

Ava and the Loggerhead Sea Turtles

It would be dark soon, but seven-year-old Ava Barker didn't want to leave the beach. She and her mother had been there all afternoon. Ava's father was at a business meeting, which was the reason they were in Florida. Ava put the finishing touches on the fancy sand castle she'd been building.

"Just a few more minutes, Ava," said his mother. "We need to get back to the hotel. I'm sure your father is finished with his meeting and is ready to go to dinner. Aren't you hungry?"

"Nope," said Ava. "But I'm almost finished."

Ava took her plastic pail and raced to the water's edge. When she got there, she froze. A turtle was making its way out of the ocean. It was gigantic, bigger than any turtle Ava had ever seen. She backed away from the huge animal. Unable to say a word, she raced up the beach to her mother.

"Mommy!" Ava screamed. "Look! Look! A turtle! A turtle!"

Ava's mother sat up. She smiled and put a finger to her lips. "Shh. It's a loggerhead turtle; she lives in the ocean. She's come to lay her eggs. But you'll scare her off if you don't stop screaming. Come here."

Ava moved closer to her mother. She pulled Ava onto the blanket with her. "We can watch the turtle build her nest. But you have to be quiet."

The giant turtle looked very awkward as she crawled up the beach.

"She's really slow," whispered Ava. "Where is she going?"

"She's trying to make it up to the dunes, away from the water. This way her eggs won't get washed away," said Mom. "She's slow because she doesn't have legs, she has flippers. Watch how she drags them through the sand and pulls herself along. She's amazing. She must weigh at least 300 pounds."

"Wow! 300 pounds! She's humongous!" said Ava.

After what seemed like hours, the turtle made it up to the dunes. She turned herself around so she was facing the ocean. Then she used her back flippers to dig a huge pit in the sand.

"That will be her nest," said Mom. "She can lay her eggs there now. But it's getting dark. We need to go. It could take her twenty minutes or more to lay her eggs. We'll come back in the morning to see the nest."

Ava unwillingly gathered up her pail and shovel. Her mother folded up the blanket. Together they walked along the beach to their hotel.

The next morning Ava's father left for another meeting. Ava couldn't wait to return to the beach. "Come on, Mommy! Let's go see the turtle nest."

Ava raced out to the sand and looked over the beach. She hoped to find the nest. All she saw though was four pieces of wood staked into the sand. The wood frame had long yellow plastic strips on it.

"What is that?" asked Ava.

"That's where the turtle made her nest," explained Mother. "The beach patrol has put the tape there to keep people from bothering it."

Ava frowned. "But it doesn't look like a nest. And where is the big turtle?"

Mom spread the blanket in the sand. "Her job is done, so she went back to sea."

Ava shrugged then raced over to her sand castle. The tide had swept away part of it. But she had all morning to rebuild it. And just maybe another giant turtle would come ashore to lay her eggs.

Questions

1. What kind of turtle did Ava see?
2. What do you think humongous means when Ava says, "Wow! 300 pounds! She's humongous!"?
3. How did the turtle move across the sand?
4. Why did the turtle want to get to the dunes?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. froze
2. awkward
3. humongous
4. pit
5. unwillingly

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "When she got there, she **froze**"

- a. became cold or chilled b. fell; slipped c. jumped up; leaped d. stopped; became still

2) "The giant turtle looked very **awkward** as she crawled up the beach"

- a. tired or exhausted b. clumsy or ungraceful c. wet; covered in water d. strong; mighty

3) "'Wow! 300 pounds! She's **humongous!**'"

- a. human-like b. fat; overweight c. gigantic; huge d. cute or adorable

4) "she used her back flippers to dig a huge **pit** in the sand"

- a. hole or burrow b. cooking area c. seed; egg d. lake or pond

5) "Ava **unwillingly** gathered up her pail and shovel"

- a. hesitantly; reluctantly b. quickly or speedily c. happily or with joy d. angrily; unhappily