

# The Great Rat Hunt



Video link at [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com)

Memoir by Laurence Yep

## When is it OK to be SCARED?

### COMMON CORE

**RI 3** Analyze how a text makes connections among individuals, ideas, and events. **RI 5** Analyze the structure of a text.

A spider. A roller coaster. A hurricane. We're all scared of something. Even so, it can be hard to admit to being afraid. If your friends think it's fun to jump off the high dive, you might not want them to know that heights frighten you. In the selection you are about to read, Laurence Yep tells about a time he tried to overcome his fear in order to impress his father.

**SURVEY** What scares you and your classmates? Find out by conducting an informal survey. On your own, jot down three or four of your fears. Then meet with a small group, combine your lists, and tally the results. Which fears are most common? Which surprised you? Create a list of the suggestions you think are most effective.

<i>What Scares You?</i>	
<i>Fears</i>	<i>Number of People</i>
1. Heights	
2. Thunder	
3. The dark	
4.	



### ● TEXT ANALYSIS: CONFLICT IN NONFICTION

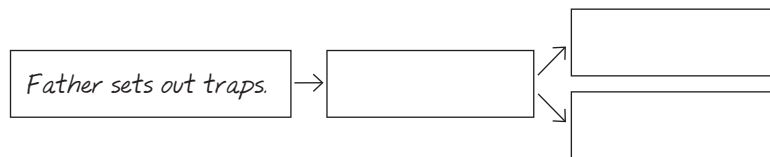
In the memoir you're about to read, Laurence Yep relates an event from his childhood. To tell this real-life story, he uses some of the same literary elements that appear in his award-winning fiction. For example, the narrative centers around **conflicts**, or struggles between opposing forces. As you read "The Great Rat Hunt," identify the conflicts the young Laurence Yep faces.

### ● READING SKILL: IDENTIFY CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Memoirs are often organized in **chronological order**, which means that events are presented in the order in which they happened. To make sure you know when each event occurs, follow these steps:

- Identify individual events taking place.
- Look for words and phrases that signal order, such as *before*, *after*, *first*, *next*, *then*, *while*, *the next day*, or *an hour and a half later*.

As you read, keep track of the chronology in a chart. Use parallel boxes when two actions occur at the same time.



### ▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The boldfaced words help Laurence Yep relate a story from his childhood. To see how many you know, substitute a different word or phrase for each one.

1. **barricade** the doorway
2. **rationalize** a bad habit
3. **wince** in pain
4. **perpetual** motion
5. an **improvised** comedy skit
6. known for his quiet **reserve**
7. **vigilant** watchdog
8. the **ravage** caused by the flood
9. embarrassed by my **ineptitude**
10. spoken to me **brusquely**

## Laurence Yep

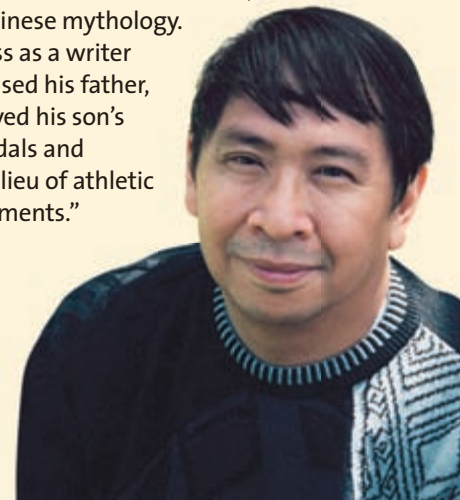
born 1948

### A Man of Accomplishment

Laurence Yep has said that he approaches American culture as "somewhat of a stranger." Born in San Francisco, California, Yep was always surrounded by people of various backgrounds, none quite like his own. He was raised in an African-American community and commuted to a bilingual school in Chinatown. There, his classmates teased him for not knowing Chinese. Yep began submitting his work to magazines when a high school English teacher made publishing a story a requirement for getting an A in the class. He became a published author at 18 and went on to publish dozens of stories, as well as earning a college degree and a PhD. Many of the main conflicts in his works involve feeling like an outsider.

### A Father's Pride

Yep's writing has gained him numerous awards, including more than ten for his book *Dragonwings*—a book that, like many of his more recent works, explores Chinese mythology. Yep's success as a writer greatly pleased his father, who displayed his son's writing medals and plaques "in lieu of athletic accomplishments."



