

Name: _____

Giving Up Sydney

By Neal Levin



"Lights out," the counselor said with his hand on the switch.

"Wait!" Jacob shouted. "I need my flashlight."

"What you need is a good night's sleep. Tomorrow's our big camping trip. Is everyone packed?"

"Yes," all the boys in the cabin cried.

Jacob crawled into bed as the room went dark. He checked behind his pillow for his stuffed koala, but it wasn't there.

"I can't find Sydney," Jacob said.

Ryan tossed it back to him and snickered. "You're the only nine-year-old who still needs a teddy bear."

"He's not a bear," Jacob said. "How many times do I have to tell you? Koalas are marsupials."

"Whatever," said Ryan. "It's still a stuffed animal."

Jacob tucked Sydney under his arm and pulled the blanket over his shoulder. He knew Ryan was right. He did need a stuffed animal to fall asleep.

A month before camp, Jacob had tried sleeping without Sydney. He stayed awake until 1:30 in the morning, staring at the big red numbers glowing on his clock. But he just couldn't do it. Finally, he snatched the koala off his dresser and brought it back to bed. Then he had no trouble sleeping.

Jacob had hoped he wouldn't need Sydney at camp, but by the first night he missed home more than he'd expected. His parents were 200 miles away. Even his little brother was in a separate cabin. Jacob needed someone in his family to keep him company, and Sydney was the only one around.

No one else in Jacob's cabin had a stuffed animal. Even his brother gave up his when he was six. Jacob imagined himself as a grown-up, still cuddling Sydney in bed. Maybe his wife would have one too.

In the morning the boys piled onto the bus. It took an hour to drive to the national forest. They set up tents, cooked hot dogs, and saw a deer while hiking. Later they dipped in the lake, then buried each other in sand.

It wasn't until they were roasting marshmallows that evening that Jacob felt homesick again. The woods were darker and this time his parents were 300 miles away—at least!

He poked his marshmallow stick deeper into the campfire. Flames danced and flickered, casting strange shadows. Suddenly his marshmallow burst into flames. He blew hard to blow it out, but it was burnt. It didn't matter. He wasn't even hungry.

When the boys returned to their tents, Jacob slipped quietly into his sleeping bag. But where was his koala?

"I can't find Sydney," Jacob said. "Give it back, Ryan."

"I don't have your teddy bear," Ryan said.

Then Jacob remembered: he forgot to bring Sydney because everything had been packed yesterday afternoon. Sydney was still on Jacob's bed from last night.

His stomach tightened as he lay there listening to the other boys telling jokes and munching on cheese puffs. The tent smelled like plastic and canvas and the ground was bumpy and hard.

Soon everyone was asleep, except Jacob. The tent was dark and the woods were full of strange noises. Leaves rustled. Branches snapped. He was sure wild creatures were prowling outside.

Jacob needed Sydney more than ever. Koalas stay awake at night. He tried remembering more koala facts—anything to keep his mind busy. A baby koala is a joey. They eat eucalyptus leaves. They live in Australia...

Jacob heard music outside the tent. It sounded like an ice cream truck. He crawled out of his sleeping bag, grabbed his flashlight, and peered outside.

It was an ice cream truck! Tons of koalas were dancing and singing.

"I want a Popsicle," one of them yelled.

"I want scrambled eggs."

Jacob's eyes snapped open. He was still in his sleeping bag, but it was light out. The other sleeping bags were empty.

"I want scrambled eggs." It was Ryan's voice. Jacob unzipped the door flap and crawled out of the tent. His counselor was cooking eggs over the fire. "You certainly had a good night's sleep, didn't you?"

Jacob smiled. The koalas were part of a dream. He'd fallen asleep without Sydney.

"Today we're hiking over the waterfall before we go back to camp," the counselor said. "Think you guys can handle that?"

"Of course," Jacob said.

Who did they think he was anyway? Some little kid who still needed to sleep with a stuffed animal?



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1. Based on what you read in the story, which statement about Jacob and koalas is most likely true?
 - a. He has seen them dancing and eating popsicles.
 - b. He likes them but prefers bears.
 - c. He loves them and they make him happy.
 - d. He doesn't know a lot about them.

