

A Secret for Benji



COLOR THE PICTURE



A little wind was skipping through Sunny Square, rattling the wishes on the Wishing Tree and tugging at the four painted leaves tied snug against the trunk. Somewhere a woodpecker went *tikka-tikka-tok*.

"Today," said Mr. Monkey, "is for friends. Everybody who isn't in our house."

Mr. Moose looked into the basket. Ricky's twisty leaf was in there, and Bruno's leaf, and the little oak leaf. "Who helps everybody," he said slowly, "and never gets thanked?"

Mr. Monkey thought. Then he jumped. "Benji!"

"Benji," said Mr. Moose.

Benji Bunny heard everything first. He heard the wind coming before the wishes blew off the tree. He heard Shiloh's quiet voice when nobody else did. And when the big storm knocked down the lookout on Fort Friendship, Benji heard it creak before anybody, and then he listened for wobbles the whole time they built it back up.

"And nobody ever made him a leaf," said Mr. Monkey. "Let's make him the best one! But it has to be a surprise."

"Okay," said Mr. Moose. "Let's plan it."

They ducked behind the trunk of the big maple, close together.

"What should we paint on it?" whispered Mr. Monkey.

A pair of long ears popped up over the grass, right behind them. "Paint on what?" asked Benji.

Mr. Monkey and Mr. Moose spun around. Benji was standing right there, nose twitching, ears up tall.

"Um," said Mr. Monkey. "It's a secret."

"Oh," said Benji. "Okay." And he hopped away. But his ears stayed pointed right at them.

"He heard us," whispered Mr. Moose. "From his burrow."

"Then we need to be quieter," said Mr. Monkey.

So they got Bruno to help. Bruno was very good at being quiet. Mostly.

"Bruno," said Mr. Monkey, very softly, "we're making a surprise leaf for Benji. Can you whisper?"

Bruno nodded. He took a big, deep breath. "OKAY," he whispered. "THIS IS MY QUIETEST WHISPER."

His quietest whisper rolled across Sunny Square like thunder. Birds flew out of the trees. The wishes on the Wishing Tree spun on their vines. And way over at the clover patch, Benji's ears popped straight up.

"Hee hee hee!" went Mr. Monkey, covering his mouth. "Bruno, that wasn't a whisper. That was a BOOM!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Moose.

Bruno looked surprised. "That was my quiet one," he said. "Want to hear my loud one?"

"NO!" said Mr. Moose and Mr. Monkey together.

They tried humming, so the humming would cover up their plans. Benji hummed along from across the square. They tried going up into the Fort Friendship lookout. Benji called up from the bottom, "Is it a GOOD secret?"

"It's a very good secret," said Mr. Monkey.

They tried going all the way to the far side of Munching Meadow. Benji was there, sitting in the clover, looking very innocent.

Mr. Monkey flopped down in the grass. "It's impossible! Benji hears EVERYTHING. We can't make a surprise for somebody who hears everything!"

Mr. Monkey wanted to give this leaf so much. Benji was the kind of friend who did good things quietly, and nobody ever noticed. This time, somebody was going to notice. Mr. Monkey just didn't know how.

Mr. Moose was thinking. Whispering didn't work. Being far away didn't work. Benji's ears were too good. So they needed a place where even Benji couldn't hear.

Somewhere loud. Louder than talking.

Mr. Moose's ears went up. He remembered the river, past the bend, where the water hurried over the stones, *rush-a-rush, plish-a-plish*, so loud you had to shout.

"Whispering Water Way," said Mr. Moose. "The water's so loud there, nobody can hear anything."

Mr. Monkey sat straight up. "Not even Benji!"

"Not even Benji," said Mr. Moose.

So they packed up a flat leaf and the three bowls of berry paint, and with Bruno carrying everything, they walked all the way upriver, to where the water roared over the rocks.

RUSH-A-RUSH. PLISH-A-PLISH. SHHHHHHHHHH.

"PERFECT!" shouted Mr. Monkey.

"WHAT?" shouted Mr. Moose.

"I SAID PERFECT!"

"WHAT?"

Mr. Monkey leaned right up to Mr. Moose's big ear and tried whispering, just out of habit. "Psst. Perfect."

Mr. Moose shook his head. "WHAT?"

Mr. Monkey decided to just start painting. He dipped his finger in the paint. "LET'S PAINT BENJI ON THE FRONT!" he shouted. "A BUNNY!"

Bruno leaned in close. "A HONEY?" he shouted back.

Bruno loved honey. So Bruno painted a big round honey pot, right in the middle of the leaf.

"NO!" shouted Mr. Monkey. "A BUNNY!"