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Authors Online



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# The Great Rat Hunt

Laurence Yep

I had asthma<sup>1</sup> when I was young, so I never got to play sports much with my father. While my brother and father practiced, I could only sit in bed, propped up by a stack of pillows. As I read my comic books, I heard them beneath our apartment window. In the summer, it was the thump of my brother's fastball into my father's mitt. In the fall, it was the smack of a football. In the winter, it was the airy bounce of a basketball.

Though my father had come from China when he was eight, he had taken quickly to American games. When he and Mother were young, they had had the same dances and sports leagues as their white schoolmates—but kept  
10 separate in Chinatown. (He had met Mother when she tripped him during a co-ed basketball game at the Chinatown Y.)

Father was big as a teenager and good at sports. In fact, a social club in Chinatown had hired him to play football against social clubs in other Chinatowns. There he was, a boy playing against grown men.

During a game in Watsonville, a part-time butcher had broken Father's nose. It never properly healed, leaving a big bump at the bridge. There were other injuries too from baseball, basketball, and tennis. Each bump and scar on his body had its own story, and each story was matched by a trophy or medal.

20 Though he now ran a grocery store in San Francisco, he tried to pass on his athletic skills to my older brother Eddy and me. During the times I felt well, I tried to keep up with them, but my lungs always failed me. **A**

## Analyze Visuals ▶

What can you **infer** about the relationship between the man and the boy in this painting?

### **A** CONFLICT

How does Yep's asthma affect his relationship with his father and brother?

1. **asthma** (ăz'mə): a lung disease that at times makes breathing difficult.



When I had to sit down on the curb, I felt as if I had let my father down. I'd glance up anxiously when I felt his shadow over me; but he looked neither angry nor disgusted—just puzzled, as if he could not understand why my lungs were not like his.

“S-s-sorry.” I panted.

“That’s okay.” He squatted and waved his hat, trying to fan more air at me.

In the background, Eddy played catch with himself, waiting impatiently for the lessons to begin again. Ashamed, I would gasp. “Go on . . . and play.”

And Father and Eddy would start once more while I watched, doomed to be positively un-American, a weakling, a **perpetual** spectator, an outsider. Worse, I felt as if Eddy were Father’s only true son. **B**

And then came the day when the rat invaded our store. It was Eddy who first noticed it while we were restocking the store shelves. I was stacking packages of pinto beans when Eddy called me. “Hey, do you know what this is?” He waved me over to the cans of soup. On his palm lay some dark drops. “Is it candy?”

Father came out of the storeroom in the rear of our store. Over his back, he carried a huge hundred pound sack of rice. He let it thump to the floor right away. “Throw that away.”

“What is it, Father?” I asked.

“Rat droppings,” he said. “Go wash your hands.”

“Yuck.” Eddy flung the droppings down.

While Eddy washed his hands, I helped Father get rid of the evidence. Then he got some wooden traps from a shelf and we set them out.

However, the traps were for mice and not for rats. The rat must have gotten a good laugh while it stole the bait and set off the springs. **C**

Then Father tried poison pellets, but the rat avoided them all. It even left a souvenir right near the front door.

Father looked grim as he cleaned it up. “I’m through fooling around.” **D**

So he called up his exterminator<sup>2</sup> friend, Pete Wong, the Cockroach King of Chinatown. While Pete fumigated<sup>3</sup> the store, we stayed with my Aunt Nancy over on Mason, where the cable cars kept me up late. They always rang their bells when they rounded the corner. Even when they weren’t there, I could hear the cable rattling in its channel beneath the street. It was OK, though, because my cousin Jackie could tell stories all night.

The next day, when we went back home, Father searched around the store, sniffing suspiciously for deadly chemicals. Mother went upstairs to our apartment over the store to get our electric fan. **E**

She came right back down empty-handed. “I think he’s moved up there. I could hear him scratching behind the living room walls.”

Father stared at the ceiling as if the rat had gone too far. “Leave it to me,” he said. He fished his car keys from his pocket.

**perpetual**  
(pər-pěch’ōō-əl) *adj.*  
continuing without interruption

**B CONFLICT**

Reread lines 28–33. Why does Yep feel “un-American” and “as if Eddy were Father’s only true son”?

