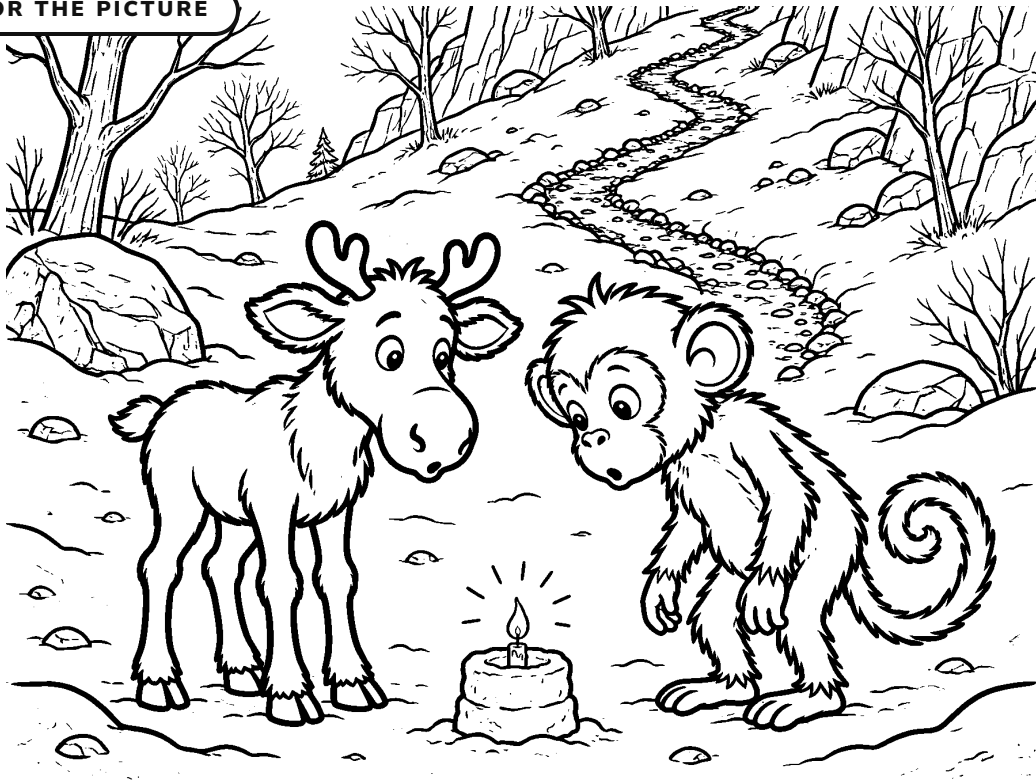


The Littlest Trail

 COLOR THE PICTURE



The morning was cold and bright, and the snow at the bottom of Lookout Ledge was so sparkly that Mr.

Monkey had to squint. Little puffs of cloud came out of everybody's noses. Way, way up above them, past the rocks and the snowy trees, stood the top of Everest's cliff.

"There has to be a trail," said Mr. Moose. "A way up."

There wasn't just one trail. There were four.

They started right at the bottom of Lookout Ledge, side by side, big and wide and easy to see. One was smooth, shiny ice. One went through bushes full of frozen red berries. One was soft, fluffy snow in the sunshine. And one was wide and flat and covered in everybody's footprints, as if the whole woods had walked it.

"Which one goes to the top?" asked Ricky.

"Let's find out!" said Hazel, and she galloped onto the ice trail before anybody could stop her. Bruno went right after her.

The ice trail went up. And up. And then it curved. And then it tipped. And then it wasn't a trail at all. It was a slide.

"WHEEEEEEEEEEE!" went Hazel, sliding all the way around the hill.

"HAAAAAAW!" went Bruno, right behind her.

They came shooting out at the bottom, right where they started, and landed in a big soft drift, *FOOMF, FOOMF*.

Hazel popped up with snow on her nose. "Hee hee hee... *SNORT!* That was the best trail ever!"

"Haw haw haw!" went Bruno. "Again!" And he ran back up the ice trail and slid down it two more times, just to make sure.

"It doesn't go to the top," said Mr. Moose. "It goes back to the bottom."

