



## **Thunder Creek Ranch**

Sonya Spreen Bates

illustrated by Kasia Charko

ISBN: 978-1-4598-0060-1

AR Quiz # 158264

### **About the Book**

Jake and his younger brother Tommy are visiting their grandparents' farm, Thunder Creek Ranch. The boys have been told to stay away from the McNash farm next door, but when Jake spots a new kid in the yard, he goes to investigate and meets Cory McNash, a city kid from Toronto. When Cory offers Jake a ride on the new quad bike, Jake can't resist. But Cory's antics on the bike bring Mrs. McNash storming from the house and the boys make a run for it back to Thunder Creek Ranch.

In their haste, city-slicker Cory leaves the gate open and a herd of cows escapes from the field. One young calf takes a fancy to Tommy and chases him over the creek and into the woods. Following on the quad bike, Jake and Cory don't realize the danger they are heading into. There's a storm coming, and they are about to find out why the little trickle of water in the riverbed is called Thunder Creek.

After the storm, the boys discover that the tiny creek has turned into a raging torrent. It's far too dangerous to cross and they are trapped on the wrong side. Will the boys make it across the creek and back home?

### **About the Author**

**Sonya Spreen Bates** is a Canadian writer living in Australia. She was born in the United States, but moved to Victoria, BC, as a small child. When she wasn't riding horses, she loved to read and daydream and scribble down short stories that she never dared to show anyone.

Sonya obtained a Bachelor of Science in Linguistics from the University of Victoria in 1987, and then a Masters in Speech Pathology from Dalhousie University in Halifax in 1989. She has spent her life working with children with communication disorders, both in Canada and Australia, often writing her own stories to use in therapy.

She began writing children's fiction in 2001, inspired by her two daughters and their love of the stories she told them. Her books and short stories have been published in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. *Thunder Creek Ranch* is the fourth book about Jake and Tommy in the Orca Echoes series.

### About the Writing

The idea for *Thunder Creek Ranch* came during a road trip across the eastern states of Australia following a period of severe flooding in 2011. The sight of the waterlogged paddocks and river water lapping at the base of bridges reminded Sonya of smaller waterways she'd known which nevertheless became dangerously flooded at times; a creek in the Shuswap region of BC that became a raging torrent every spring, and a stream in New Zealand called "Roaring Meg." Wanting to make the challenge of crossing the creek realistic, she enlisted the help of her daughter, then 10, to be Jake, and a friend's son, who was 8, to be Tommy. Expecting that Tommy would struggle to make the distance, she was surprised to find that "Tommy" was the better long-jumper, and so the story was changed accordingly. Tommy makes the leap across the creek with ease, and Cory, the same age as Tommy but not very athletic, has a scare as he stumbles on landing.

### Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections

#### *Prereading Ideas*

One of the main characters, Cory McNash, exaggerates the truth when telling Jake and Tommy about himself and his life in Toronto. Why would he do this? How would you feel if you thought someone you had just met was lying to you about themselves and their life?

#### *Classroom Discussion Questions*

1. Cory takes the quad bike so that he and Jake can search for Tommy, knowing that he's not supposed to ride it. Was this a good decision? Why or why not? Does the need to help someone make it all right to do something you know is wrong? What else could they have done?
2. Cory is nervous about jumping across the creek. He can't swim and he's not a good long-jumper. Yet he doesn't tell Jake and Tommy this. Why does he go ahead and try the jump, knowing how dangerous it could be? What would have happened if Jake and Tommy hadn't been able to pull him up the ledge?
3. In the past, Jake has teased Tommy about being a baby and a scaredy-cat. Yet he sticks up for Tommy when Cory says exactly the same thing in chapter 6. Why does he do this? How does it make him feel when Cory calls his brother names? Does it change his own attitude toward Tommy? Do you think he will stop teasing him?
4. Tommy has some good ideas about getting across the creek, but each time he suggests something, Cory says it's a bad idea. How does this make Tommy feel? How could Cory have handled it differently so that he got his own opinions across without hurting Tommy's feelings?

***Suggested Activities***

- The three boys tried to build a bridge across the creek, but found it was too wide and too deep and they didn't have proper building materials. Try building your own bridge. What building materials would you need? How would you design the bridge? What difficulties do you come across as you try to make the bridge wider?
- The boys got caught in a thunder storm and had to seek shelter. Do a research project on different types of storms (e.g. hurricanes, snow storms, tornados). How do survival skills differ for different types of storms?
- When the cows get loose, Jake wishes that Bella the sheepdog was there to help round them up. Do a research project on sheepdogs. What kind of training to they need to learn to herd sheep and cattle. What kind of dogs makes the best sheepdogs? Why?
- Storms can be exciting and frightening and beautiful all at the same time. Write a poem about a storm and how it makes you feel.
- Write a short story about an experience you have had in a storm.

**Other Books by the Author from Orca Book Publishers***Marsh Island* (Orca Echoes)*Smuggler's Cave* (Orca Echoes)*Topspin* (Orca Sports)*Wildcat Run* (Orca Echoes)**Awards***Marsh Island*

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