**C CONFLICT**

What **external conflict** is the Yep family facing?

**D CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER**

Describe Father’s first two attempts to catch the rat. Add them to your chart.

**E CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER**

Reread lines 52–60. What words make clear the order in which events occurred? Add the events to your chart.

2. **exterminator** (ĭk-stŭr’mə-nā’tər): a person whose job it is to get rid of insects or rodents.

3. **fumigated** (fyōō’mĭ-gāt’d): used smoke or fumes to kill rodents or insects.

“Where are you going?” Mother asked.

Father, though, was a man of few words. He preferred to speak by his actions. “I’ll be back soon.”

An hour and a half later he returned with a rifle. He held it up for the three of us to examine. “Isn’t it a beaut? Henry Loo loaned it to me.” Henry Loo was  
70 a pharmacist and one of Father’s fishing buddies.

Mother frowned. “You can’t shoot that cannon off in my house.”

“It’s just a twenty-two.” Father tugged a box of cartridges out of his jacket pocket. “Let’s go, boys.”

Mother sucked in her breath sharply. “Thomas!”

Father was surprised by Mother’s objection. “They’ve got to learn sometime.”


Mother turned to us urgently. “It means killing. Like buying Grandpop’s chickens. But you’ll be the ones who have to make it dead.”

“It’s not the same,” Father argued. “We won’t have to twist its neck.”

80 Buying the chicken was a chore that everyone tried to avoid at New Year’s when Mother’s father insisted on it. To make sure the chicken was fresh, we had to watch the poulterer<sup>4</sup> kill it. And then we had to collect the coppery-smelling blood in a jar for a special dish that only Mother’s father would eat. For a moment, I felt queasy.

“You’re scaring the boys,” Father scolded her.

Mother glanced at him over her shoulder. “They ought to know what they’re getting into.”

 I didn’t believe in killing—unless it was a bug like a cockroach. However, I felt different when I saw a real rifle—the shiny barrel, the faint smell of oil,  
90 the decorated wooden stock. I **rationalized** the hunt by telling myself I was not murdering rabbits or deer, just a mean old rat—like a furry kind of cockroach.

“What’ll it be, boys?” Father asked.

Taking a deep breath, I nodded my head. “Yes, sir.”

Father turned expectantly to Eddy and raised an eyebrow.

From next to me, though, Eddy murmured, “I think I’ll help Mother.” He wouldn’t look at me.

Father seemed just as shocked as Mother and I. “Are you sure?”

Eddy drew back and mumbled miserably. “Yes, sir.”

100 Mother gave me a quick peck on the cheek. “I expect you to still have ten toes and ten fingers when you finish.”

As we left the store, I felt funny. Part of me felt triumphant. For once, it was Eddy who had failed and not me. And yet another part of me wished I were staying with him and Mother. **F**

Father said nothing as we left the store and climbed the back stairs. As I trailed him, I thought he was silent because he was disappointed: He would rather have Eddy’s help than mine.

## Language Coach

**Oral Fluency** When the letters *ph* appear at the beginning of a word, they combine to form an *f* sound, as in the word *pharmacist*. Reread lines 68–70, pronouncing *pharmacist* correctly.

## rationalize

(rāsh’ə-nə-līz’) *v.* to make explanations for one’s behavior

## **F** CONFLICT

Reread lines 88–103. Why is Yep torn between staying with his mother and going to help his father?

4. **poulterer** (pōl’tēr-ər): a person who sells domestic fowls, such as chickens, turkeys, ducks, or geese.

At the back door of our apartment, he paused and said **brusquely**, “Now for some rules. First, never, never aim the rifle at anyone.”

I listened as attentively as I had the disastrous times he’d tried to teach me how to dribble, or catch a football, or handle a pop foul. “I won’t.” I nodded earnestly.

Father pulled a lever near the middle of the gun. “Next, make sure the rifle is empty.” He let me inspect the breech.<sup>5</sup> There was nothing inside.

“Yes, sir,” I said and glanced up at him to read his mood. Because Father used so few words, he always sounded a little impatient whenever he taught me a lesson. However, it was hard to tell this time if it was genuine irritation or his normal **reserve**. **G**

He merely grunted. “Here. Open this.” And he handed me the box of cartridges.

