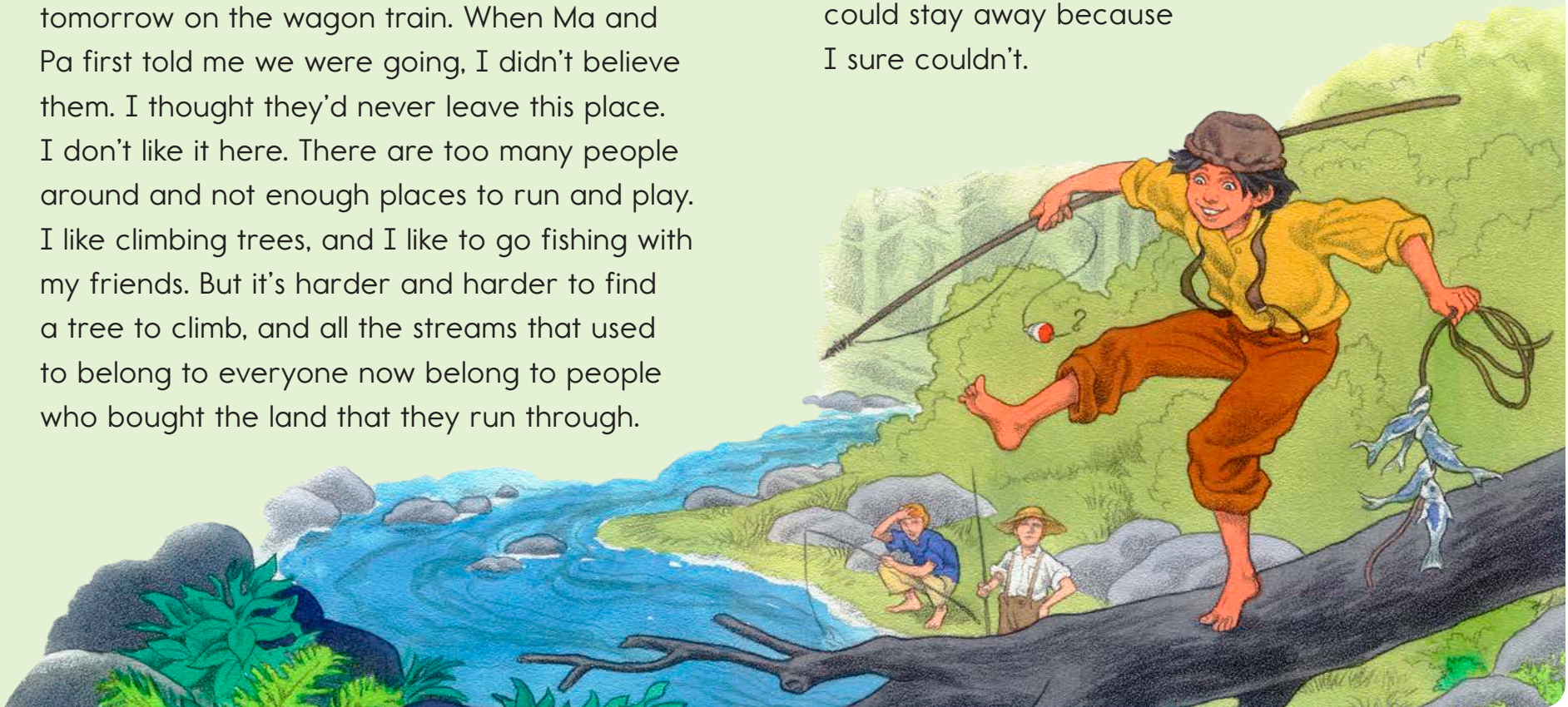


The Excited Child



My Ma keeps telling me, “Joe, sit down and be still,” but it’s not easy for someone like me who’s almost ten. I’m so excited about leaving tomorrow on the wagon train. When Ma and Pa first told me we were going, I didn’t believe them. I thought they’d never leave this place. I don’t like it here. There are too many people around and not enough places to run and play. I like climbing trees, and I like to go fishing with my friends. But it’s harder and harder to find a tree to climb, and all the streams that used to belong to everyone now belong to people who bought the land that they run through.

I hear the West is full of open spaces, it’ll be a lot different. There’ll be room to run and trees to climb and streams to fish. I’ll miss my friends, though. I think some of them are a little jealous that I’m going, and they’re not. The other night I met a few other kids who are going on the trip—there’s at least one other boy my age and a few girls, too. I heard there are more boys coming, but they weren’t there that night. I don’t understand how they could stay away because I sure couldn’t.



At the meeting, the grown-ups got to elect who would become the Wagon Master. I wanted to vote, too, but no one would pay attention to what I thought. I guess it doesn't really matter, though, 'cause the man they selected, Mr. Richmond, seems like a pretty good choice. Ma's always telling me I have to grow up to be a responsible man like Poppa and Mr. Richmond. It sure seems like Mr. Richmond has got a lot of responsibility on this trip, but he didn't seem to hesitate at all when they asked him to be the Wagon Master. I'm going to help him as much as I can. It'll give me something to do, and I'll need it because this trip is going to be a very long one. I hate being bored. Maybe he'll let me help take care of the horses. I'd like to think he would, anyway.

Mr. Richmond started talking about things that we should look out for along the way. Things like running into horse thieves and Native American tribes that don't like us on their land. But I think

DID YOU KNOW?

The trip from Missouri to Oregon took six months. Now, you can drive it in 29 hours (no stops)!

those things would be exciting, even though I wouldn't want anything bad to happen. And I don't think they would, what with having Mr. Richmond in charge, and all.

When we get to the West, Ma and Pa are planning on starting up a ranch like the one they lived on when they were kids. I guess they've missed ranching a lot. I'll get to help them on the ranch, which I'm really looking forward to. I've always wanted a horse of my own, but there wasn't room for one where we lived back in Independence, Missouri. I don't think that'll be a problem out West, from what I've heard!

It's going to be an adventure, this trip we're taking. I can't wait!