So they tried the berry trail. It wound around the side of the hill through bush after bush of frozen berries, and Bruno ate every berry he passed. It went around, and around, and around, and then it came out at the bottom of Lookout Ledge, right where they started. Bruno's whole face was purple.

"Was that the top?" asked Bruno, licking his nose.

"No," said Mr. Moose. "That was the bottom again."

They tried the wide, flat trail with all the footprints.

"Everybody, follow the trail!" said Mr. Moose.

Dottie's ears shot up. "Follow the TAIL?"

She looked around. The nearest tail was Hazel's. So Dottie followed it. Hazel turned around to see what Dottie was doing, and Dottie turned around too, to keep following her tail, and Hazel turned again, and Dottie turned again, and pretty soon they were both running around and around in a circle in the snow.

"I'm following the tail!" barked Dottie happily. "Ha! Ha! It keeps going!"

"Hee hee hee!" went Mr. Monkey. "Dottie, you're following it in a circle!"

Hazel stopped, dizzy. Dottie bumped gently into her.

And the wide, flat trail, when they finally walked it, went around one big rock and right back to the bottom too.

Everybody sat down in the snow. The four trails had been so much fun. The ice was fun. The berries were fun. The fluffy snow was fun. Following the trail was fun. And every single one of them had brought them right back to the same place.

Mr. Monkey looked up at the cliff. It was just as far away as it was this morning. "We went on four trails," he said, "and we didn't go anywhere."

Mr. Moose was quiet. He thought about it. The four big trails were so bright and so easy that they were all anybody could see. Every time he looked around, his eyes went right to them. Maybe that was the trouble.

So he did something strange. He turned his back on all four trails. He closed his eyes for a long time, until the sparkle went away. And then he opened them again and looked, slowly, at the corner where nobody had looked at all, behind a big gray rock at the very edge of the snow.

And there, beside the rock, was a light.

It was a little snow lantern, a cup of packed snow with a candle glowing inside it. And next to it, so small and so rocky that you would walk right past it if you didn't stop, was a trail. A skinny one. Steep. Twisty. Hardly wider than Benji.

It went up.

"Mr. Monkey," whispered Mr. Moose. "Look."

Mr. Monkey looked. Then he looked at the snow lantern again, and he gasped. "That's ours! That's one of the snow lanterns we left on the night of the doors! At the hedgehogs'!"

All around the little light in the snow were tiny footprints. Hedgehog footprints.

They looked over at the big old oak at the foot of the ledge, where the tiny round door was. The door opened, just a crack. Mama Hedgehog's nose peeked out. She looked at them. She looked at the little light by the trail. Then she smiled a very small smile and closed the door again, without a word.

Mr. Monkey felt it go all the way through him, warm, like cocoa. They had given Mama Hedgehog that light in secret. And she had carried it over here, in the snow, and set it at the bottom of the one trail that really went up, so anybody who came looking could find it. And she didn't say so.

"She kept it lit," he whispered. "For us."

"Then we go up," said Mr. Moose.

The littlest trail was hard. The rocks were bumpy. The snow was deep. The walls of rock came so close on both sides that they brushed Mr. Moose's antlers. Bruno had to squeeze through sideways.

"I'm a bear sandwich," said Bruno, squished flat between two rocks.

"Haw haw haw," he added, from inside the sandwich.

Mr. Monkey had packed his pack too full: pinecones, a snack, a blanket, and three snowballs just in case. Halfway up a steep part, it tipped him over backward, and he lay there on his back in the snow with his arms and legs waving in the air, like a beetle.

"Mr. Moose," he called. "I'm stuck on my pack."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Moose, and he gently tipped Mr. Monkey right side up with his nose.

They kept going. Their packs got heavier. Their legs got tired. Down below, they could still see the four big, bright trails, shining in the sun.

"We could go back," said Hazel. "The ice slide was really fun."

Mr. Moose looked down at the ice slide. He knew exactly where it went. All the way around. Back to the bottom.

"We know where the slide goes," he said.

And they kept going.

They climbed higher than any of them had ever climbed before. Higher than the trees. And then they came out onto a flat rock, and they stopped and turned around.

The whole woods was below them. And above them, far away, the top of Everest's cliff was catching the last of the sun. A thin, bright line of light ran along its very top edge, like the light under a door.