120 I was so nervous that the cartridges clinked inside the box when I took it. As I fumbled at the lid, I almost felt like apologizing for not being Eddy.

Now, when I got edgy, I was the opposite of Father: I got talkier. “How did you learn how to hunt?” I asked. “From your father?”

My father rarely spoke of his father, who had died before I was born. He **winc**ed now as if the rat had just nipped him. “My old man? Nah. He never had the time. I learned from some of my buddies in Chinatown.”<sup>6</sup> He held out his hand.

I passed him a cartridge. “What did you hunt? Bear?”

“We shot quail.” Father carefully loaded the rifle.

130 I was uncomfortable with the idea of shooting the cute little birds I saw in cartoons. “You did?”

He clicked the cartridge into the rifle. “You have to be tough in this world, boy. There are going to be some times when nobody’s around to help—like when I first came to America.”

That was a long speech for Father. “You had your father.” His mother had stayed back in China, because in those days, America would not let her accompany her husband. **D**

“He was too busy working.” Father stared back down the stairs as if each step were a year. “When I first came here, I got beaten up by the white kids.

140 And when the white kids weren’t around, there were the other Chinese kids.”

I furrowed my forehead in puzzlement. I handed him another cartridge. “But they were your own kind.”

He loaded the rifle steadily as I gave him the ammunition. “No, they weren’t. The boys born here, they like to give a China-born a hard time. They thought I’d be easy pickings. But it was always a clean fight. No knives. No guns. Just our feet and fists. Not like the punks nowadays.” He snapped the last cartridge into the rifle. “Then I learned how to play their games, and I made them my friends.” He said the last part with pride. **H**

**brusquely** (brŭsk’lĕ) *adv.*  
in an abrupt, sudden  
manner

**reserve** (rĭ-zŭrv’) *n.* self-  
restraint in the way one  
looks or acts

### **G CONFLICT**

How does Yep think his  
father sees him?

**wince** (wĭns) *v.* to flinch  
or shrink in pain or  
distress

### **D GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT**

In lines 135–137,  
Lawrence Yep uses the  
**past perfect tense** when  
he writes “His mother  
had stayed back in  
China....”

### **H CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER**

What action is taking  
place at the same time  
the father is talking  
about his past?

5. **breech**: the part of a gun behind the barrel.

6. **Chinatown**: the name given to some neighborhoods in which there is a large Chinese population with prominent Chinese cultural influence.



And suddenly I began to understand all the trophies and medals in our  
150 living room. They were more than awards for sports. Each prize was a sign  
that my father belonged to America—and at the same time, to Chinatown.  
And that was why he tried so hard now to teach sports to Eddy and me.

When I finally understood what sports really meant to my father, it only  
magnified the scale of my **ineptitude**. “I’m not good at fighting.” As I closed  
the lid on the box of ammunition, I thought I ought to prepare him for future  
disappointments. “I’m not much good at anything.”

Careful to keep the rifle pointed away from me, Father unlocked the door.  
“I said you have to be tough, not stupid. No reason to get a beat-up old mug<sup>7</sup>  
like mine.”

160 I shook my head, bewildered. “What’s wrong with your face?”

Father seemed amused. He stepped away from the door and jerked his head  
for me to open it. “It’s nothing that a steamroller couldn’t fix.”

“But you have an interesting face,” I protested as I grabbed the doorknob.

“Are you blind, boy? This mug isn’t ever going to win a beauty contest.” He  
chuckled. “I’ve been called a lot of names in my time, but never ‘interesting.’  
You’ve got a way with words.”

### ▲ Analyze Visuals

How would you describe  
the **mood** of this  
painting? Tell what  
elements of the image  
contribute to the mood.

#### **ineptitude**

(ĭn-ĕp'tī-tōōd') *n.*  
clumsiness; lack of  
competence

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7. **mug**: face.



The doorknob was cold in my hand. “I do?”

Father adjusted his grip on the rifle. “I wouldn’t buy any real estate from you.” And he gave me an encouraging grin. “Now let’s kill that rat.”

170 When I opened the door, our home suddenly seemed as foreign to me as Africa. At first, I felt lonely—and a little scared. Then I heard Father reassure me, “I’m with you, boy.”