"A FUNNY?" shouted Bruno. And he painted a funny face on the honey pot, with its tongue sticking out.

Mr. Moose leaned in. "BUNNY!" he shouted, as loud as he could. "B-B-BUNNY!"

"OH!" shouted Bruno, nodding. "SUNNY!"

He painted a big yellow sun in the corner.

They all looked down at the leaf. On the front was a honey pot with a funny face, under a big yellow sun.

Mr. Monkey stared at it. Then he added two long ears on top of the honey pot. Mr. Moose added a little pink nose. Now it was a honey pot with bunny ears and a funny face, under a big yellow sun.

"Hee hee hee!" shouted Mr. Monkey. "IT'S A HONEY-BUNNY!"

"Haw haw haw!" boomed Bruno, and even the river couldn't cover that one.

On the back, the thank-you side, Mr. Moose painted carefully. He painted the lookout on Fort Friendship, tipping over in the storm. And he painted Benji at the bottom, with his ears standing up as tall as they could go, listening. Mr. Monkey painted lines coming out of the lookout, *creak, creak, creak*, so you could tell Benji heard it first. Bruno painted a little heart in the corner, very gently, with one claw.

When it was dry, they carried it all the way back to Sunny Square, nobody saying a word about it. Mr. Monkey climbed the Wishing Tree and tied it to the trunk, honey-bunny face out, thank-you side in, with a knot at the top and a knot at the bottom. Then he tied up Ricky's leaf, and Bruno's leaf, and the leaf for Shiloh, who always saved the middle spot on the Listening Log.

Just as he finished, Benji came hopping into Sunny Square. He stopped. He looked up at the tree.

There, on the trunk, was a leaf with two long ears and a pink nose on the front.

"Is that..." said Benji. "Is that me?"

"It's you," said Mr. Monkey from the branch.

Benji's ears went pink, all the way to the tips. He looked at the leaf for a long time. "Nobody ever made me a leaf before," he said, very quietly.

"What does it say?" he asked. "On the back?"

"It's a secret," said Mr. Monkey. "You'll find out at the Thankful Feast."

Benji tilted his head. His ears turned toward the tree, as if he could hear the leaf if he tried hard enough. Then he gave up and smiled. "Is it why you went to Whispering Water Way?"

Mr. Moose and Mr. Monkey looked at each other.

"How did you know we went to Whispering Water Way?" asked Mr. Moose.

"I heard Bruno laughing," said Benji.

"Hee hee hee!" went Mr. Monkey.

"Hee hee," went Benji, with his ears still pink.

"What a day!" said Mr. Monkey on the way home. "We tried to make a secret leaf for Benji, but he heard everything. Bruno's quietest whisper was a BOOM. At Whispering Water Way, Bruno heard 'bunny' and painted honey, and then a funny face, and then a sun, and it turned into a honey-bunny. And now Benji has a leaf."

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

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

And at the edge of the clover patch, Benji sat in the moonlight with his long ears turned toward Sunny Square, listening to the leaves on the Wishing Tree whisper in the wind.

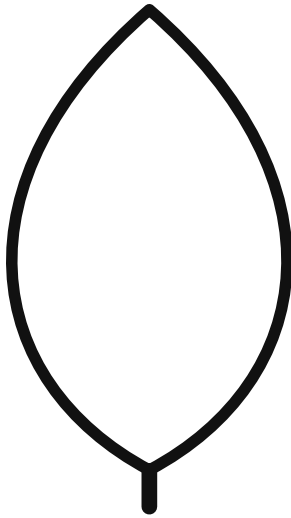
Let's Talk

- 1 Benji hears things first. How did that help everyone when the storm came?
- 2 Who outside our house does something good that nobody notices?

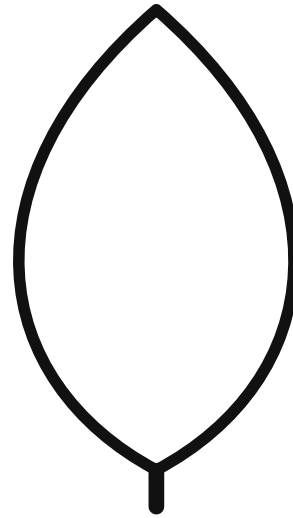
Your Turn

Plan a leaf for someone outside your house. Name on the front. What they did on the back.

