

Arnie the Actor

by Judy Yero



- 1 The day started out so well. Arnie's mom made blueberry pancakes for breakfast. The sun shone brightly. The weekend was coming up. *Things couldn't get much better*, thought Arnie, as he whistled on his way to school.
- 2 Then, disaster struck! Mr. Martin announced that Arnie's class would put on a play for Parents' Night. They would perform

"Jack and the Beanstalk." Arnie immediately offered to help build the scenery.

- 3 Mr. Martin said, "That's great, Arnie. Everyone will need to work on scenery, costumes, or props. And I want everyone in the class to have a speaking part. It's very good experience."

4 As far as Arnie was concerned, it was a nightmare! The last “experience” he wanted was to make a fool of himself in front of his family and everyone else.

5 To make matters worse, Arnie was the tallest boy in the class. Mr. Martin decided that Arnie was to portray the giant! If he had to act, why couldn’t he have played the cow? At least that way, the costume would cover his face, and no one would know who he was.

6 Even though Arnie was tall, he was really very quiet and a little shy. He had no trouble talking to his friends or teachers. He had no trouble speaking up in class because he usually knew the correct answers. However, the thought of getting up on stage and having hundreds of eyes on him scared Arnie to death!

7 Besides, he was nothing like the giant in the play! He would never go around trying to scare people. If he had a hen that laid golden eggs, he’d share them.

8 When Arnie got home, his shoulders drooped, and he thought his face would crack if he tried to smile. Besides, there was nothing to smile about. He was doomed!

9 “OK, Arnie,” said his mom. “What’s wrong? What have you done with my son—the cheerful boy who left here this morning?”

10 Arnie groaned and told his mom about his horrible day.

11 “I tried to tell Mr. Martin that I didn’t want to be in the play, but he wouldn’t listen. He says I’ll love it once people start laughing and clapping,” Arnie said.

12 Disgusted, Arnie plopped into a chair. “Hah! They’re more likely to start throwing tomatoes at me when they see how bad I am.”

13 Arnie’s mom wanted to laugh, but she didn’t. She knew Arnie felt upset because he truly believed he couldn’t play the giant.

14 “Why Arnie,” she said, “you just have a bad case of stage fright. But that should be easy to cure. You know how much you love to read stories?”

15 Arnie nodded, wondering what that had to do with anything.

16 “When you read, do you ever pretend—in your head—that you’re one of the characters in the story? Do you ever imagine that you’re living

through the adventures just like the character?” she continued.

17 Arnie looked shocked and a little embarrassed. How could his mom know he did that? There was this one action character . . .

18 His mom seemed to read his mind. “You’re not the only one who does that,” she laughed. “When I was little, I used to pretend I was the young detective Nancy Drew. I’d live through all her adventures and solve the mysteries right along with her.”

19 “That’s different,” argued Arnie. “I do that in my head.”

20 “It’s not so different,” said his mom. “All you have to do is allow your voice and your body to act out the ideas in your head. If you think like a giant, you can act like one. The story tells you what the giant did and what he thought.”

21 Arnie considered that. It made sense. Still, he was sure everyone would laugh if he stomped around and bellowed like a giant.

22 “I don’t want people to laugh at me,” admitted Arnie quietly.

23 “Arnie, that’s what they’re supposed to do!” his mom replied. “The giant is a funny character because he’s such a big bully. People want to see Jack get the better of him. The meaner and louder you play the giant, the funnier he’ll be. People will laugh because you’re playing the part so well, not because you’re making a fool of yourself.”

24 “I never looked at it that way,” said Arnie thoughtfully.

25 “One more thing,” said his mom, “imagine that you saw someone playing the giant very timidly. What if they looked scared? You’d feel sorry for them, wouldn’t you? You’d know that they were embarrassed.”

26 Arnie nodded.

27 “Well, that’s just one more reason to play the giant as if you really mean it. Inside you might be nervous, but the audience will see only this big, gruff giant. They’ll think you are a really great actor.”

28 A month later, when the class performed the play, Arnie’s stomach was full of butterflies. But on stage, he was the meanest, noisiest giant ever. The audience laughed and clapped and cheered. They loved it—and so did Arnie.

