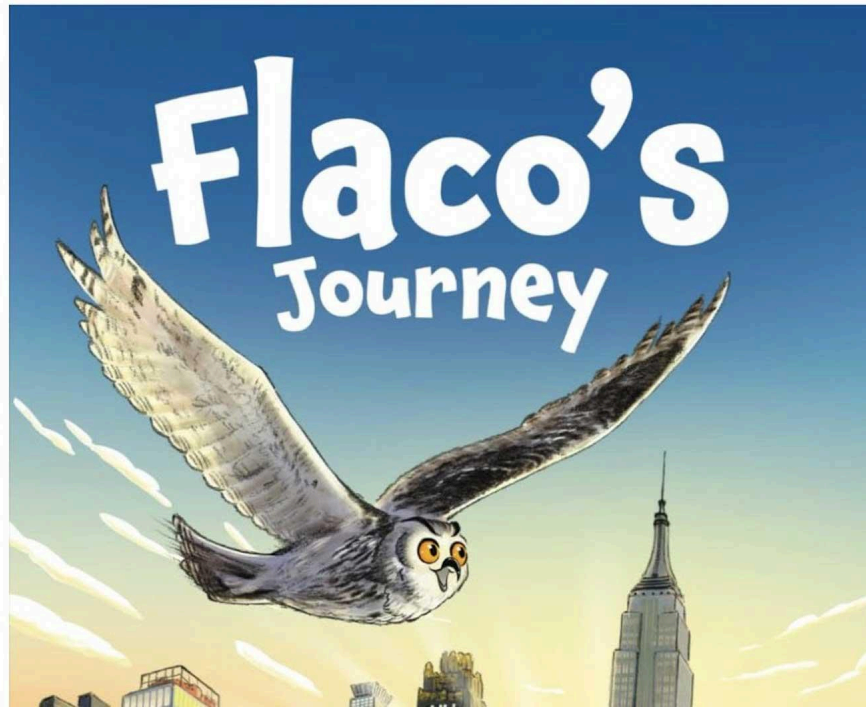




Flaco's Journey Gr. 5

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****FLACO'S JOURNEY by Kathleen Conklin****

****PROLOGUE****

High on a rocky cliff, way above the forest, an egg sat in a nest. As the sun came up, the egg started to crack. Inside, a baby owl, called an owlet, smelled the air and lifted its head.

He didn't know that his life would make millions of people feel inspired 13 years later.

When he opened his eyes, he saw his new world all around: tall pine trees and sunny fields. The air smelled like pine. Far away, he saw a big blue lake.

His mother came back with food and fed him until he was full. Then he snuggled into the nest to sleep. Everything was perfect.

Every day, he got stronger, and his wings grew bigger. One day, his mother showed him how to fly. He was so excited! He loved the feeling of the air under his wings. He felt so alive!

Every night, his mother went hunting. She would fly high above the forest and quickly swoop down to catch food in the fields. He wanted to hunt on his own someday, and he hoped it would be soon. But someone else had different plans.

One day, he woke up to strange noises. Two-legged animals were climbing up the cliff toward the nest. He looked at his mother. She had seen these animals before and wasn't worried.

She didn't know what they were going to do until it was too late. They appeared suddenly. She spread her big wings to look bigger, but they didn't come for her.

As she made a loud screech and flapped her wings, one of the animals held her back while the other threw a net over her son.

The animals ran down the mountain with the owlet. His mother tried to stop them with her wings and claws, but they got to their van, put the owlet in a cage, and drove away.

Hours later, the van stopped. The animals put his cage into a big truck filled with cages of other eagle owls. Right away, he started asking them questions. How long had they been in the truck? Where were they going? All they could tell him was that some cages were taken out... and never came back.

The owlet missed his mother. He remembered flying with her just yesterday. He was afraid he would never feel that way again. He was given food, but it wasn't the kind he was used to. Instead, he got dry seeds that didn't taste good. He worried more each day.

The next day, the truck stopped at a place that looked nothing like where he came from. He saw huge buildings taller than any pine tree. As they took his cage from the truck, he wondered if any other owls were coming with him. Would they be allowed to live near each other so they could hunt, sleep, and find friends? And most importantly, would he ever fly again? Would he ever feel that amazing feeling of flying on his powerful wings? He felt a little bit of hope.

The animals talked and laughed, shaking hands. They passed green papers back and forth.

Then, he was put in a bigger cage.

