece of bark. Peering at it carefully, she yelped, "A map!" Maybe this map will lead me to the place from my dream! She noticed it started at the camp. She scurried back to camp, and began to follow the map.

The route wound itself around the forest, and she finally reached the end. Looking around, she spotted a hole at the base of a tree. She leaped toward it. Fern let out a scared yowl as she felt herself plunging through the air. "Help!" She screeched, desperately clawing the air. Suddenly, she landed on something soft.

Fern raised her head. Around her, there was a huge meadow. In the distance, she saw a line of trees. "Oh," she whispered. "This place really is from my dream!" Fern leaped forward.

It had been a day since Fern had found the meadow.

Fern stretched. Her paws fizzed with excitement.

"What should I do today?" Fern asked herself. "I should go and explore the forest!" She scampered off toward the trees. She reached the forest a few minutes later. Pushing her way through the trees, Fern spotted a fat rabbit and crouched, ready to ambush it. Suddenly, Fern heard a twig snap behind her. The rabbit froze, its eyes locked on something behind Fern. Then it ran.

Fern turned.

A tail-length away, two dogs were standing over the body of a cat Fern knew: Sky.

Fern gasped. She ducked behind a bush as one dog began to speak.

“Any more cats that come back here can expect to die!” The dog let out a fearsome howl and fixed its gaze on Fern.

Fern gave a shriek. “Sky! Run!” She pelted through the trees. I have to get out of here! Dread dropped into her belly like a rock. I’m lost. She picked up speed, crashing through the trees. She could feel the hot breath of the dogs behind her. Suddenly, the trees thinned and disappeared.

Fern cast her terrified gaze around the meadow, searching for an exit.

The dogs followed her gaze.

Fern let on a final burst of speed.

One of the dogs leaped over Fern, landing right in front of her. It snarled.

Fern gave a screech and ducked under the dog. She rolled and felt herself falling.

Fern scrabbled at the grass. Raising her head, she saw that she was home—and the dogs were gone.

“Sky?” She whimpered.

Silence.

A shuddering gasp. “I’m here.”

Fern turned her head, and saw the white she-cat on her paws. Her eyes were haunted. “Whatever happens,” she meowed. “We must never speak of this again.” Fern nodded. “Never.”

The End

The Keys of ALCATRAZ

By Mitchell, age 9

You find yourself locked in a cage with a bunch of old men, wearing black and white. You look around, and you see yellow lights, rusty pipes, coated with a thick layer of stains. Then suddenly, you wake up. In the city of San Francisco, it's 8:00 a.m. in the morning, and you're late for school. You rush to put your clothes on, pack your bag, and chow down breakfast. As you're about to bolt out the door, you see a gleam in the corner of your eye. You turn around, and you see a silver, rusty chain, which is linked to plenty of keys. Their colours vary from a lustrous silver to a glistening gold. Next to the keys is a yellow sheet of wrinkly parchment paper. You look at it, pick it up, and examine it. It has a dashed line curving in all directions, and at the end of the line, there is a big red "X". You bolt out the door and follow the dashed line. After lots of walking, you stand outside a giant building. On the front, you see a massive sign saying "ALCATRAZ PRISON" in big, bold letters.

You stare at the towering entrance and notice a thick metal padlock keeping the gates shut. Curious, you grab one of the gleaming keys from the chain and slide it into the lock. With a loud click, the gate swings open. You quickly discover that every gleaming key on the chain can unlock every door in the prison, no matter how large or small the lock is.

You step inside. The air feels cold and damp, and every footstep echoes through the empty halls. The map leads you through narrow corridors lined with rusty cell doors. Every few metres another locked gate blocks your path, but each time you simply choose a different key. Every lock opens effortlessly, almost as though the prison wants you to continue.

Eventually, the map leads you to an old cell at the end of the hallway. Inside sits a dusty wooden chest with a heavy iron lock. You unlock it with one of the golden keys and slowly lift the lid. Resting inside is another piece of wrinkled parchment. On it are only four words. "You have been here." A chill runs down your spine. Suddenly, flashes of your dream race through your mind. The cage. The old men. The stained pipes. They feel less like a dream and more like a forgotten memory. Before you can think any further, a loud clang echoes through the prison. Another follows. Then another. It sounds like someone or something is walking toward you.

