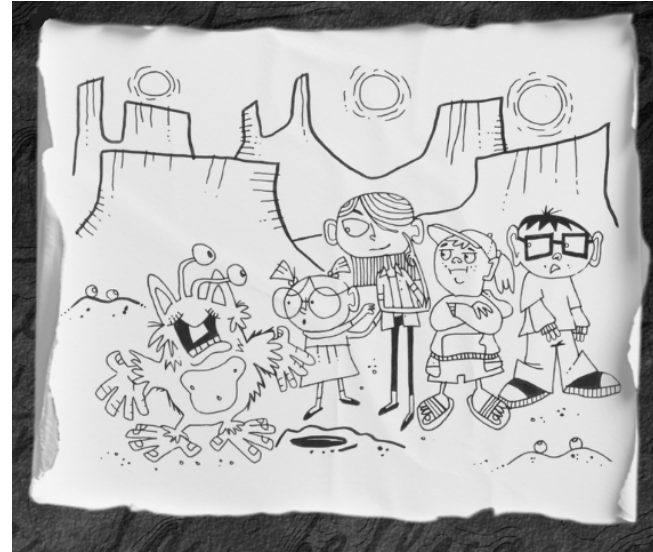


Examples of chapter opener illustrations



that this was a very good question to start with, compared to all of the other good questions they had running through their minds.

"No, I am not a sand fairy," the creature said. He looked disgusted. "I am a Psammead."

"It's the same thing," Nell said. "The Psammead is a sand fairy."

"It's not the same thing at all!" the Psammead said. "A sand fairy does not sound nearly as impressive as a Psammead, and I think that as far as Psammes go, I am a fairly impressive one. I prefer to be called a Psammead."

The creature puffed himself up full and round, and then suddenly let the air out and pointed its eyes at Nell.

"OK then. I answered one of your questions. Now you answer mine. Who are you? You're not those children that I thought you were."

"We're the Mackamans," Nell said. "I am Nell. This is my sister Jane and my little sister Lou. That's my brother Aldo. We are very glad to meet you."

"Well," the Psammead said. "Well then. Yes, I suppose you are."

"Those other children," Nell said, "were a different family. They were in a book by..."

"Do you bite?" Lou asked, interrupting.

The Psammead looked at her, and flattened its ears back against its head. "Do I bite? Do I bite? How repulsive. Do I look like the type of creature that would

bite? I'm not the one running around digging up poor sleeping creatures from their warm homes and then accusing them for no good reason of biting. I should think the better question would be whether *you* bite."


Jane was about to ask a question and Nell silenced her with a warning look.

"Can you excuse us for just a minute, Mr. Psammead," Nell asked.

"Well, I think it's awfully rude that you awaken me, pull me out of my nice warm sand by the scruff of my neck, and then leave me standing here while you go and have a conversation off by yourselves. I do not know what has become of manners."

Nell huddled with the children out of earshot of the Psammead, who was still muttering to himself and picking sand out of his fur with his large monkey hands.

"OK, listen to me," she said. "This is just like in the E. Nesbit book I told you about. It's the same way it happened in the story, only it's just like we're in the story



*"I didn't actually wish for invisibility,"
Aldo said. "I said I would wish it."*

*"You can't argue grammar
with a sand fairy," said Nell.
"Now look what you've done!"*

Middle Ages tunes. If you have not had Middle Ages tunes crooned to you by a knight, you should be very thankful, for it is the type of thing that helped bring about an end to the Middle Ages and it is not the sort of thing that sounds tolerable unless one is so deeply in love that one is really not listening at all.

The crooning, however, inspired the other Mackamans to take action. The best course that they could see was to somehow resolve the chapter of *King Arthur*, with or without Sir Lancelot. That meant, unfortunately, that one of them needed to save Lady Guinevere from being taken hostage at tonight's joust, and it was decided, even more unfortunately for Aldo, that it should be Aldo.

Being a family may not count for some things, such as getting the largest slice of chocolate cake during a holiday, but being a family can be useful for such things as convincing a sister in love with a knight to join you as you perform a daring Medieval joust rescue. The children thought this would be a good idea so that they could keep an eye on Nell in case they got to the point that they could return home. They also thought that Sir Lancelot might be useful in case they got into a clash of swords with ignoble, scurvy knaves. This thought, however, waned as they made their way through the woods and shrubbery, as the hapless knight was so head-over-heels for their sister that he could barely stay astride his horse. Though he had stopped with them at the castle for gruel and grog, and to fit the children

with armor and gear (although Aldo of Justaldo's gear was a lime green and Jane of the Vociferous Walnuts sported a powder blue), he could do little more than that. Sir Lancelot was too fixated on Lady Eleanor, and was bent on spouting awful lines, such as "be it that a sword should plucketh the life from my body, I shall give asunder to it with pleasure, for I have lived a thousand lives moreover in every golden drop of time with thou."

"If I ever fall in love, shoot me," said Aldo of Justaldo. The other riders agreed that they would do so without hesitation and, thinking it would be more difficult for Sir Lancelot to speak if riding upon a horse that is trotting very hard, urged their horses into just such a pace.