2. Reread the following sentence from the story.

It wasn't until they were roasting marshmallows that evening that Jacob felt homesick again.

What feeling does the underlined word homesick mean in this sentence?

- a. when you miss school because you're sick
 - b. when you miss your home
 - c. getting sick so you need to go home
 - d. when thinking of going home makes you sick
3. Put the events from the story in order of what happened from first to last. Write **1, 2, 3, 4, or 5** on each line.
_____ Ryan takes Sydney.
_____ Jacob dreams about koalas.
_____ Jacob leaves home for camp.
_____ Jacob learns he will have to sleep without Sydney.
_____ The boys leave for an overnight camping trip.
 4. Which of the following best describes the author's main purpose?
 - a. to show that sleeping with stuffed animals is bad
 - b. to tell a story of a boy who does something difficult and grows as a person
 - c. to give information about koalas
 - d. to explain what kids do at summer camp

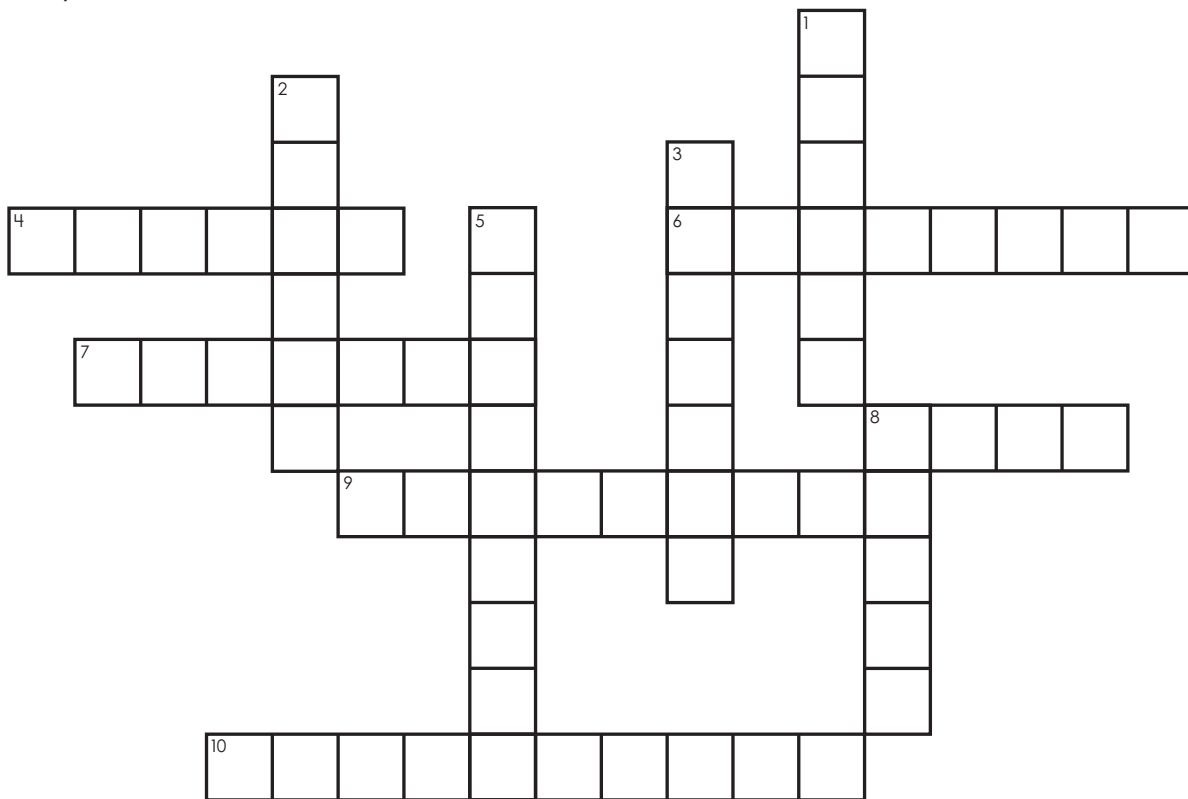
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Complete the crossword puzzle using words from the story.



