

Night at the Capitol

Chapter Ten

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Charlie grabbed the black, worn cowboy hat that belonged to the thief who stole the magical Great Seal of the State of Missouri out of the Secretary of State's office. Hat in hand, he sprinted down the stairs to the second floor, where Laura Ingalls Wilder had promised him he'd find more important paintings.

The second floor of the Missouri Capitol was deathly silent. Charlie could hear his own heartbeat thudding in his ears. The only light came from a few security signs spaced randomly down the hallway. Charlie could look over the railing and see the large, marble rotunda below. He froze against the wall, listening. He heard voices. Not exactly whispers, but tiny voices. He followed them to their source.

"There! Aim there!" a man called.

Charlie heard the unmistakable whiz of an arrow. He walked a bit further until he found himself in front of a large painting. Like everything else in the Capitol at night, the people in the painting were alive and busily involved in their own little world.

"Indian Attack on the Village of Saint Louis 1780," Charlie read on the placard in front of the painting. A group of Native American men were crouched and ready for battle, alternately shooting arrows at some tiny white men gathered around a rudimentary fort.

"Excuse me," Charlie said.

The Native American men glanced at him and then quickly turned back to firing arrows toward the fort.

"Excuse me?" Charlie said, even louder.

BOING! A tiny arrow flew out of the picture frame and stuck gamely into Charlie's arm. He looked at it, pulled it out and watched a minuscule bit of



blood form where the arrow had stuck. It was as if he'd been pricked by a sewing needle. He quickly wiped it away and turned back to the men.

"Please! I need your help!" Charlie said. "You're going to lose this battle anyway! I know you're all fighting for the British right now, but it's useless because Saint Louis becomes part of America. It's still part of America! I know because my

grandparents live there and I've visited it before and seen that giant Arch!"

"Would you mind lowering your voice? You're giving our position away!" one of the Native American men said.

Now Charlie was starting to get cranky.

"Giving your position away? I think those arrows have already

given your position away!"

Then he remembered the Hall of Famous Missourians.

"Oh! Laura sent me? Laura Ingalls Wilder? She said you could help me?"

This caught the men's attention. They convened for a moment. Several of them continued to shoot arrows, but three hunkered behind a bush and turned to speak to Charlie.

"What does Laura need?" one asked.

"There's a thief here and I'm trying to find him! He left this hat up in the Hall of Famous Missourians. It's a clue. She said maybe one of you could help me track him down. I know he's still here in the Capitol."

"Track a thief? You want us to leave behind a battle and track a thief?"

"Please," Charlie pleaded. "It's important. The thief stole the seal that allows you all to come alive. Do you like shooting your arrows and fighting your battle? If you want to do it again tomorrow night then we need to find the thief and get the seal back! He could be heading out of the Capitol with it as we speak!"

The men all looked at each other,

spoke for a moment in their native language, and then one climbed out of the painting. As the man swung a leg through the gold frame, he instantly became the size of a real man, rather than his tiny painted form.

"Whoa," Charlie said, startled.

"I am Machk," the man said.

"I am Charlie," Charlie replied.

"Let me see this ... clue."

Charlie handed Machk the cowboy hat. The man examined it, smelled it and turned it carefully in his hands. He looked around thoughtfully for a moment.

"Right. We go this way."

Machk began to move down the hallway.

"Wow," Charlie said, jogging to keep up with him. "You figured out which way the thief went just by looking at his hat?"

Charlie was very impressed. Machk glanced down at him.

"No, this hat means nothing. I figured out which way to go by looking at his footprint!"

Charlie followed Machk's gaze and saw a muddy boot print, there on the floor in a puddle of water right next to a drinking fountain topped by a shiny, bronze bear.

Capitol Ideas

Charlie has to persuade the Native Americans to help him. The newspaper is filled with examples of writing to inform, entertain and persuade. Can you find an example of each type of writing? Explain why you chose each example.

Learning Standards: I can read historical fiction to develop fluency and to make text-to-world connections. I can identify vocabulary in context. I can comprehend main idea and supporting details. I can analyze literary techniques and make predictions.