Your heart pounds. You grab the parchment, shove it into your backpack, and sprint through the corridors. Locked doors appear one after another, but your gleaming keys open every single one without hesitation. Behind you, the footsteps grow louder and faster. At last, you reach one enormous steel door covered with dozens of locks. You place a single gleaming key into the first lock. Instantly, every lock clicks open at once, and the giant door slowly creaks aside. On the other side is your bedroom. The clock still reads 8:00 a.m. Your backpack rests by the front door exactly where you left it. As you step through the doorway, the prison vanishes behind you. You look down at the chain in your hand.

The gleaming keys are still there. And hanging beside them is one brand new key that definitely was not there before.

The End

The First Day of Summer

By Mmesoma, age 13

When I awoke on the first day of summer break, a map was on my bedside table. It didn't belong in my room, and I knew that right away. My door had been locked, and my window hadn't been opened.

Yet, the paper was there, folded into uneven thirds as if it had been done hastily. Across the top, in thin ink, was my name: Maria. I sat up so quickly I almost knocked it to the floor.

The map showed my neighbourhood, but not as I knew it. Streets were missing, and others twisted in odd directions. My school was marked in the wrong place, shifted closer to the edge of the page. Near the bottom, just beyond everything I recognized, there was a single mark: a black dot. I told myself I wouldn't go.

I really meant it. I even left the map on my desk and went downstairs as if nothing had happened. I ate breakfast and watched half a show I wasn't even paying attention to.

But every time I blinked, I saw that dot. By late afternoon, I was standing at the end of my street. The map was in my pocket, but I didn't need to check it anymore. I knew where I was headed. The first strange thing was Maple Drive. It didn't end where it was supposed to end.

Instead, it curved to the left, looping behind a row of houses that shouldn't have had any space behind them. No one else seemed to notice. A man walked his dog right past the bend without even glancing at it. I stopped anyway. When I pulled out the map again, the

black dot had moved. That's when I noticed the narrow path between two fences. It wasn't on any map I'd ever seen, but it was on this one. I followed it. It led behind the houses into a strip of trees that shouldn't have fit there at all.

The sounds of the neighbourhood faded until there was nothing but my footsteps and my own breathing. Then I found the mailbox. It stood alone in the middle of the path and it was the dot on the map. My name was creepily written on it again. Inside was another folded map. This one was smaller. It only showed the woods around me.

At the centre, a circle had been drawn around a spot not far ahead. And beneath it, in the same thin handwriting as before: "You always were easy to find, Maria." I looked up slowly. The path ahead was gone. Just trees now, tight and still, like they had grown in to close something off. But the map in my hand had changed again. The circle wasn't ahead anymore. It was around me.

The End

Magic Tag

By Patrick, age 10

Beep! Beep!

My alarm rang as I tried to turn it off, “Huh?”

“Why did it go off so early?” I said to myself with surprise.

“It’s probably because we just moved to Beijing and I forgot to change the time,” I thought to myself.

I tried to turn the alarm off, “Huh?” My alarm wasn’t there.

Instead, there was a weird-looking map and an envelope.

Once I opened the envelope, it said:

Hello adventurer, to whoever is reading this, you’ve been invited to join Magic Tag. Magic Tag is basically tag, but you can fly, create walls, and turn into objects! It’s basically tag, but with magic! So if you want to join, grab the key under your pillow and open the closet! (Don’t forget to bring your map!)
-The Commander Of Magic Tag

After reading the envelope, I immediately flipped over my pillow to check if there was really a key under my pillow, and THERE IT WAS!

A big, bright, shiny, blue key sitting right there in the middle of the pillow. I took my map, grabbed the key, flew to the closet with excitement, and opened the door!

But standing there was nothing but a small, messy closet.

“What? Is this a dream again?” I wondered to myself.

I looked again and found a little keyhole behind my clothes. I shoved my blue key in the keyhole, and as soon as I put it in, my wall suddenly tore open. I looked inside, and there was another dimension that sucked me into another world.

After I woke up, I was in an unfamiliar place, which was super crowded, and I had never been there before.

Suddenly, a voice pops up behind my head, “Hey!”

As I turn around, “SAMMMM!” I screamed when I turned around.

You see, Sam was my best friend in grade 3, but I sadly moved away to Beijing. “It’s been so long since the last time we met!” I cried.

“Sooooo, you’ve also been invited to join?” he asked.

