Jumanji

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Retold by John Escott

About the author
Todd Strasser wrote the book of the film, Jumanji, which was based on a book by Chris Van Allsburg. Van Allsburg was born in 1949 in Michigan, the United States. He was originally an artist and has had numerous individual exhibitions. In 1979 he wrote his first children's book, The Garden of Abdul Gasazi, and since then he has written over a dozen books for children. Van Allsburg's illustrations play an important part in all his books.

Uncertain boundaries: All Van Allsburg's books have uncertain boundaries between reality and fantasy, or dream, and contain a puzzle element. The deepest puzzle in his books is – are the events real or are they fantasy? For children, the world of the imagination is very real. The boundaries between the imagination and the real world are not yet firmly in place. Van Allsburg's stories make these uncertain boundaries very explicit and are consequently both confusing and exciting. They often narrate a quest (a long search). The hero or heroes set out on an adventure that changes them in some way for the better, and teaches them something important. This is a familiar theme, but Van Allsburg succeeds in giving it a brilliant new twist.

About the film
Action-packed: 'Jumanji', released in 1995, was a highly successful film. It is an entertaining, action-packed movie. The fantasy sequences were created using computer-generated imagery. Robin Williams, who plays Alan, has great charisma and a crazy, out-of-control humour that appeals to all ages. He also has a vulnerability that enables him to play children very successfully. A twist in the film is that the same actor plays the hunter Van Pelt and Alan's father. The suggestion here is that because his father intends to send Alan to boarding school, Alan feels betrayed, and even ‘persecuted' by him.

Summary
‘That game is too dangerous for children to play!’ says Alan Parrish. Alan Parrish should know. He played the game in 1969 and disappeared! Jumanji is a story for children about a very strange game – a game that becomes far too real and frightening for the players. It was originally a story by Chris Van Allsburg. It was released as a film in 1995, starring the famous American actor Robin Williams. The story begins in 1869 in New Hampshire, America. Two young brothers bury a box under some trees. They fear that someone will find the box some time – ‘Then God help them,’ says one of the boys. A hundred years later, in 1969, a boy, Alan Parrish, finds the box and takes it home. He's unhappy because his father wants to send him to boarding school. Alan's friend Sarah arrives and they open the box. Inside is a board game. They throw the dice and words appear: ‘Do you want to leave the world behind? Then this is the game for you.’ Suddenly Alan finds that he is disappearing into the game.

The story moves on to 1995. Peter and Judy Shepherd are orphans. They come to live in the same house that Alan Parrish lived in. They find the game, Jumanji, in an attic room, and start to play it; the first throw of the dice unleashes an unexpected sequence of events …

Brantford, New Hampshire, 1869: Two brothers bury a big box under some trees after they hear strange noises come from it.

Chapter 1: Brantford, New Hampshire 1869. A twelve-year-old boy called Alan Parrish, the son of a shoe-factory owner, is attacked by a group of boys who have been hiding behind some trees. After the attack, Alan hears strange noises and finds the big box. On the box are pictures of jungle animals and a hunter, and the word: JUMANJI. He takes the box home with him.

Chapter 2: Alan is unhappy when his parents tell him he is going to a new school. He wants to leave home, but his friend Sarah Whittle arrives. The Jumanji box starts making a strange noise and the two children open the box and begin to play the game. Strange things start to happen and Alan gets smaller and smaller and is pulled inside the game!
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Chapter 3: Twenty-six years later, two orphans – a boy called Peter and his sister Judy – find the Jumanji box in their Aunt Nora’s house. They begin to play the game. After they throw the dice strange things happen – first mosquitoes, then monkeys and then a lion appear in the house! Finally a man appears – it is Alan Parrish, and he is looking for his parents!

Chapter 4: The children follow Alan to his father’s old factory. The factory is close and his parents are dead. Alan is very unhappy, but the children want him to finish the game so they can get rid of the animals in the house. He finally agrees but tells them they need a fourth person to play the game – Alan takes them to find Sarah Whittle.

Chapter 5: Peter, Judy, Alan and Sarah begin to play the game. A hunter, called Van Pelt, appears and tries to shoot Alan, but Alan manages to escape. They continue to play the game and many different wild animals, including elephants and zebras, appear and run out of the house. Finally, some pelicans appear and one of them takes the board-game away in its mouth …

Chapter 6: Alan manages to get the Jumanji game back from the pelican, but on the way home he is arrested by the police. Peter tries to finish the game by cheating when he throws the dice, but it doesn’t work and thick dark hair begins to grow on the backs of his hands.

Chapter 7: Van Pelt steals the game and captures Sarah but Peter, who is beginning to turn into a monkey, helps Sarah escape by biting the hunter. They get the game back and when Alan arrives they all go back to the house to continue playing. This time, the house starts to fill with water and crocodiles!

Chapter 8: Despite the water, they finally manage to finish the game when Alan’s token arrives at the finish and he says ‘Jumanji’.

Chapter 9: Alan and Sarah are taken back to 1969. All the jungle animals go back into the game board. Alan is reunited with his parents. It is as if nothing had ever happened! But now his parents don’t want to send him away to school.