"It's still really far," said Mr. Monkey.

"It is," said Mr. Moose. He was puffing. His pack was heavy. His legs ached. "It's heavy. But it's worth it."

The sun was going down, so they started home. But now they knew the way.

That night, by the little green pine, they painted red circles. Mr. Monkey painted Mama Hedgehog on the front, with her tiny nose. On the back, he painted a big gray rock, a skinny little trail going up, and one small snow lantern glowing at the bottom.

"What a day!" said Mr. Monkey. "Hazel and Bruno slid all the way around the ice trail. Bruno ate every berry and his face turned purple. Dottie followed Hazel's tail in a circle. Then Mr. Moose closed his eyes, and we found the littlest trail, with Mama Hedgehog's light at the bottom. Bruno was a bear sandwich, and I got stuck on my back like a beetle. And we climbed higher than ever."

Mr. Monkey whistled, and Mr. Moose hummed, and together they sang:

*We are better together,
Moose and Monkey forever.*

And at the bottom of Lookout Ledge, beside a big gray rock, one small snow lantern kept on glowing, all night long, at the start of the littlest trail.

Let's Talk

- 1 Four big trails were fun, but they all went back to the bottom. How did Mr. Moose find the one that went up?
- 2 Who outside our house helps you keep going?

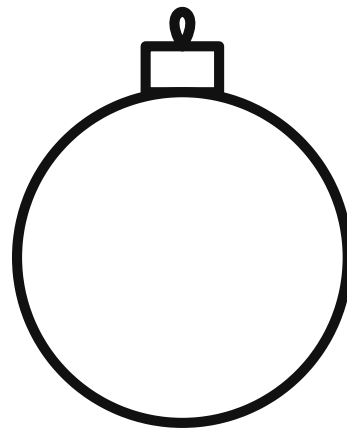
Your Turn

Make a red ornament for someone outside our house who helps you keep going. Front: their name. Back: draw what they did.

FRONT: THE NAME



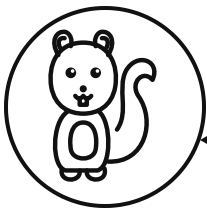
BACK: THE THANK-YOU



This one is red. Color it red when you are done!

Make a real one: with a grown-up, hold plain paper over this page against a sunny window and trace both ornaments. Cut them out, glue them back to back, and hang it with your family's ornaments.

SAMMY'S JOKE



Where do bees wait for a ride?

Unscramble the letters to finish the joke. The picture is a clue!