“Yeah!” I replied.

“COOL!” we both said at the same time.

Before we could say anything else, the commander came out and said, “All right, guys! For those who want to join Magic Tag, please come forward.”

Sam and I both rush forward with everyone.

“Thank you, guys. There are different groups, and you will be in the lightning group.”

“Great!” he said with excitement.

“Okay, before we do anything else, I first need to explain the rules.

“Okay, so first of all: No using dark magic. Second of all, you can use as much magic as you want. And last of all: Have Fun!”

Sam and I screamed, “There Is Magic?!”

We ran inside the castle with everybody else and saw people inside casting spells.

“WOAH!” we screamed and followed our gaze to find people who were making concrete and lava walls out of thin air!

“This is the best day of my life!” I squealed.

And once we went outside to the Magic Tag training grounds, the fun had just begun!

The End

The Map That Led to the Future

By Stacy, age 11

I woke up on the first day of summer break, glad there were no early alarms and I had a chance to sleep in. I could finally watch TV without worrying about homework. But as I looked over at my bedside table, there was a map printed on yellowing paper. I was sure it wasn't there the night before. Maybe my little brother left it there to prank me. Curious, I picked it up and studied it. The map showed me a small path that led through the town I lived in into the nearby woods, where a red X was located. Something told me not to go, but out of curiosity, I packed water, a compass, and a flashlight for dark places. TV could wait. As I stuffed the map into my bag, I noticed something written on the back of it: Come Before Sunset.

Half an hour later, I was walking through the woods. Branches cracked under my feet. As I headed closer to my destination, my heartbeat raced faster. Minutes later, I approached a dark cave, where the red X was. My legs shook as I reached into my bag for the flashlight, and walked into the open chasm. I soon approached a small chamber. Thinking it was a dead end, I turned around to leave. But before I could take a step, there was a loud noise behind me which sounded like a giant rock door scraping against the stone walls. I spun around, scared and expected to face a giant monster, but that was not what I saw. I saw a simple photo on the ground, and I went to pick it up. Then, I gasped. It was a picture of... me. But it didn't look like my current appearance. I looked about five years older. I looked up, and I saw the actual older version of myself heading towards me. "Hello," he said.

I simply didn't respond.

"Thanks for coming," he continued, ignoring the fact that I didn't respond to him. "Your future is secure now." He handed me a small, silver stopwatch, the kind you would find back in the 80s. I took it from him, still speechless.

Future Me looked at me once more before he turned around. "Don't lose it," he said. "You're going to need it next summer."

"Thanks...?" I tried telling him, but he had vanished into thin air before I finished. The next thing I knew, a bright, white light filled the chamber and suddenly, I was back in my bedroom again. I thought it was just a dream, since I couldn't really have seen a version of myself in the future. But when I looked down at my hands, I was holding the same silver stopwatch. And it was ticking... backwards.

The End

The Mystery Place

By Sze Hok (Savannah), age 10



Once upon a time, a boy named Peter found a map. He found it beside a table in the kitchen. The map was leading to a mystery place. It was located in a forest. The forest was in the middle of nowhere.

So, one day Peter sneaked out of his house at 10 pm when his parents were asleep. Before he sneaked out, he put a mannequin in his bed so his parents would think he was sleeping. Meanwhile, he was actually riding his skateboard without a helmet to an abandoned forest. Anyway, he started riding his skateboard but then he reached the abandoned forest. There were a lot of animals. Then Peter slept there that night. He slept on a log for the bed, a tree for the covering and leaves for the pillow.

The next morning Peter woke up. However, there were a lot of animals surrounding him. He was so scared that he got his skateboard and sprinted away. Meanwhile, a coyote was right behind him. Then one second later *CRASH* he crashed right into a giant tree. "OUCH!" said Peter at the top of his lungs. Then he just noticed that the coyote even took his skateboard. Peter also noticed that he hurt his foot, so he took his gauze roll out of his backpack and wrapped it around his foot. But he also couldn't put any weight onto it so he got two sticks and held onto them.

Peter had already walked 1000 km but he still had 8000 km left. Then, Peter thought to himself that if he walked 1000 km in 10 days he would still take 80 more days to get to the mystery place.

One day, Peter ran out of water and food, so he had to go to a swamp nearby. He drank the water and ate raw worms. He thought they tasted terrible but he still ate them.