The fated quest of Aldo Justaldo



THE CHILDREN ARRIVED at the jousting grounds by late afternoon. Tents were set up all around, each with colorful banners rippling in the breeze and impressive coats of arms marking their doors. In the center were the broad, grassy jousting grounds, with two long tracks that ran side by side. Positioned near the center was a raised seating platform where the children knew Lady Guinevere

The Burgundy Bookmark

enough, either once they started trigonometry or once they entered city limits. Riding with black goats to the Matrix Market can make a person hungry, and even though the Mackaman children did not have much culinary success in recent days, or, really, since this story began, they saw no reason why they should not try again in the town of Cosine. The town, as seen from the back of a truck amidst a gaggle of goats, (again, an imprecise number as we do not know the exact count), appeared to be quite normal. Vector Ranch stopped the truck at the Matrix Market, and the children clambered out. The town streets spidered out from the market in several directions, and down one of them, Jane saw what looked like a restaurant sign. They headed that way, discovered that it was, indeed, a place to eat, and they went inside.

**The trouble
with spaghetti**

THE RESTAURANT SEEMED ordinary enough, until the children looked at the menus. They came with pencils and erasers, and were as complicated as a tax form. They did not have any pictures. Each item involved a slew of numbers and conditions. Three of the Mackamans put their

Numbers, Nerves and Flaming Torches

menus down immediately in despair. For a few minutes at least, Nell studied the menu until she, too, gave up.

"There is too much here to figure out," she said. "The only one I've solved so far is the turkey loaf, which ends up being free today between the hours of 11 and noon if you calculate it with the daily special as variable X . It's 11:45 now, so if we hurry, we can have free turkey loaf."

"I don't want turkey loaf," Jane said. "I want spaghetti."

"You can't order the spaghetti," Nell said. "I don't know the math."

"I don't care," Jane said. "I don't like turkey loaf and I want spaghetti."

"Listen," Nell said. "The only way we are going to get out of this math book is to solve enough problems that the bookmark thinks we've completed a chapter. If we make mistakes, we're going to be stuck in this book for a long time and, who knows, maybe even sent to the remedial problems in the appendix! So just do what I say and order the turkey loaf."

Nobody wanted to be sent to the appendix, but Jane really did want spaghetti and really did not like it when Nell was bossy, so when the server came, spaghetti was what she ordered. When the bill came, three of the Mackaman children were free of charge, but one spaghetti-eating Mackaman owed \$45.17, once you added in the 15% tip. This was not a good situation since the

Excerpt spreads from Chapter 5: **Pirates, Double Crosses and Mildly Bad Language** Content is Copyrighted



Pirates, Double Crosses and Mildly Bad Language

“AY, ‘TIS A MIGHTY FINE DAY, Hawkins, ‘tis. Whyn’t ye and yer crew come out o’ that scurvy hole ye be hidin’ in ‘n come do some fishin’ with your good friend John. I got just the hook for ye, m’boy!” and with that a hard, sharp grappling hook jabbed into the cabin through a chink in the wall and swiped viciously in the air. Aldo rolled away from the wall as the pirates broke into coarse and growly laughter.

This was pirate humor, and it was no way to wake up in the morning unless you were Aldo and had been lying awake for most of the night waiting for just such a thing. If you were Nell or Jane or Lou or most anyone else for that matter, you had not been lying awake all night thinking how fun it might be to have a skirmish with pirates, and you were also not so excited at this moment to discover that you were on a dirt floor in a dark timber stockade, surrounded by them.

"Aldo!" said Nell. "Don't tell me you made us do a pirate adventure!"

"What's the matter with a pirate adventure?" Aldo said. "It's fun. Anyway, it was my turn with the bookmark, so it's my choice."

In the dictionary, pirates are those who commit piracy. In literature, pirates are daring swashbucklers that hold swords in their teeth, dive off tall rigging during breath-taking sword fights, and capture ships and gleaming treasure. In Nell's mind, pirates are vulgar and smelly, plus they have bad grammar and bad teeth. It was this last definition that was being applied now.

"There are plenty of adventure stories you could've chosen from," Nell said. "How about one with horse racing? Why not something like *National Velvet*?"

Jane, too, had been agreeing with Nell. Not because she necessarily thought the same of pirates, but she still thought her turn with the bookmark had ended

somewhat unfairly, and it made her feel a little bit better to see Aldo's turn get off to a rough start. However, Jane being Jane, she was getting a little bit tired of the talk and thought they might as well start skirmishing if that's what they were here to do.

Aldo was saying that there wasn't much harm in the pirate adventure anyway. "It's not like you can die in a book, can you?"

"How would I know that?" Nell answered. "I haven't been in books any more than you. But I don't see why you can't. Things die in books all the time. Remember the spider in *Charlotte's Web*?"

This thought pretty much stopped the conversation, and Aldo lost a little bit of his pirate panache. He did not want to end up like a dead spider. It wasn't a good time to worry about that, though, because someone had pressed their eyeball up to the stockade wall, trying to see inside through the cracks.