FRONT: THE NAME

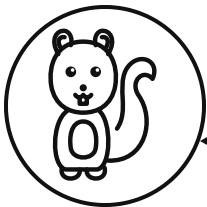


BACK: THE THANK-YOU



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

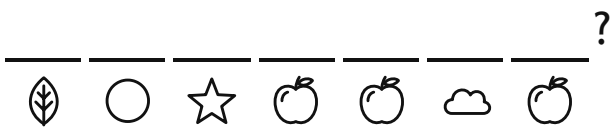
SAMMY'S JOKE



How do you know carrots are good for your eyes?

Crack Sammy's code! Find each picture in the key and write its letter on the line.

Have you ever seen a bunny wearing

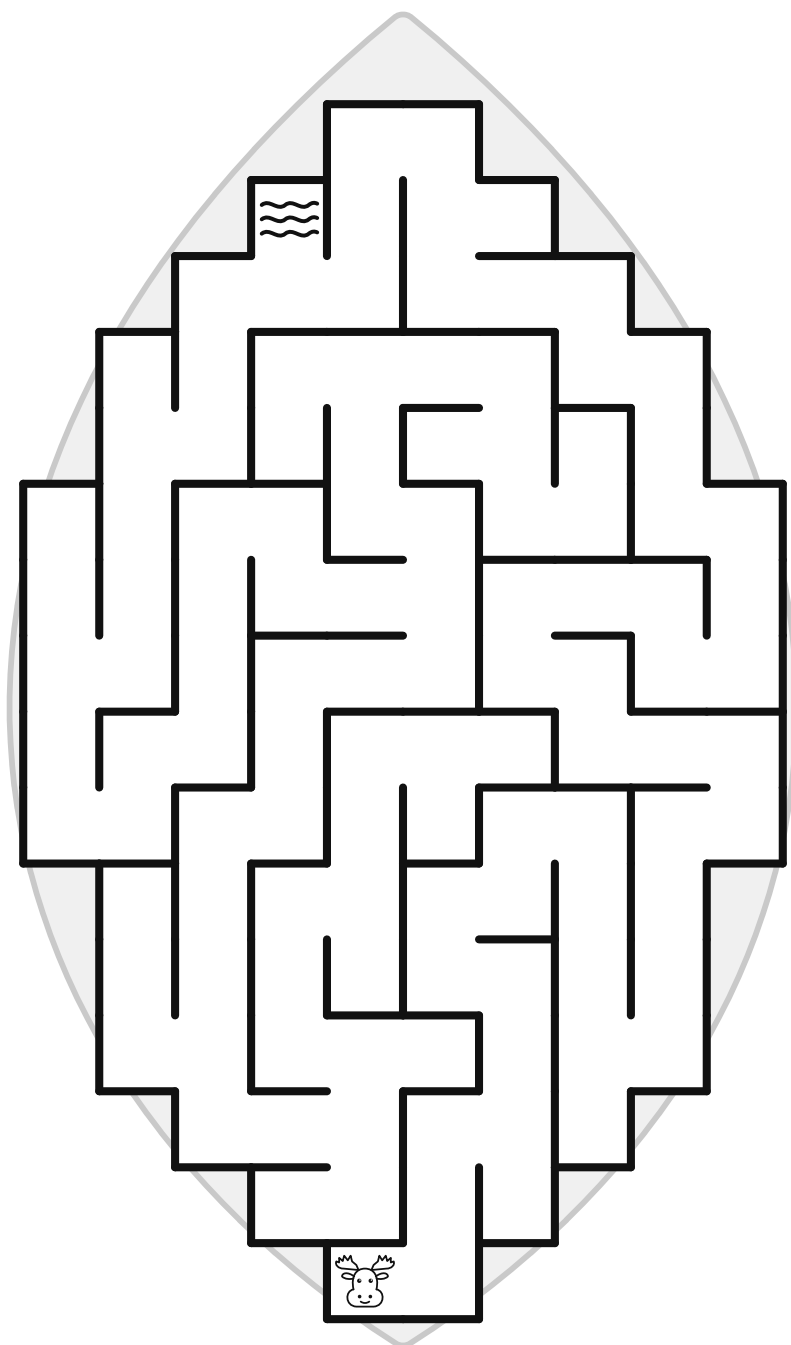


KEY



☆ To Whispering Water Way

Help Mr. Moose find the way to Whispering Water Way. Start at Mr. Moose.



 Read With Me

DRAW THE STORY

Is It a Sun?

 got a cup.

Dot, dot, dot!

Is it a sun? Is it a nut?

It is  !“It is fun!” said  .

PICTURE WORDS



Bruno



Benji



Color a star each time you read it.

♥ My Thank-You

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

Thank you.

for making my life better.

📖 What Happened First?

Write 1, 2, 3, 4 in the circles to put the story in order.