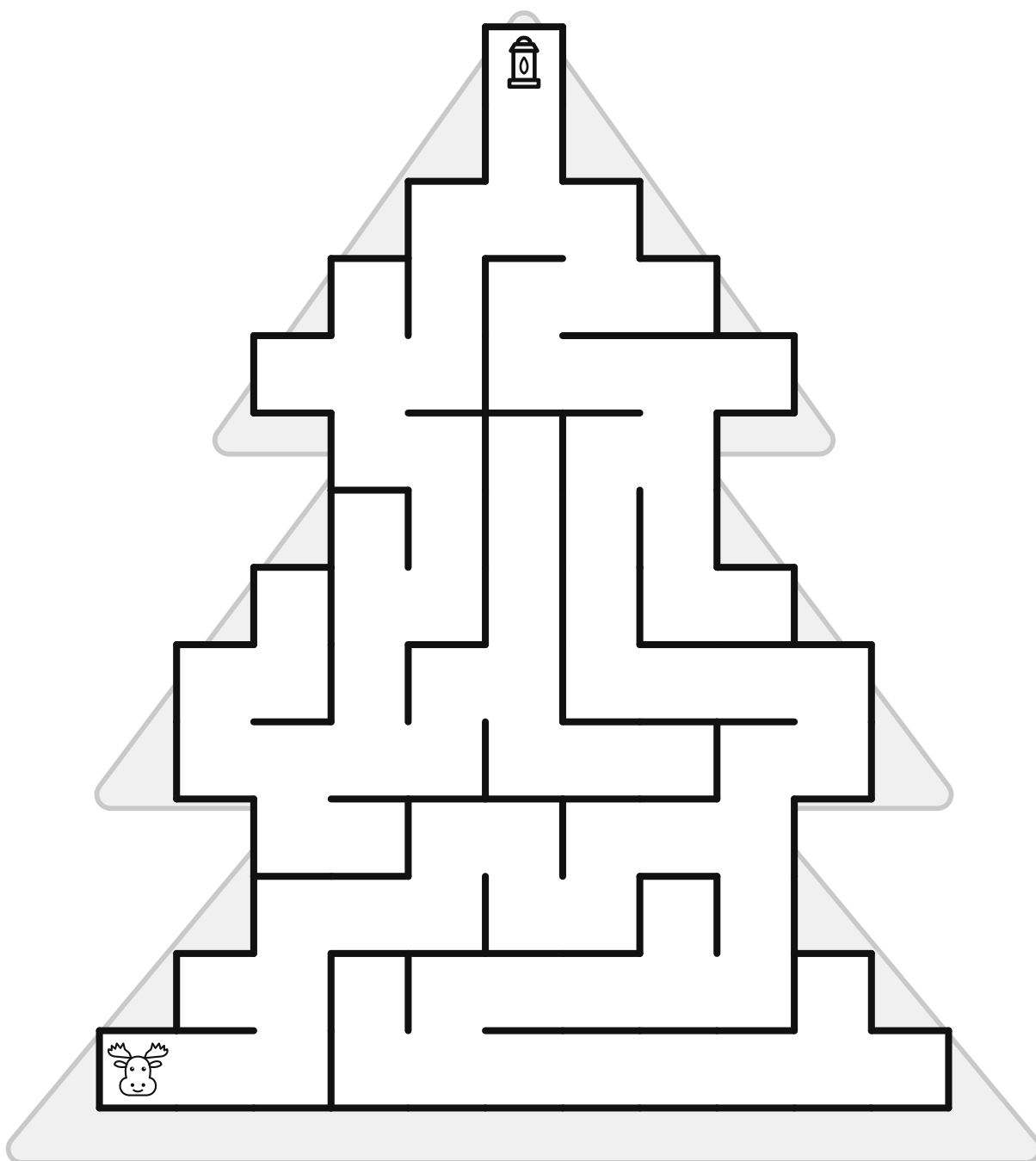
CLUE



At the _____ stop!

☆ The Littlest Trail

Help Mr. Moose find the snow lantern at the start of the littlest trail. Start at Mr. Moose.



 Read With Me

DRAW THE STORY

Up, Not Back and  slid. Zip, zip, zip!

It was fun! But it went back, not up.

 spun and spun. It was fun!

But it went back, not up.

 stops. He is still. He looks and looks. spots a lamp on a stump.

Next to it is a gap in the hill.

It is not fun. But it is up, up, up!

PICTURE WORDS



Hazel



Bruno



Dottie



Mr. Moose



Color a star each time you read it.

For grown-ups: New words to learn by heart: looks, was.

♥ My Thank-You

Trace the dark word, then the light words. Write their name on the line, or draw a tiny face. Read it to them!

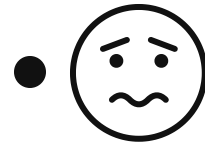
Thank you.
for helping me keep going.

♥ Feelings Match

How did they feel? Draw a line from each friend to the face that matches. One face will be left over.



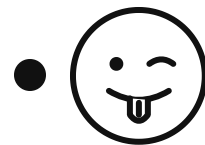
Hazel, zooming down the ice slide



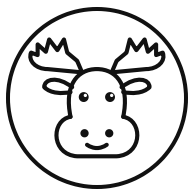
worried



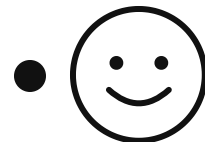
Bruno, squished between two rocks like a sandwich



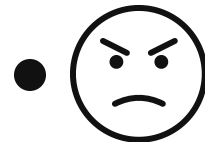
silly



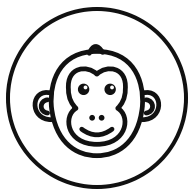
Mr. Moose, looking at four trails that all went back down



happy



angry



Mr. Monkey, when he saw Mama Hedgehog kept the light lit



excited