Across

4. thick, tough, waterproof cloth
6. belonging to a whole country
7. to glow shakily
8. to look carefully, with purpose
9. a person who gives advice and guidance
10. an Australian tree koalas eat and live in

Down

1. to shake
2. to grab roughly and quickly
3. to laugh teasingly
5. type of mammal that usually carries babies in pouches
8. to hunt or creep

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In the story, *Giving Up Sydney*, you read about a boy who had to do something he didn't think he could. Jacob did not think he could sleep without his stuffed koala, Sydney.

However, when Jacob forgot Sydney on a camping trip and had to try sleeping without him, he learned that he could.

Think of a time when you had to do something difficult. What was it? What made it hard to do? How did you feel before doing it, while doing it, and after doing it? Write one or two paragraphs describing your experience.

ANSWER KEY

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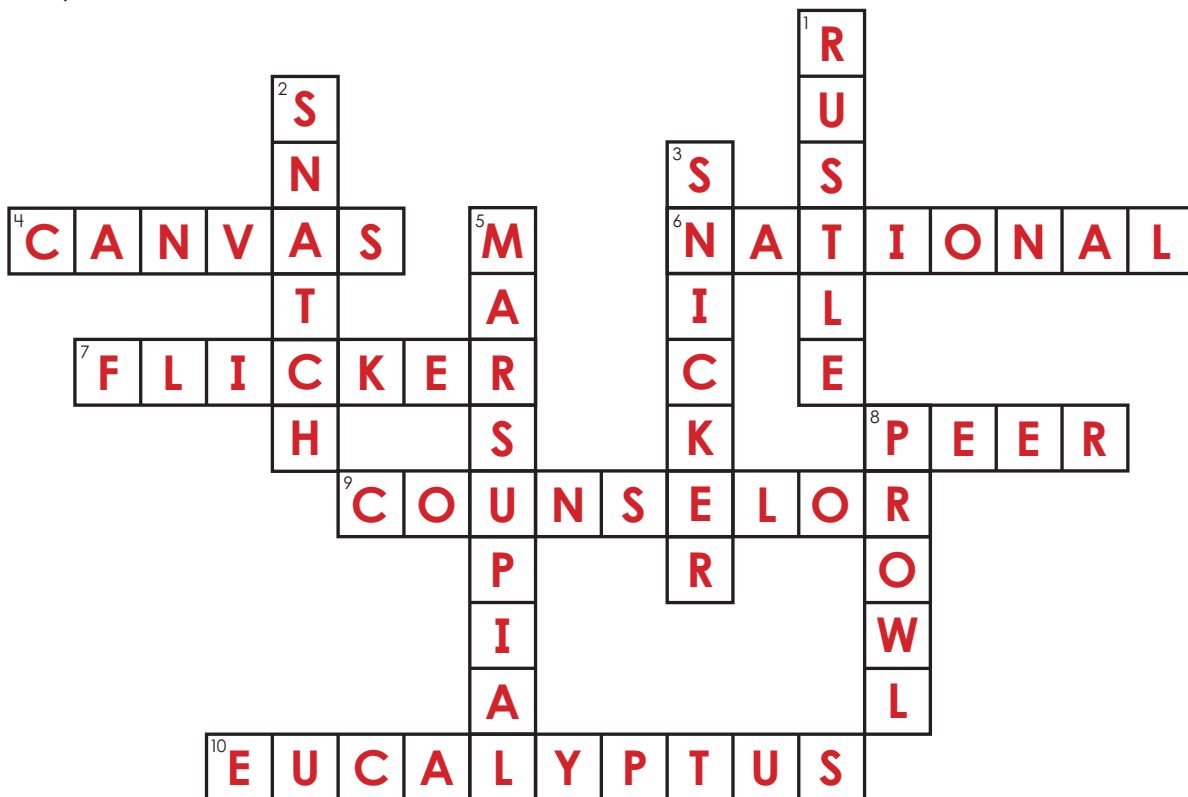
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