Finally, Peter only had 500 km until he arrived. Peter was so excited that he ran faster than a cheetah. He was also exhausted from all walking and only sleeping five times out of 90 days.

He arrived at the mystery place. But there were seven doors. Number 1 was gold; number 2 was silver; number 3 was orange; number 4 was green; number 5 was blue; number 6 was brown; and last of all number 7 was black. Of course, Peter chose number one which was gold, but guess what was in it? Bees! He had one more chance left.

He chose number 7 which was black. Guess what was in it? \$100.000 x 10, 100 gold bars, gold, and diamonds.

Then he got a mining job offer. Peter would only say yes if the boss was a doctor. He said that because his foot was still hurt. Luckily the boss was the best doctor in 1912. His name was Josh Young, he was so smart.

Then the next day it was Peter's 12th birthday. He was so sad because his parents weren't here. So he got to ride home on an airplane.

The End

A Map that Leads to Unanswered Questions!

By Vihaan, age 13

“What’s this doing here? It wasn’t there last night when I slept!” an astonished Ken asked himself while gazing at the faded parchment map on his bedside table.

A while ago, his family inherited a large countryside home as his grandfather died, located in a small town far away from the hustle bustle of the big city. They converted it into a summer home and as Ken’s school ended, they drove to the town yesterday afternoon to spend the beautiful first summer in this home.

That night, before sleeping, as Ken kept his spectacles on the bed side table, he clearly remembers that those were the only item on that wooden antiquated table.

But, this morning, as he opened his eyes with the sunlight, he found this old and faded map with a ‘X’ marked near a building.

It looked akin to a treasure map straight from a pirate novel. The entire day, he was curious about the map and had a divided mind if he should follow the path to ‘X’. But his divided mind finally decided to see what the map has in store for him.

That night, once everyone was asleep, Ken took a couple of flashlights from his closet and made his way downstairs. He quietly turned the doorknob and closed the door behind him.

As his nervous and anxious footsteps continued to trace the cobblestone path surrounded by old brick and stone buildings, he reached the place where the map had an X mark. Just like the others, it was an old brick-and-concrete building.

“This mysterious building seems as if it came out of a Sherlock Holmes novel,” thought Ken.

Nonetheless, he turned the doorknob and swung open the rotten wooden door. As he climbed up the dusty cement stairs, his footsteps were the only noise in the silent night.

Clouds of dust rose as he opened the wooden trapdoor, at the end of the stairs, with a creaking sound. As Ken coughed from the dust, he got a glimpse of an old book and an oxidized silver watch.

“What’s in this?” questioned Ken as he opened the book, which turned out to be a photo album. On the cover was written the name of his great-grandfather.

“What is my great-grandfather’s photo album doing here?” he asked himself.

This was a strange thing, but even stranger was the fact that his great-grandfather looked exactly like Ken at this age. “I didn’t know I looked this similar to him,” he remarked.

But Ken was in for a big surprise when he looked at the watch. The time read 12:45. Ken looked at his watch. The time on his watch also read 12:45. A wave of questions started flooding his mind but there was no one to answer those for him –

How did it show the exact same time as my watch?

More importantly, who had left the map for me, and how?

What was the point of showing him the picture album?

Is this real or am I dreaming?

It seems that this is a mystery that only time would solve for him...

The End

Scavenger Hunt?

By Yiran, age 9

“What time is it?” I groaned as the alarm clock went off. I reached for my glasses when I felt something rough like paper. It was a map! Before I knew it, I had gotten up and was brushing my teeth. It was so exciting! Even though I had planned to sleep in, finding a map was not something that happened every other day. I sped down the stairs and then stopped at the kitchen. What a delicious smell! A piece of warm banana bread lay on a plate. I started eating quickly.

“Eat carefully,” my older sister warned. “You don’t want to start choking in the morning, do you?”

I nodded before enthusiastically explaining my findings as I ate my breakfast. She didn’t look very excited, but still she said, “Let’s follow the map then.”

After I finished my breakfast, we headed to our garden to look around, and I noticed something shiny in the bushes.

“Check this out!”

There were eggs of different colours, gold and brown ones, but most of them were white. As I looked at them, I felt like I had forgotten something, but I brushed away the thought and looked at the map.

“Huh? The map says to climb up a treehouse and look there, but we don’t have one!” I said, annoyed.

