

Grade 7 Narrative

An Unforgettable Day

Kristen's day did not begin the way she had anticipated. Everyone in her family had overslept, and getting ready had been like sprinting toward the finish line in a mile relay. She had already missed her bus, and her brother, Steve, shouted that he would take her to school only if she could be ready quickly, because he had a physics test first period. She scrambled around her dark room in the cold, winter morning, searching for shoes and rummaging through drawers for something easy to put on. She snatched a banana on her way out the door while pulling on her jacket and grabbing her backpack.

Kristen opened the car door and settled into the seat before buckling the seat belt. She was beginning to think her day would be fine after all. She wasn't bouncing along in the cold school bus; instead, she was sitting comfortably in the back seat of the car. Steve would soon be dropping her off at the school's front door. Kristen's attitude began to change when her side of the car began to make a loud noise, and the ride abruptly turned bumpy. Steve slowly brought the car to a halt on the side of the road, stepped out, and noticed the flat tire.

Steve set out red warning flares behind the car and unhappily pulled the spare tire from the trunk. He had Kristen stand to the side of the road and direct the beam of a flashlight toward the flat tire so he could see better while changing it. Both Kristen and her brother were shivering silently in the icy breeze. Steve was concentrating on removing the flat tire and replacing it with the spare; Kristen was contemplating what would be happening at school when she arrived. She was hoping that Mr. Breyer had completed the lesson and that her classmates would be occupied working on their homework problems, so she could slip in unnoticed. Steve finished tightening the spare tire on the car and dropped Kristen off at school.

Kristen entered the school swiftly, went to the office, received a late slip, and hurried to class. She was relieved to see everyone hard at work. She slipped into the room and closed the door silently, only to have her backpack fall from her shoulder onto the floor with a resounding thud. Kristen handed Mr. Breyer her late slip and went to her seat to begin the assignment.

As Kristen extended her hand to reach for a pencil in her bag, she noticed that she was wearing two sneakers that didn't match. In her haste to get dressed quickly this morning, she had grabbed one that was brightly striped and another that was cherry red.

After class, Kristen went to her locker and changed into her gym shoes. She then reached in her backpack to retrieve her science homework only to discover she had left the completed assignment at home.

As Kristen and her friends strolled to the cafeteria for lunch, Kristen was hoping

that the afternoon would go more smoothly. She did not want the rest of her day to be like the morning.

At the lunch table, Kristen talked with her friends while drinking milk and eating the cafeteria's daily special—chili and cornbread. "With everything that has happened this morning, I will be happy when today is over," Kristen said. "I can't remember when I've had a day like this one has been so far."

Her friends tried to encourage Kristen to think positively. They all began to discuss the topic for a writing assignment they were to complete during language arts class that afternoon. During the previous day's class, they had read a short story titled "When Life Hands You Lemons, Make Lemonade." They had discussed the theme—Make the best of every situation. Today, they were supposed to incorporate that theme in an original narrative.

"Well," Kristen said to her friends, "I know exactly what I'm going to write about!"

Kristen stopped at her locker on the way to class. Smiling to herself, she took off her white gym shoes and put on the mismatched pair she had worn to school.

Today had been a good day after all.

Grade 7 Informational

Great Shrinking Lizards!

In the 1980s, a team of biologists began visiting the Galapagos Islands. The islands lie approximately 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador and are world-famous for their unusual animals. The scientists had come to study one of the strangest Galapagos animals, the marine iguana.

Marine iguanas are the only lizards on Earth that make their living from the ocean. They graze on algae in the intertidal zone—the part of the coastline that is covered and uncovered by ocean tides each day. Large iguanas even dive underwater to snatch algae off the sea floor. No other lizard survives in this way, and the biologists began visiting the Galapagos to learn about these startling reptiles.

Over the years, the scientists marked hundreds of iguanas. This allowed them to observe individual lizards over long periods of time. They also regularly caught the lizards to weigh and measure them. This helped the biologists track how different lizards grew and survived.

In the 1990s, the scientists continued catching and measuring the iguanas. When comparing their measurements between years, however, they got a whopping surprise. They found that many of the iguanas had stopped growing. Instead, the lizards had actually *shrunk*!

The scientists didn't believe it at first. They thought they had made a mistake. But this was no mistake. What the scientists observed was real. The iguanas had actually been shrinking. What was going on?

Dr. Martin Wikelski, who heads up the scientific team, believes that the iguanas had lost size because of a phenomenon called El Niño. El Niño is an unusual weather pattern that happens every few years. In El Niño years, the cold water that normally surrounds the Galapagos is replaced by much warmer water. When this happens, the algae that the iguanas eat die. They are replaced by other algae that the iguanas cannot digest. Thousands of iguanas starve to death, but some survive—including many that shrink.

During normal years, Dr. Wikelski observed that larger iguanas survive better than smaller ones. They get more food and are more successful at mating. During El Niño years, though, the opposite is true. When food is scarce, smaller iguanas survive better because they locate food and use their energy more efficiently.

What's amazing, though, is that shrinking iguanas don't just get skinnier. They grow shorter, too. Dr. Wikelski's team found that some iguanas lost more than a third of their weight and 20 percent of their length. The scientists believe that these iguanas actually began digesting some of their own bone material to grow shorter. When conditions improved, the iguanas

resumed eating and growing again. No other adult vertebrates—animals with backbones—have ever been found to shrink and regrow in this way. The scientists think that the shrinking is a unique adaptation that allows the iguanas to survive in an unpredictable environment.

Scientists continue to study marine iguanas to learn more about their behavior and adaptations. Dr. Wikelski believes that, with further study, other vertebrates will be found that can shrink and regrow like the marine iguanas do. If that's true, they will reinforce an important lesson about life on Earth—bigger is *not* always better.