He was now the first and only Eurasian Eagle Owl in the New York City Central Park Zoo. The other eagle owls went to other zoos. The zoo workers called him Flaco, which means "skinny" in Spanish, because he was the smallest one.

****THE CENTRAL PARK ZOO****

Even though he missed his mother a lot, he tried to get used to his new home. But the cage was too small for him to fly. Why did the animals get to decide where he lived? This wasn't his home. There were no pine trees, no ocean view, and no way to fly high above the trees. All he could do was hop onto fake branches that looked like a tree.

He had many visitors. Some would hoot at him, hoping he would hoot back. They waved at him and called out "Flacoooooooo!" They took pictures. But he was awake at night, so he wanted to sleep. He could hear other birds nearby, but none of them were eagle owls. It made him sad. Every day, he dreamed of escaping, but he didn't know how.

Every day, he would jump from his fake branch and try to fly, but he would hit the top of the cage and fall to the ground. There just wasn't enough room. He dreamed of flying fast through the air. He wanted that back. If he couldn't go back home, he just wanted to fly away, out of his cage, over the tall buildings, and all the way to the blue ocean.

****NIGHT VISITORS****

****ROY****

Roy was a big man. Even though he was old, he looked strong with his wide shoulders, long arms, and big hands.

He had lived in Maine his whole life. He loved to watch the animals. He loved the hawks and eagles and could tell what kind they were by the sounds they made.

He loved watching the bald eagles fly over the river and swoop down to catch fish for dinner.

The old man was sick. His family wanted him to come home to New York City so they could take care of him. He thought he would stay for two weeks and then go back home. He just wanted to go back to his old home.

So, he went to the only place that reminded him of home: Central Park. Going to the zoo became the best part of his day. It made him feel calm to be with the birds. But Maine was his home, and he wanted to go back.

He found a bench near Flaco's cage.

Roy had heard that Flaco was at least 13 years old. That was a long life for an eagle owl. Usually, they only live for six or seven years. But because Flaco had lived in a cage with no enemies and plenty of food, he had lived much longer.

So the cage gave him a long life. But was it a good life? Roy was sad that the cages weren't big enough. Flaco kept trying to fly, but he kept hitting the top of the cage.

The old man knew how he felt. He wanted to escape too.

****JENNY****

Every day before the zoo closed, a young woman came to visit Flaco. She sat on a bench nearby for about an hour. Roy wondered why she was there.

The next day, Roy was sitting on his bench, and the woman came and sat next to him. "Hi! I'm Jenny. Nice to meet you!"

Roy took off his hat and said his name. When she took off her hat, he saw that she didn't have any hair either. It seemed like they had more in common than just the bench and Flaco.

One afternoon, Jenny sat on the other side of the bench next to Roy. She said, "I used to work in there. When I got sick, they let me go." She shrugged. "They don't take very good care of their birds or their workers."

"But why are you here, then?" Roy asked.

"It's Flaco," she said. "I'm worried about him."

"I am too," Roy said. "He's not trying to fly anymore. He's just hopping from one branch to another."

"He doesn't have any energy, like he's lost all hope," Jenny added.

For the next few days, they talked about Flaco and how he was different from the other birds. Roy knew so much about birds! Jenny was amazed as he described Maine and watching birds in the wild.

She understood why Roy loved it. He was watching them in their real homes, instead of in a zoo.

Roy said he knew why Flaco was unhappy. He said it made sense that Flaco had lost his hope to fly. Roy also couldn't do things since he got sick. But he didn't tell Jenny that, because he didn't want her to lose hope in getting better. He was old and had enjoyed his life. She hadn't had one yet.

"What can we do for him?" she asked. "He's lost his will to live!"

Roy pointed at the cage. "He's a bird! He wants to fly."

****THE PLAN****

The next day, they were sitting quietly when Roy said, "Jenny, I don't want to lose you, but I'm leaving after this weekend."

She sighed. "I'm going to miss you, Roy," she said.

Then, after a few minutes, she said, "I've been thinking about something, but I don't know how to ask."

Roy nodded. "Okay," he said. "Tell me."

Jenny said, "I want to ask you to do me a favor before you go. I know you're good with tools. I was hoping you'd... well, I want us to give Flaco his freedom. I'm too short to climb over the fence and cut the top of the cage, but that wouldn't be a problem for you."

"We'd be breaking the law, though, right?" Roy said.

"Come on, Roy," she said, raising her eyebrows.

He smiled. "It would be pretty easy. I'd love to help give Flaco his freedom back!"

