

Fire in the Forest

Theme: As the Sun rises, Vole smells fire, and warns the other animals to clear the forest. Fat Buck Rabbit, thinking it's just the sunrise, doesn't believe her and puts his family in danger. He finds it difficult to apologize, but Vole tells him that actions speak louder than words.

Setting: The forest

SEAL reference: Be the Best you Can be

As dawn broke over the forest, the brilliant orange Sun burst across the horizon like a ball of flame. The cool green dawn was lit up with hot glowing colours. Through the trees, Vole saw splinters of light race up the tree trunks. She watched them dance through the branches of the bare Winter trees, and thought she saw fire!

'Fire!' she screeched, at the top of her voice.

'Fire! Run for your lives!' Then she raced off, without another word, looking remarkably like a children's toy that had been wound up too tightly.

Immediately, all the animals and birds started to warn one another. They surged into action, a huge tidal rush of creatures trying to get out of the forest – every last one panicking, hurdling, hopping or flying in different directions. The noise was deafening.

'I don't smell fire!' said cool dude, Fat-Buck-Rabbit. 'Do you smell fire?' he lazily asked his family.

'We should ask Deer, she has an exquisite sense of smell,' said his wife, beginning to be worried. 'Don't you

think we think we ought to be moving with the others now?'

'Ha-Ha! Deer has l--o--n--g gone,' drawled Fat-Buck-Rabbit. 'I'm sure it's only the sunrise, there's no need to panic.' He was comfortable and didn't want to leave his cosy burrow so early in the morning.

'But we'll be barbecued in our warren, if you don't get a move on!' whimpered his wife.

'We don't follow all the other jack-asses,' said Fat-Buck-Rabbit, convinced he was right. 'We're not sheep!'

Only a few minutes after the first cry of 'Fire!', the forest appeared to be completely empty. Then there was a rustle, as Hedgehog unrolled himself from his Winter sleep. He crawled out from under a pile of crisp dry leaves.

'Where is everyone, I wonder?' Hedgehog said to himself. 'Ah well,' he continued, 'Food first, friends second.'

But then the eerie stillness of the forest began to worry Hedgehog. 'Perhaps I've woken up too early,' he thought. 'Perhaps there's been a storm, it's

always quiet after a storm. Perhaps I have woken up in a different world?' Suddenly he realized that he was not alone.

Fat-Buck-Rabbit slouched out of his burrow with one very angry wife and the rest of the Rabbit family pushing behind him.

'Hey, Man! What's all the rush? Your whiskers on fire, Dude?' he asked Hedgehog.

'Excuse me,' said Hedgehog, 'But do you know where everyone is?'

'They've gone!' replied Mrs Rabbit. 'And so should you be!'

'Gone?' repeated Hedgehog.

'Yes, gone. They're all gone, every last one of them has gone! Except for us and my lazy, good-for-nothing husband.'

'Why?' asked Hedgehog.

Fat-Buck-Rabbit chimed in. 'Because of this fire we're having, man. Can't you see all of the forest is going up in flames.' He laughed again. 'Can't you feel the heat, man?'

Now Hedgehog was not Brain of Britain, but he was a sensible little chap.

'But there is no fire,' he answered.

'Yep,' said Fat-Buck-Rabbit, 'but nobody told that silly old Vole, when she saw the Sun rise this morning?'

'Didn't you think to tell everyone about Vole's mistake?' asked Hedgehog.

'He was too busy laughing at them all,' answered Mrs Rabbit.

Suddenly there was a whispering and a rustling, a whooshing and a crackling. The noise seemed to flow menacingly towards them.

'You laughed too soon, Fat-Buck-Rabbit,' said Hedgehog. 'Is this warm enough for you?'

And they all stood transfixed, as a mighty wall of flame gobbled its way through the forest towards them.

'Run!' squeaked Hedgehog – but the rabbits were already ahead of him.

At last they were all safe in the fields with the other creatures. 'You got here just in time,' they all commented, watching the smoke rising up from the forest. 'Why didn't you run with us?' they asked Fat-Buck-Rabbit.

'...because he is too big for his ears,' said his wife. 'He doesn't listen to little old Vole nor to his little old wife. He thinks he's *much* too clever.'

Fat-Buck-Rabbit looked ashamed. He needed to say sorry to his wife and to Vole – but he didn't know how. Fat-Buck-Rabbit hopped slowly over to Vole and clumsily patted him on the back.

'Oh, you don't need to say anything,' said Vole. 'Actions speak louder than words.'

Follow-up questions

- Why did 'actions speak louder than words' in this story?
- What was it that made it so difficult for Fat-Buck-Rabbit to say sorry?