"Ahoy there Mr. Hawkins... S'matter m'boy? Who ye be talkin' to? Surely ye ain't to be hidin' agin all day? Ay, come now Hawkins. Come on out to see us 'n we won't harm a hair on ye head."

Jane took charge by saying, "We're not coming out! And if you don't leave, we'll keel-hoe you."

"Keelhaul," Aldo whispered.

"Keelhaul!" Jane finished.

"Aaargh, there be more to the crew than we knew,

and she be full of spit and sinew, that one.” The pirate chuckled. Then suddenly the long curved blade of a cutlass poked through the wall. “And ye be ridin’ on the end o’ this, m’lass, if ye hang camp with the likes o’ young Hawkins. Me think it best ye leave the pilferin’ scoundrel and come ‘n join the likes of us.”

“I’m not Hawkins!” Aldo suddenly yelled out. “I’m not Hawkins. My name is Aldo!”

Upon hearing this, the pirate called out to his swarthy counterparts.

“Well, shiver me timbers, if’n young Hawkins don’t think he’d rather be by a different name. And what might ye think that name be? Mebbe Peg-leg? Scar? the Dark Hand?”

The other pirates kept nodding yes and then no to each question, as they tried to follow along. Long John Silver continued.

“Or mebbe he’d like to be Mad Eye? Or Black Dog?” he said. “But no. No, not those. Hawkins wants to go by the name of...” He lowered his voice, then said, “Aldo.”

The pirates laughed uproariously and those that had two legs bent over laughing and those that had only one leg fell over onto the ground in fits of mirth.

Aldo hung his head and Jane elbowed him in the ribs.

“You need to go say Aargh,” she hissed.

“What?” Aldo asked.

“You need to go say Aargh,” she said. “You need to let them know that your name is Aldo and that you mean it. If you want to do this pirate thing, then you need to start doing it.”

Aldo knew she was right. So he went to the door, opened it, and said “aargh” to the pirates, who were wiping tears from their eyes with their hands and their hooks. They paid him no attention.

“That wasn’t very good,” Jane said.

Aldo went back to the doorway, and this time he gave a much louder “Aaargh,” and when it stopped the pirates in their convulsions so that they looked to the door, he said “Aaargh” again with all of the fierceness he had and he told them that they have not heard the last of Aldo and he will send each and every blimey scallywag to the depths of the sea. This prompted Long John Silver to come over closer to the door but not too close to it, and he rubbed his chin before speaking.

“Ay,” he said. “Ay, Aldo speaks like the devil, he does. Come now, and let’s not be bickerin’ like filthy seabirds when there’s a treasure to be had. Come on out and see yer old friend John Silver. Whyn’t ye just come on out now and bring with ye that treasure map so’n we can have a look, m’boy.”

“That’s not a very good trick,” Aldo said. “I am not going to come out with the map.”

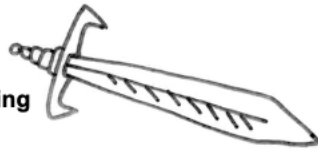
"Ay, as ye wish, then," said Long John Silver. "If'n ye don't want to come out with the map, mebbe ye just send the map out by isself. It won't be hurtin' John's feelings none if that's what ye do."

The pirates laughed a little bit at this, but not nearly so much as before.

"Goodbye, pirates," yelled Jane, and Aldo added one last "Aargh."

The pirates, at that, did slowly leave, breaking into a poorly sung verse of "Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum" as they disappeared over the hill.

Swashbuckling gone awry



WHEN THEY WERE SURE Long John Silver and his mates were gone, the Mackaman pirates came out of the stockade. First, they discovered a dark, hairy wild boar that seemed to think it was not wild. It came up to the children. Aldo scratched its back and it followed them like a puppy as they practiced pirating. They swung their swords and stabbed them into the air, they twisted their faces into fierce expressions, and they did their best at talking low and gravely if not a little bit incoherently. Suddenly, Lou said, "Quiet! Somebody is coming!"

They were not close enough to the stockade to dash back inside for safety, so they ducked behind the bushes at the side of the path. Down the trail came a large man with a scruffy beard, a blousy white shirt that was very dirty, big black boots, and a drawn sword. He was looking around cautiously, holding the sword in striking position. He passed within a few yards of the children, who did not dare breathe. The man was grumbling things that sounded like swear words, such as "fo'castle" and "mizzenmast," and when he broke out of the woods and saw the door to the stockade open, his mood seemed to change quite substantially. He slipped the cutlass quietly into his belt and began to make his way in that direction.

"Pirate," Aldo mouthed to the others. They looked back at him, confused. "Pi-rate," Aldo mouthed again, enunciating as clearly as one can when not actually speaking. The girls responded with blank stares which, to Aldo in the heat of battle, looked very much like understanding and determination. After the man had taken a few more steps, Aldo yelled "Now" and charged out onto the path with his gang, except his gang was still hiding in the bushes wondering what Aldo had said. The man turned in surprise, seeing a young lad fiercely hurtling toward him, grabbing him by the front of his blousy, but soiled, white shirt and pushing on him with all his might. The girls, now catching on to what was asked of them, darted out at the pirate as well. Although delayed in their part of