The next day, Roy went out to buy supplies. He bought a strong rope and a wire cutter to cut through the cage. Back at the bench, he and Jenny talked about their plan.

The zoo closed at 5:00 p.m. Jenny would buy a ticket 30 minutes before and then go to the Tropical Section. There were security cameras in the zoo, but Jenny knew where they all were. The Tropical Section was the best place to hide because there were plants to hide behind. They would

try for 8:00 p.m. that night.

Jenny bought her ticket, went to the Tropical Section, and found her spot. After all the zoo workers had gone home, she used her phone light to find the wall near Flaco's cage. "Roy?" For a minute, she didn't hear anything. Then, she heard, "Over here."

He threw the rope over the high wall, and she grabbed it. Before he threw it, he had tied it to a tree near their bench. They would climb out using the rope and pull it back over the wall after they were done.

As Roy climbed over the wall, Flaco started to hoot. Jenny hurried to his cage, hoping to calm him down. She took a deep breath and sang a song her mom used to sing to her. She wanted Flaco to feel safe. In the dark, his orange eyes were bright.

Roy and Jenny looked at each other nervously. Could they do this? Flaco was getting more and more upset, so Roy took out some raw meat for him. Flaco started eating it right away, and Roy went back to work.

He stepped on a box he had brought and could just reach the top of the cage. It was easy to cut, but he felt angry. How could people treat animals so badly? He started ripping and tearing at the cage that had kept Flaco locked up for 13 years.

Flaco hopped up on the highest branch and watched. The food had been good! Was he finally going to get his chance to fly? It had been so long since he had flown that he wasn't sure he could. His heart beat faster and faster. He felt excited.

Could this really be happening? Roy moved away from the hole he had made. Flaco jumped up and stood on the outside of his cage for the first time in 13 years. He looked around in wonder. Roy and Jenny hoped he would try to fly.

Then the wind blew into his face, and he lifted his wings. He FLEW! Right out of the cage he had been forced to live in for almost his whole life.

His wings were tired, and his muscles were weak. But even though he looked unsure, he felt happy. He flew into the night air.

With every flap of his wings, he found the wind and flew with excitement. He flew above the buildings and saw the blue ocean in the distance.

He had finally found his hope.

****EPILOGUE****

Everyone heard about Flaco's escape. People were worried about him. He had never hunted on his own. Would he be able to survive?

Many people started following his travels online, hoping he would survive.

Zoo workers called the people who had cut the cage "vandals." They wanted them to be punished.

No one said they did it.

Roy went back to Maine and died a month later. He was happy because he heard that Flaco was still flying, hunting, and surviving.

Soon after Roy died, Jenny got a letter from his lawyer. Roy had left his house to her. Once she was better, she moved to Maine and became a bird watcher.

Flaco stayed in the city.

He learned to fly well again, and even though his mother had never taught him to hunt, he learned on his own. In a city with so many people, he found food everywhere. He lived mostly in Central Park and could often be seen in the tree near the bench where Roy and Jenny made their plan to set him free.

The zookeepers tried to catch him, but they never could. Finally, they gave up.

Flaco became a fun thing to see for the people who lived and worked in the city.

Bird watchers and other people kept track of him, posting pictures online. These posts became more and more popular because people thought his story was inspiring.

As time went on, he flew out of the park and into the city. He even flew over the ocean.

He sometimes landed on windowsills and looked in at people eating dinner.

Photographers took pictures of him on top of a water tower, hooting to people below, or near a baseball field, hunting for mice.

People went to the park every day to see him sleeping in the sunlight in his tree. He became a symbol for the city. He showed hope, determination, and joy to people who admired those things. The city, and even the whole world, wanted him to live and be free.

Flaco died 13 months after he escaped. But he spent that time happy and flying. His death made everyone sad.

He won't be forgotten soon.

Reading Summary

- Flaco, a Eurasian Eagle Owl, was taken from his nest and put in the Central Park Zoo in New York City.
- Roy and Jenny, two people who visited Flaco, helped him escape from his cage so he could be free.
- Flaco lived in the city for 13 months, flying around and becoming a symbol of hope for many people.

Vocabulary

Term	Definition	Example Sentence
prologue (noun)	An introduction or beginning of a story.	The prologue of the book tells you a little bit about what the story will be about.
Eurasian (adjective)	Relating to both Europe and Asia.	A Eurasian Eagle Owl is a type of owl that lives in Europe and Asia.
vandals (noun)	People who destroy or damage property on purpose.	The vandals broke the windows of the school building.
epilogue (noun)	A section or speech at the end of a book or play that serves as a comment on or a conclusion to what has happened.	The epilogue of the story told what happened to the characters later in their lives.
determination (noun)	The quality of deciding to do something and not letting anything stop you.	She showed great determination when she kept practicing the piano even when it was hard.