Feeling more confident, I crept through the kitchen and into the living room. Father was right behind me and motioned me to search one half of the room while he explored the other. When I found a hole in the corner away from the fireplace, I caught Father’s eye and pointed.

He peered under a chair with me and gave me an approving wink. “Give me a hand,” he whispered.

In silent cooperation, we moved the chair aside and then shifted the  
180 sofa over until it was between us and the rat hole. Bit by bit, Father and I constructed an upholstered **barricade**. I couldn’t have been prouder if we’d built a whole fort together.

Father considerably left the lighter things for me to lift, and I was grateful for his thoughtfulness. The last thing I wanted was to get asthma now from overexertion. When we were done, Father got his rifle from the corner where he had left it temporarily.

As we crouched down behind our **improvised** wall, Father rested the rifle on it. “We’ll take turns watching.”

190 “Yes, sir,” I said, peering over the barrier. There wasn’t so much as a whisker in the hole.

While I scanned the hole with intense radar eyes, Father tried to make himself comfortable by leaning against the sofa. It made me feel important to know Father trusted me; and I was determined to do well. In the center of the living room wall was the fireplace, and on its mantel stood Father’s trophies like ranks of soldiers reminding me to be **vigilant**.

We remained in companionable silence for maybe three quarters of an hour. Suddenly, I saw something flicker near the mouth of the hole. “Father,” I whispered. ❶

200 Father popped up alertly and took his rifle. Squeezing one eye shut, he sighted on the rat hole. His crouching body grew tense. “Right.” He adjusted his aim minutely. “Right. Take a breath,” he recited to himself. “Take up the slack. Squeeze the trigger.” Suddenly, he looked up, startled. “Where’d it go?”

As the gray shape darted forward, I could not control my panic. “It’s coming straight at us.”

The rifle barrel swung back and forth wildly as Father tried to aim. “Where?”

I thought I could see huge teeth and beady, violent eyes. The teeth were the size of daggers and the eyes were the size of baseballs, and they were getting bigger by the moment. It was the rat of all rats. “Shoot it!” I yelled.

**barricade** (bărr’ī-kād’) *n.*  
a structure that blocks passage

**improvised** (ĩm’prə-vīzd’) *adj.* to put together with little preparation or planning **improvise** *v.*

**vigilant** (vĩj’ə-lənt) *adj.*  
watchful; alert

### ❶ CONFLICT

Reread line 196. Compare the “companionable silence” Yep describes here with an earlier statement, “I thought he was silent because he was disappointed.” Why does Yep view the silence differently the second time?

210 “Where?” Father shouted desperately.  
My courage evaporated. All I could think of was escape. “It’s charging.”  
Springing to my feet, I darted from the room.  
“Oh, man,” Father said, and his footsteps pounded after me.  
In a blind panic, I bolted out of the apartment and down the back stairs and  
into the store. **J**  
“Get the SPCA<sup>8</sup>. I think the rat’s mad,” Father yelled as he slammed the  
door behind him.  
Mother took the rifle from him. “I’d be annoyed too if someone were trying  
to shoot me.”  
220 “No.” Father panted. “I mean it’s rabid.”<sup>9</sup> We could hear the rat scurrying  
above us in the living room. It sounded as if it were doing a victory dance.  
Mother made Father empty the rifle. “You return that to Henry Loo  
tomorrow,” she said. “We’ll learn to live with the rat.”  
As she stowed the rifle in the storeroom, Father tried to regather his dignity.  
“It may have fleas,” he called after her.  
Now that my panic was over, I suddenly became aware of the enormity of  
what I had done. Father had counted on me to help him, and yet I had run,  
leaving him to the **ravages** of that monster. I was worse than a failure. I was a  
coward. I had deserted Father right at the time he needed me most. I wouldn’t  
230 blame him if he kicked me out of his family.  
It took what little nerve I had left to look up at my father. At that moment,  
he seemed to tower over me, as grand and remote as a monument. “I’m sorry,”  
I said miserably.  
He drew his eyebrows together as he clinked the shells in his fist. “For  
what?”  
It made me feel even worse to have to explain in front of Eddy. “For  
running,” I said wretchedly.  
He chuckled as he dumped the cartridges into his shirt pocket. “Well, I ran  
too. Sometimes it’s smart to be scared.”  
240 “When were you ever scared?” I challenged him.  
He buttoned his pocket. “Plenty of times. Like when I came to America.  
They had to pry my fingers from the boat railing.”  
It was the first time I’d ever heard my father confess to that failing. “But  
you’re the best at everything.”  
“Nobody’s good at everything.” He gave his head a little shake as if the very  
notion puzzled him. “Each of us is good at some things and lousy at others.  
The trick is to find something that you’re good at.”  
I thought again of the mantel where all of Father’s sports trophies stood.  
Eddy gave every promise of collecting just as many, but I knew I would be  
250 lucky to win even one.  
“I’m lousy at sports,” I confessed.