“I know! We can go to Mr. Harris’s tree library,” my sister said with a smile.

Mr. Harris made a mini tree library a few years ago because the public library in our town was too far to go regularly from our neighborhood, so he built this miniature one.

When we arrived, the place was surprisingly neat.

“Look around. Maybe we can find something to colour the eggs we found,” she said.

I didn’t know what colouring the eggs would do, but I still looked around. While wandering in the tree house, I spotted a few bottles of spray paint.

“Hey, aren’t those mine?” I asked, confused.

“Oh, uhh, perfect! I’ve been looking for those spray paint bottles.”

My sister grabbed the bottles, and we headed home. Why was my sister so weird and suspicious today? How did my spray paint find its way to Mr. Harris’s mini library?

When we got home, we started spray painting the eggs, and all the fun it was made me forget all about the weird things that had happened. During dinner, Dad made a delicious meal with five dishes. I finally asked what I wanted to all day.

“Okay, this is way too weird. Why does today feel like a special day? I got to eat my favourite breakfast, Dad made a big meal, and you and I went on a scavenger hunt.”

My family looked at each other and smiled before my sister looked at me.

“Do you want to know the answer?” I nodded.

“It’s Easter!”

My family shouted together. A wave of realization washed over me, and I smiled. How could I have forgotten? It was Easter today!

The End

The First Day of Summer Break

By Zoe, age 10

Samara yawned. At first, she didn't want to get up. But then, she remembered it was the first day of summer break! She jumped out of bed, and reached for her hairbrush on her bedside table. But instead of grasping the familiar bristles of her brush, she found a slip of paper.

Confused, Samara brought it up to her eyes. It was a map! It looked very interesting. Mountains... lakes... but the corner was torn out! And there was no big X on any of the paper! However, on one of the not-torn-out corners, there was a note. 'If you wish to seek the location of the missing corner, visit the lake where memories are made.'

Samara groaned. It was a riddle. She was awful at riddles! She had to put her head together with someone! So she knocked on her sister's door. "Lillyyyy! I need help with a riddle!"

Lily answered the door. "What is it, Samara?"

"Say you found a map on your bedside table. It had the riddle, 'visit the lake where memories are made'. Where, exactly, would you go?"

"Memorial Lake. It has 'memory' in the name, and when I was little, I made more than a few memories there," answered Lily, quick as lightning.

Samara brightened. Perfect! “And, say, could you drive me there?”

“Sure! I love any excuse to drive, you know that!”

And so, fifteen minutes later, she found herself standing by a blue, blue lake. Minnows swam beneath the water, and though they were a pleasant surprise, Samara was aghast to find no maps whatsoever.

Just as she was about to get Lily to leave, she found a growling cat sitting in a tree. It seemed too scared to get down. As an animal lover, Samara decided to help it. She climbed the tree in a few easy swings, and gathered the cat in her arms. Then she climbed back down. On the ground again, she checked the cat’s collar, mumbling, “Who do you belong to, hm?”

There was a small piece of paper tucked away in the collar. Samara pulled it out. It was the missing piece of the map! She jumped for joy, and ran towards her sister, determined to find whatever she was looking for!

The corner of the map was just empty fields with the occasional tree. Lily and Samara spent hours searching for where the big X in the middle of the formerly missing corner was. Finally, tired and sad, Samara sighed. “Lily... it’s hopeless. I think we need to go home.”

“What’s hopeless? You do realize you never told me what any of this is about! You’re just dragging me places!”

“Let’s just go home!”

Lily, sensing that Samara wasn’t in a good mood, drove her home. Not wanting to go inside, feeling like a failure, Samara sat on the front porch for a while. She groaned, and climbed her favorite climbing tree. Then what her family called the ‘dinner bell’ sounded, and Samara knew she had to go inside. As she was climbing down, she stuck her foot into the mini crevice that she used for her climbing—and out tumbled an envelope!

Samara leaped after it, catching it before it hit the ground. She opened it. There was a letter inside. It read, 'Person who found this! You are amazing and smart! I can't believe you solved the puzzle! Good job!'

She'd solved it! But was that really it? Just a letter? She searched the page, and found a little pocket at the bottom. It was hiding a one hundred dollar bill!

Samara laughed. The treasure had been hiding in her very own back yard!

The End



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