

Cricket[®]

Spider[®]

Stories and Fun for New Readers



Paper Princess



THE STORM SWEEPED low across the Iowa farmland like a black dragon with enormous wings. Lightning crackled from the storm's mouth, scorching the air and spreading fire across the cornfields. Sparks and ash swirled. Then the storm raced toward the nearest farm, twenty miles away.

Meanwhile—on that farm—the skies were still clear and calm. Ellie sat at the end of a rickety wooden dock with her bare toes dangling in the water. She concentrated, tongue between teeth. A wisp of black hair fell into her face, ignored. One sneaker flattened the glossy pages of her origami book. She studied the diagram and compared it to the paper shape in her hand. She tucked a corner down, then glanced around, with hope.

Will you be able to hook Bill up to the air machine?

Hmm... here's an old diagram — drawing or chart that shows the parts of something or how something works.

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Ugh. She was *still* on a farm. Dad, fixing the barn's stone walls, wasn't a king yet. That wasn't his crown, just his faded work cap. Those were ducks on the pond, not swans.

One last fold and she wouldn't be stuck here anymore.

Dad complained she read too much fantasy garbage. "Git yer nose out of those books, and live in the real world."

But Ellie wanted quests. All she got was chores. She longed to fight ogres, but her only enemy was Sandra

DuPont, who'd called Ellie a "hick" at the beginning of third grade.

"I'm not a hick. I'm a princess in disguise."

Fantastical Origami, there on page 24, promised that when she finished the book's final project, all her origami figures would come to life, including the crown, the sword, the swans, and the dragons. *But only if your imagination is strong enough*, the book had said. Yes! Ellie's imagination was so strong she could almost touch her dreams. She'd be a



Bill, if the hose is a hassle,
we can buddy breathe.

Speak for yourself, Sam. I ain't
sharing my air with no buddy.





real princess, with enough courage to stand up to anything—even Sandra DuPont.

She'd been folding for a week.

Ellie glanced skyward. Perfect paper-folding weather, clear and firecracker dry. Supposedly she was watching her little brother, Nathan. She could hear him, within easy-peasy hollering distance, chasing bullfrogs.

A sudden breeze tugged at the stack of origami sheets. She pinned them down with her other sneaker

and then paused to admire their vivid colors. Purple like a velvet ribbon. Red like a sundae cherry. The sheet in her hand was her favorite: flame orange, the color of valor.

This last project was complicated, seven origami dragons. Ellie had worked all afternoon to make six. She was painstakingly folding the seventh. The paper dragons rustled in a delicate pile in her lap. She kept glancing down, savoring the rainbow of colors lying against the denim of her overalls.

Spider! Facing the unknown for science calls for valor — heroic bravery.

Don't worry, Bill. You'll be savoring — really enjoying — fresh air, instead of stale air from a can.

Mokey dokey!



One last fold—

“Here ya go, Princess!” Nathan squeaked with excitement behind her. The boards shuddered as he galloped down the dock. “A frog for you to kiss!”



Ellie looked up. Dripping with slimy mud and heaving with fear, a huge bullfrog squirted out of Nathan’s hands, soared over Ellie’s shoulder, and somersaulted into her lap, landing with a loud paper crunch. She yelped. The bullfrog flopped and then leaped spread-eagled into the pond.

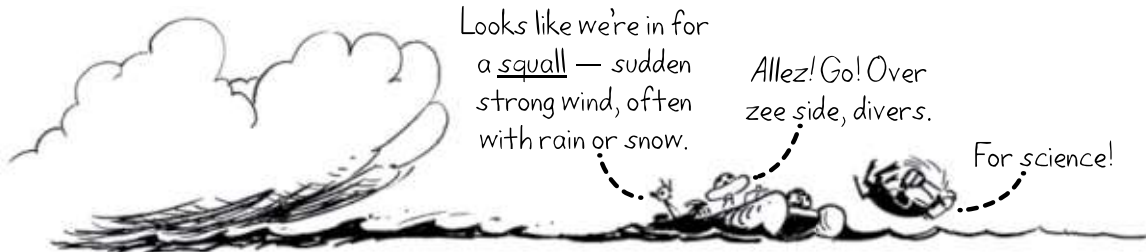
Ellie stared wide-eyed at the lumps of soggy paper in her lap. All that work! She jumped to her feet. “Nathan, you turd!” she shrieked.

But he was already gone. He hid fast when he had to.

Ellie raged. “Nathan! I’m gonna get you bad!”

In answer, thunder boomed. The dock shook. Sudden black clouds billowed overhead, blocking out the sun. The storm had arrived. Wind slammed into Ellie. It tore at her, swirling. She was too angry to be afraid. Was this courage?

A squall sucked her beautiful origami sheets up and away. Ellie jumped for them, screaming. Lightning streaked across the clouds. She



Looks like we’re in for a squall — sudden strong wind, often with rain or snow.

Allez! Go! Over zee side, divers.

For science!



braced with brave fury, challenging the lightning. She stretched skyward, a mage inside a whirling spiral of silver, gold, and orange flashing squares.

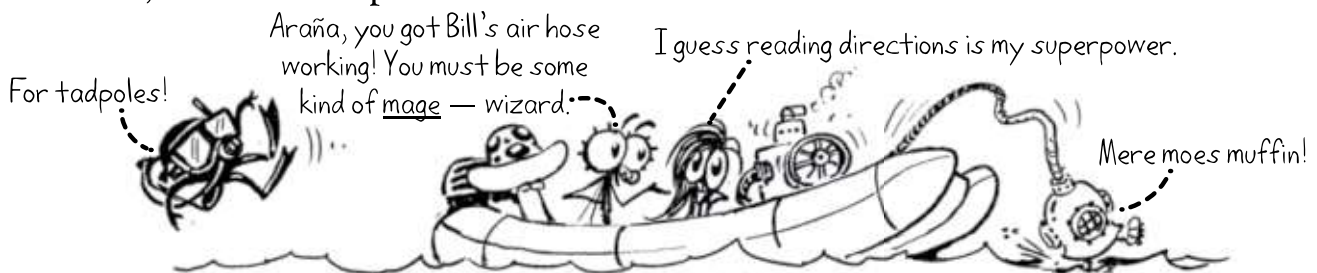
Suddenly Ellie's hair sprang out in all directions, crackling with electricity. She knew that meant lightning would strike soon. Her courage popped like a bubble. She cringed, trying to flatten her hair. She fled off the dock, leaving everything behind: her book, her sneakers, and—She spun around.

Where was Nathan?

She trembled, wanting more than anything to keep running. Nathan was the worst. He'd ruined everything. He could stay here. It'd serve him right.

A terrified rabbit sprinted past, fleeing the storm.

Something sharp jabbed Ellie's hand. She opened her fingers. The origami figure lay on her palm, crumpled but very much a dragon. She stared at it for a long, orange second.



Real courage wasn't made of paper. Princess, he'd called her, and she'd almost left him. She found Nathan hugging his knees under a honeysuckle shrub. Her heart pounded, but she pretended to be calm. She wrapped her arms around her brother. "C'mon, Prince." She kissed the top of his head. "We gotta get you safe into the castle." 🌸