## **J** CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

How much time do you think passes from when Yep and his father begin their rat hunt until they give up? Explain your reasoning.

**ravage** (rāv'ij) *n.* serious damage or destruction

## Language Coach

### Homophones

Homophones are words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings. The words *won* and *one* are homophones. Which of the two words is used in line 250? Tell what it means.

8. **SPCA**: Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

9. **rabid**: affected by the viral disease rabies.



His eyes flicked back and forth, as if my face were a book open for his inspection. He seemed surprised by what he read there.

Slowly his knees bent until we were looking eye to eye. “Then you’ll find something else,” he said and put his arm around me. My father never let people touch him. In fact, I hardly ever saw him hug Mother. As his arm tightened, I felt a real love and assurance in that embrace. **K**

**S**hortly after that, the rat left as mysteriously as it had come. “I must’ve scared it off,” Father announced.

260 Mother shook her head. “That rat laughed itself to death.”

Father disappeared into the storeroom: and for a moment we all thought Mother had gone too far. Then we heard the electric saw that he kept back there. “What are you doing?” Mother called.

He came back out with a block of wood about two inches square. He was carefully sandpapering the splinters from the edges. “Maybe some day we’ll find the corpse. Its head ought to look real good over the fireplace.”

Mother was trying hard to keep a straight face. “You can’t have a trophy head unless you shoot it.”

“If it died of laughter like you said, then I killed it,” he insisted proudly.

270 “Sure as if I pulled the trigger.” He winked at me. “Get the varnish out for our trophy will you?”

I was walking away when I realized he had said “our.” I turned and said, “That rat was doomed from the start.” I heard my parents both laughing as I hurried away. **~**

**K CONFLICT**

How has Yep’s relationship with his father changed since the beginning of the story?

## Comprehension

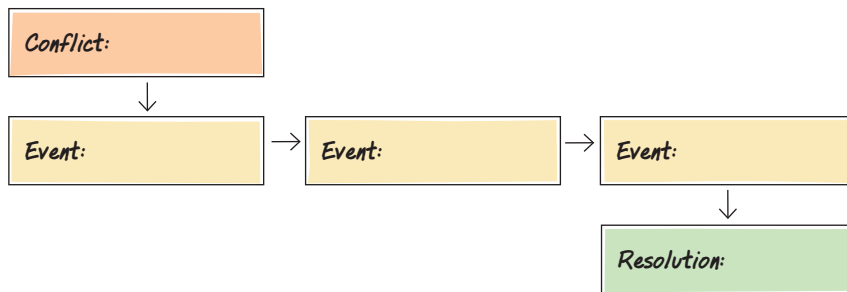
1. **Recall** How do Laurence and his brother differ?
2. **Recall** What compliment does Laurence’s father give him?
3. **Clarify** What happens to the rat at the end of the selection?



**RI 3** Analyze how a text makes connections among individuals, ideas, and events. **RI 5** Analyze the structure of a text.

## Text Analysis

4. **Identify Chronological Order** Review the chart you made as you read. Does it contain all the important events of the selection? If not, add them now. Then use your chart to tell what happened right before Father ran out of the apartment. What happened right after?
5. **Examine Conflict** In a conflict map like the one shown, note one of the selection’s most important conflicts and the events that lead to its **resolution**, or outcome.



6. **Analyze Characters** Even though Yep was scared, he still agreed to help his father capture the rat. What do you learn about Yep from his actions?
7. **Compare and Contrast** Compare Yep’s feelings about his role in the family in the beginning of the selection with his feelings at the end. How are they different?
8. **Interpret Meaning** Reread lines 270–271. What do you think it means that Yep’s father uses the word “our” to refer to the trophy?