29 Sometimes, moms are pretty smart.

COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence.
Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 This story is mainly about a
 - a** boy who plays a giant in a play.
 - b** boy who gets over his stage fright.
 - c** mother who pretends to be Nancy Drew.
- 2 Arnie was afraid of being in the play because
 - a** he didn't want to look foolish.
 - b** he didn't want to be laughed at.
 - c** Both **a** and **b**
- 3 Arnie's mother gave him some acting advice because she
 - a** didn't want Arnie to be scared on stage.
 - b** knew people would make fun of Arnie.
 - c** didn't want Arnie to be in the play.

- 4 The audience laughed at Arnie because they
 - a** thought he looked foolish.
 - b** loved how he played the giant.
 - c** felt sorry for him.
- 5 When Arnie heard the audience laugh, he
 - a** hated it.
 - b** loved it.
 - c** wanted to get off the stage.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 terrible thing (2)
- 2 play; pretend to be (5)
- 3 terrible; awful (10)
- 4 uncomfortable; troubled (17)
- 5 howled; roared (21)
- 6 confessed; revealed (22)
- 7 people who watch a show (28)

C A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning will depend on how it is used.

The *fly* buzzed around the room.
The bird will *fly* to its nest.

Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there? Write *a* or *b*.

8 face (5)

- a** deal with courageously
- b** the front of the head

9 cure (14)

- a** preserve meat
- b** heal; fix

10 shocked (17)

- a** affected by electricity
- b** surprised; startled

THINK ABOUT IT

- D** Homographs are two (or more) words that are spelled the same but have different meanings and origins. A word's meaning will depend on how it is used.

My dad is a football *fan*.

He keeps cool with an electric *fan*.

The two words in **bold type** are homographs. In this case, the homographs are pronounced the same. Sometimes they are not.

Read each pair of sentences. If the words in **bold type** mean the same thing in both sentences, write *Same*. If the words do not mean the same thing, write *Different*.

- 1 Where did Mr. Martin **post** the notice?
Mr. Martin put the notice on a **post**.
- 2 Arnie was to **play** a giant.
He had no time to **play** outside.
- 3 Arnie worked on the **set** for a scene.
After he finished, he **set** a ladder aside.
- 4 The **band** tuned their instruments.
The **band** played when Arnie walked onto the stage.
- 5 The day of the play grew **close**.
Arnie could **close** his eyes and pretend he was the giant.

- E** Writers try to make stories more interesting by using colorful or funny language that doesn't mean exactly what the words say.

Arnie was *scared to death*.

This sentence means that Arnie was very scared. It doesn't mean that Arnie died.

Read the sentences. What does each sentence really mean? Write *a* or *b*.

- 6 Arnie thought that acting was "a nightmare" is another way of saying that he
 - a thought it was very unpleasant.
 - b had bad dreams about it.
 - c practiced acting in his sleep.

- 7 Arnie wanted to "crawl into a hole" is a colorful way of saying that Arnie
 - a wanted to live in a cave.
 - b felt embarrassed on stage.
 - c liked to dig holes in his yard.

- 8 Arnie thought "his face would crack if he smiled" is a funny way of saying he
 - a had a sunburned and sore face.
 - b had been frowning for a long time.
 - c was wearing a stiff mask.

- 9 Arnie "was doomed" is another way of saying he
 - a felt as if there weren't any hope.
 - b was in trouble with Mr. Martin.
 - c didn't know how giants acted.

- 10 Arnie "had butterflies in his stomach" is a colorful way of saying he
 - a had swallowed butterflies.
 - b wore a butterfly costume.
 - c was nervous.

- F** A sentence with just one subject and one verb is called a simple sentence. A sentence that is made from two simple sentences is called a compound sentence.

Simple: Arnie likes blueberries.

Simple: He loves to eat pancakes.

Compound: Arnie likes blueberries, *and* he loves to eat pancakes.

You join two simple sentences with a comma followed by the word *and*, *or*, or *but*.

Read each sentence. If it is a simple sentence, write *Simple*. If it is a compound sentence, write *Compound*.

- 11 Arnie and his mom talked at breakfast.
- 12 The sun was shining, and the weekend was coming.
- 13 Arnie wanted to work on scenery, but he did not want to act.
- 14 Arnie had no trouble talking to his friends or teachers.
- 15 "I'll play the giant, but I hope they don't laugh at me."