Multiple Choice Questions

Question #1	Question #2	Question #3
In the passage, the author uses the phrase "He became a symbol for the city." What does this phrase imply about Flaco after his escape?	The word "vandals" is used to describe Roy and Jenny after they freed Flaco. How does the author's use of this word contribute to the mood or tone of the passage?	Which sentence from the text most vividly supports the theme of freedom and hope?
A. Flaco represented hope, determination, and joy for the people of the city. B. Flaco was used in advertisements to attract tourists to the city. C. Flaco was featured on the city's flag and official seal. D. Flaco was given a key to the city by the mayor.	A. It establishes a lighthearted and humorous tone, suggesting that the author does not take their actions seriously. B. It creates a suspenseful mood, making the reader wonder if Roy and Jenny will be caught. C. It establishes a tone of admiration, suggesting that the author agrees with their actions. D. It creates a sense of conflict, highlighting the differing viewpoints on whether freeing Flaco was right or wrong.	A. With every flap of his wings, he found the wind and flew with excitement. B. He had many visitors. Some would hoot at him, hoping he would hoot back. C. The zoo workers called him Flaco, which means 'skinny' in Spanish, because he was the smallest one. D. He was now the first and only Eurasian Eagle Owl in the New York City Central Park Zoo.

Question #4	Question #5	Question #6
Which specific detail from the text most convincingly supports the argument that Roy and Jenny were determined to help Flaco?	Which of the following statements best represents the main idea of the text?	How do the key details in the text contribute to our understanding of the main idea that freedom and hope are essential for well-being?
A. Every day before the zoo closed, a young woman came to visit Flaco. B. Roy was a big man. Even though he was old, he looked strong with his wide shoulders, long arms, and big hands. C. Roy went out to buy supplies. He bought a strong rope and a wire cutter to cut through the cage. D. Roy had heard that Flaco was at least 13 years old.	A. Flaco's story demonstrates the universal desire for freedom and the inspiring impact of hope and determination, even in unexpected circumstances. B. The Central Park Zoo is a place where animals are kept safe from harm, but they often miss their natural habitats. C. Eurasian Eagle Owls are fascinating creatures that can adapt to living in urban environments if given the chance. D. Roy and Jenny's friendship was based on their shared love for animals and their desire to break the law.	A. They show how Flaco's initial captivity led to despair, but his eventual escape and adaptation brought him happiness and inspired others. B. They describe the physical characteristics of Eurasian Eagle Owls and their hunting habits. C. They highlight the differences between Flaco's life in the zoo and the lives of birds in Maine, as described by Roy. D. They emphasize the legal consequences faced by Roy and Jenny for their actions.

Short Answer Questions

Question #1	In the passage, the author uses the phrase "He became a symbol for the city." What does this phrase suggest about how the people of New York City viewed Flaco after his escape from the zoo?
Question #2	The author uses the word "vandals" to describe Roy and Jenny. How does this word choice affect the reader's understanding of the zoo workers' perspective on their actions?
Question #3	The passage states, "He became a symbol for the city. He showed hope, determination, and joy to people who admired those things." How does this quote encapsulate Flaco's impact on the people of New York City, and what does it suggest about the city's values?

Question #4	The zookeepers tried to catch Flaco after his escape, but "Finally, they gave up." What can you infer about the zookeepers' motivations and the public's reaction to Flaco's freedom, based on this quote and other details in the passage?
Question #5	The author states that Flaco's story was inspiring. How does the evidence provided in the epilogue, such as people posting pictures online and the city viewing him as a symbol, strengthen the author's point about Flaco's impact on the city?
Question #6	The author presents Roy and Jenny's actions as both illegal and compassionate. What reasons does the author give for their decision to free Flaco, and how do these reasons contribute to the overall argument about the importance of freedom for animals?

Open Ended Questions

Question #1

Flaco dreamed of flying and escaping his cage. What is something you dream of doing, and what steps can you take to make it happen?

Question #2

Roy and Jenny helped Flaco because they felt he deserved to be free. Have you ever helped someone or something in need? How did it make you feel?

Question #3

Flaco became a symbol of hope and determination for the city. What does hope mean to you, and how can you show determination in your own life?