## Extension and Challenge

9. **Creative Project: Drama** With two other classmates, rehearse a dramatic reading of the rat-hunt scene. Have one student play the role of Father, one student play the role of Yep, and one student act as the narrator. Perform your reading for the class.

### When is it OK to be SCARED?

Yep’s father says, “Sometimes it’s smart to be scared.” Do you think the encounter with the rat was one of those times, or is Yep’s father just trying to make himself and his son feel better? Explain your answer.

# Vocabulary in Context

## ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

For each item, choose the word that differs most in meaning from the other words.

1. (a) justify, (b) rationalize, (c) multiply, (d) explain
2. (a) improvised, (b) ad-libbed, (c) invented, (d) practiced
3. (a) openness, (b) modesty, (c) reserve, (d) coolness
4. (a) destruction, (b) ravage, (c) construction, (d) ruin
5. (a) keen, (b) inattentive, (c) observant, (d) vigilant
6. (a) ineptitude, (b) awkwardness, (c) incompetence, (d) gracefulness
7. (a) finite, (b) infinite, (c) constant, (d) perpetual
8. (a) abruptly, (b) gruffly, (c) brusquely, (d) kindly
9. (a) walkway, (b) barricade, (c) fence, (d) obstruction
10. (a) flinch, (b) wince, (c) strut, (d) cringe



## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

- affect
- conclude
- evident
- imply
- initial

Reread lines 132–159. What do Yep’s father’s words **imply** about what it means to be tough? Discuss the question with a small group. Together, arrive at an answer that uses at least one Academic Vocabulary word.

## VOCABULARY STRATEGY: CONTEXT CLUES

Context clues are words and phrases in a text that suggest the definition of an unfamiliar word. For example, an author might restate or define an unfamiliar word, as in this sentence: *It was a farcical, ridiculous idea.* An author might also compare an unfamiliar word to something that is familiar: *The workers were as expendable as week-old newspaper.*

**PRACTICE** Use context clues in each sentence to help you determine the meaning of the underlined word.

1. The iridescent tail feathers spread like a rainbow behind the bird’s back.
2. He jostled the other passengers, pushing them aside as he moved toward the door.
3. Her azure eyes sparkled like bits of cloudless sky.
4. She was contrite, sorry for all the trouble she had caused.

## COMMON CORE

**L4a** Use context (e.g., a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word.

**L5b** Use the relationship between words to better understand each of the words.

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## Language

### ◆ GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: Use Past Perfect Tense Correctly

The tense of a verb indicates the time of the action or the state of being. There are six verb tenses, each expressing a range of time.

The **past perfect tense** shows that an action or condition in the past came before another past action or condition. For an example of how Laurence Yep uses the past perfect tense to make the order of events clear, review the **Grammar in Context** note on page 128. For another example of the past perfect tense, see the sentence below:

*Example:* She had decided not to go, so he sailed without her.

To form the past perfect tense, combine the verb *had* with the past participle.

Past Perfect	Singular	Plural
had+past participle	I had left you had left he/she/it had left	we had left you had left they had left laughing.

**PRACTICE** For each sentence, make the order of events as clear as possible by choosing the best tense of the verb in parentheses.

1. Before she left, she (wrote, had written) to her cousins so they knew she was coming.
2. His first year in the United States, he (wants, had wanted) to avoid trouble.
3. By the time he started high school, he (became, had become) a highly respected athlete.
4. Now that he is a father, he (encourages, had encouraged) his sons to play a variety of sports.
5. They (felt, had felt) happy when they had pleased him.

For more help with verb tenses, see page R56 in the **Grammar Handbook**.

### READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Broaden your understanding of “The Great Rat Hunt” by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

#### WRITING PROMPT

##### Extended Constructed Response: Comparison

Both Laurence Yep and his father felt like outsiders. In **two or three paragraphs**, compare their experiences, including the conflicts each person faced and how he dealt with them.

#### REVISING TIP

Review your work. Make sure you have used past perfect tense to describe any past actions or conditions that come before other past actions or conditions.

### COMMON CORE

L1 Demonstrate command of standard English grammar when writing. W2 Write explanatory texts.

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