Chapter 10: We are now back in 1995. Alan is 38 years old, and he runs the shoe factory. He meets Peter and Judy and this time they are not orphans. Alan makes sure their parents stay safe!

Background and themes

Jumanji takes the world of the imagination and then shows how this fantasy world invades the real world, causing danger and chaos. The narrative is very convincing and the reader believes it really is happening. The story becomes extremely gripping as a consequence.

Confronting fear: The story has a deeper meaning too. Through his adventures Alan learns something very important – that if you confront your fears your problems will go away. Alan turns to face Van Pelt, the hunter who is trying to kill him. In doing so, he completes the game and can return to reality; he finds that his father is not going to send him to boarding school after all.

Time is elastic: Jumanji has other levels to it. One of these is the ‘time’ theme. In Jumanji, time is ‘elastic’. Alan travels back and forwards through time. When he finally arrives back in 1969, having put everything right, then the possible disastrous future is altered. The film director Steven Spielberg’s ‘Back to the Future’ films play with time in the same way. Top scientists even tell us now that time travel is theoretically possible!

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Guess: Photocopy the pictures and their captions on pages 4, 11, 24 and 31. Separate the pictures from their captions. Photocopy the four pictures all together on one page, and the four captions on another page, not in the same order as the pictures. Put students in small groups and give each group a page of pictures and a page of captions. Ask students to put the captions with the right pictures. Then ask them to try to build a story around the pictures and the captions.

2 Artwork: Tell the students to imagine what is inside the box that the brothers bury. Write up their suggestions on the board. Then ask the students to draw a picture of what they think is inside the box.

Brantford, New Hampshire, 1869

After reading

3 Discuss: At the top of page 3, Mr Parrish says, ‘You mustn’t run away from something because you are afraid of it.’ Write this sentence on the board. Ask a student to read the sentence out loud and then say if they agree or disagree with Mr Parrish (you may need to pre-teach the expressions I agree / I disagree). Tell them...
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to give one reason for their answer. Then move on to another student and ask them if they agree with the first student and why. Continue around the class in the same way until everybody has given their opinion. Write up any new vocabulary items on the board.

Chapter 2
After reading
4 Role play: Put the students in pairs. Tell them to write out the conversation on page 5 between Alan Parrish and his father as if it were a stage play. Then ask the students to practise reading the dialogue out loud, working on pronunciation and intonation. Call on some of the pairs to perform the dialogue in front of the whole class.

5 Guess: Working in pairs, tell the students to re-read the end of Chapter 2 and then to answer the following question: What do you think Sarah does next? After a few minutes ask each pair to tell the rest of the class what they think Sarah does.

Chapter 3
After reading
6 Pair work: Put the students into pairs. They must imagine they are Peter and Judy at the end of Chapter 3, after Alan leaves them. Tell the students to imagine the conversation between Peter and Judy. Give them ten or fifteen minutes to prepare and then ask some of the pairs to perform the dialogue in front of the rest of the class.

7 Write: Tell the students to imagine they are Officer Bentley. When he gets back to the police station, he must write a short report to explain what happened to the police car. Working in pairs, the students write this report.

Chapter 4
After reading
8 Discuss: Pre-teach the word scary. Tell the students to go through Chapter 4 and make a list of all the animals that are mentioned. Then ask them to add the names of other animals that live in the jungle. After five minutes, put the students in groups of three or four and tell them to compare their lists and find out how many animals they have found. Conduct a feedback session with the whole class. Then tell each group to discuss the answer to the following question: Which are the scariest animals on your list? Tell them to make a list of the four scariest animals and to say why they think they are scary. As a follow-up, each group presents their list of scary animals to the rest of the class.

Chapter 5
After reading
9 Guess: Put the students into small groups. Give them two minutes to write down as much as they know about the character Van Pelt. After two minutes, conduct a feedback session with the whole class. Then write the following question on the board: Why do you think Van Pelt wants to kill Alan? Working in their small groups, the students try to answer the question. Write their suggestions up on the board.

Chapter 6
Before reading
10 Guess: Write the title of Chapter 6, Things Get Worse, on the board. Then put the students into small groups and ask them to predict what is going to happen next. Note down their suggestions on the board.

Chapter 7
After reading
12 Write: Put the students into pairs and ask them to tell the story of Chapter 7 from the point of view of Carl Bentley. Tell them to imagine Carl writes a letter to a friend. The students write Carl’s letter.

Chapter 8
After reading
13 Guess: At the end of the chapter there are the words, ‘K-BOOM’. Ask the students what they think happens next. Put them in pairs and tell them to compare their answers. Go round the class and ask different students for their suggestions. Write them up on the board.

Chapter 9
After reading
14 Role play: Put the students in pairs. Tell them to write out the conversation on pages 33 and 34 between Alan Parrish and his father as if it were a stage play. Then ask the students to practise reading the dialogue out loud, working on pronunciation and intonation. Call on some of the pairs to perform the dialogue in front of the whole class.

Chapter 10
After reading
15 Pair work: Put the students into pairs and get them to ask and answer the following questions:

a Why do Alan and Sarah invite Martha and Jim Shepherd to their party?

b Why do Alan and Sarah want Jim and Martha Shepherd to start work at the shoe factory as soon as they can?

c Why do Alan and Sarah smile at the end of the story?

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.