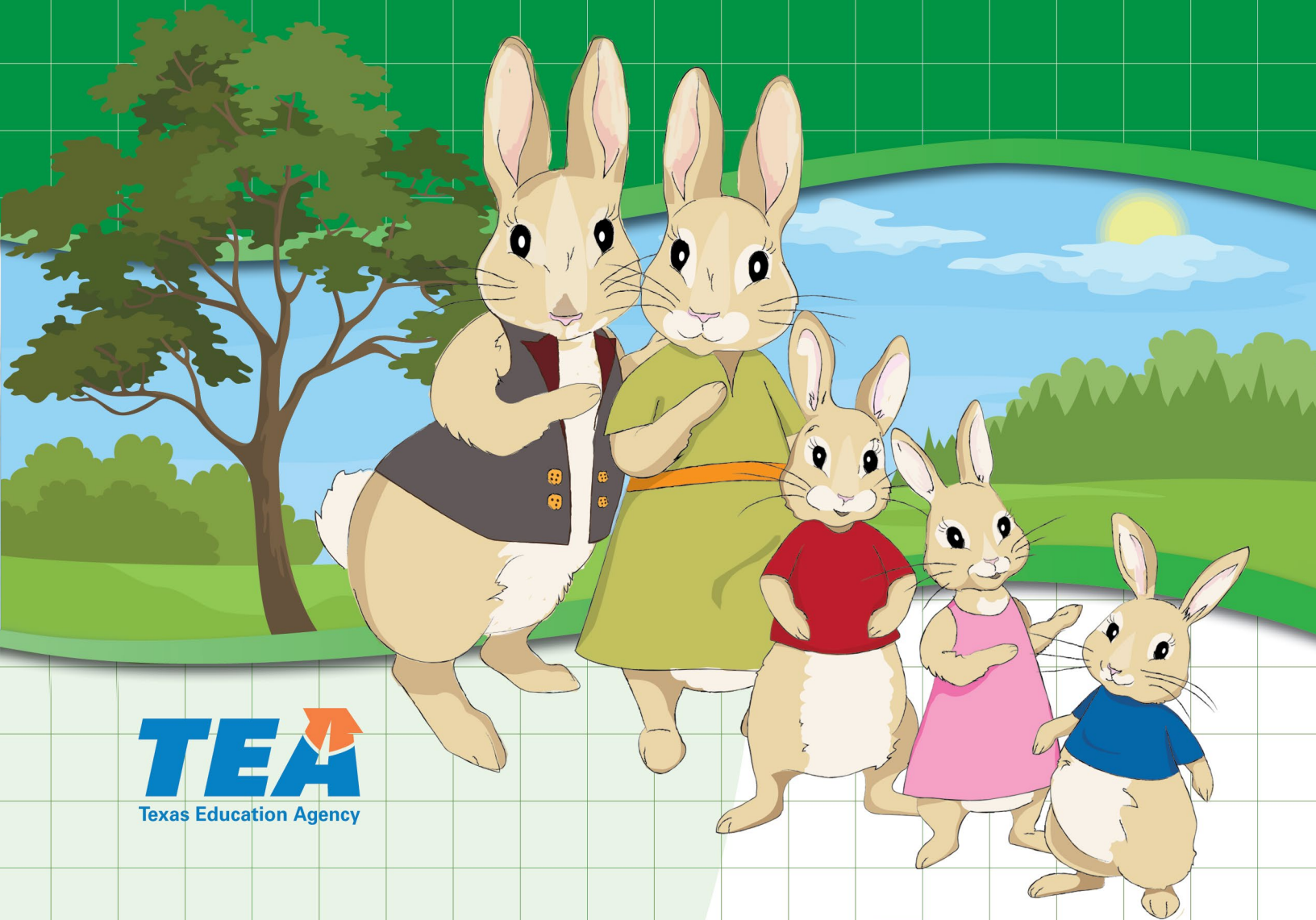
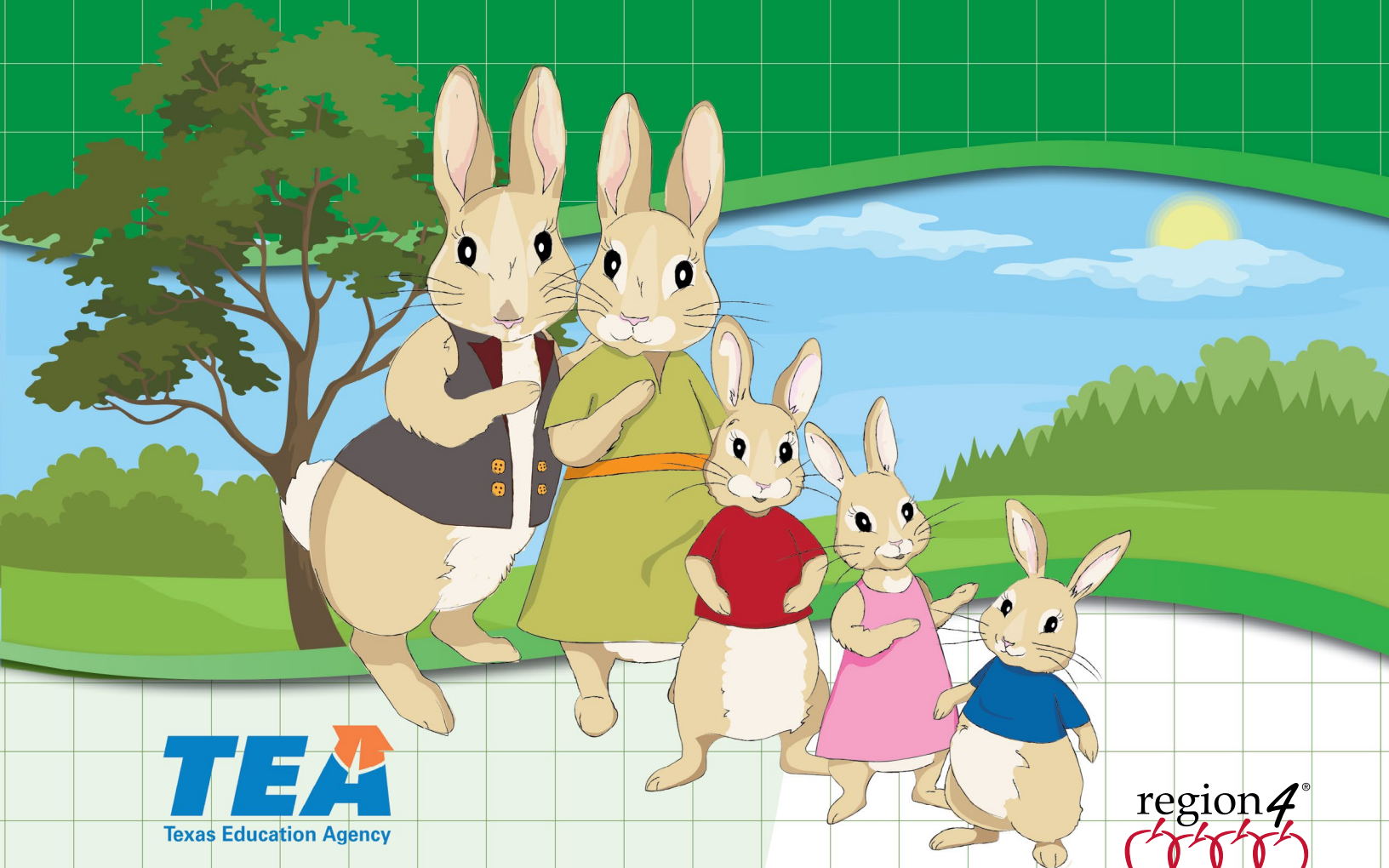


# Home Sweet Home





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This book was developed in collaboration with Region 4 Education Service Center, Houston, Texas.

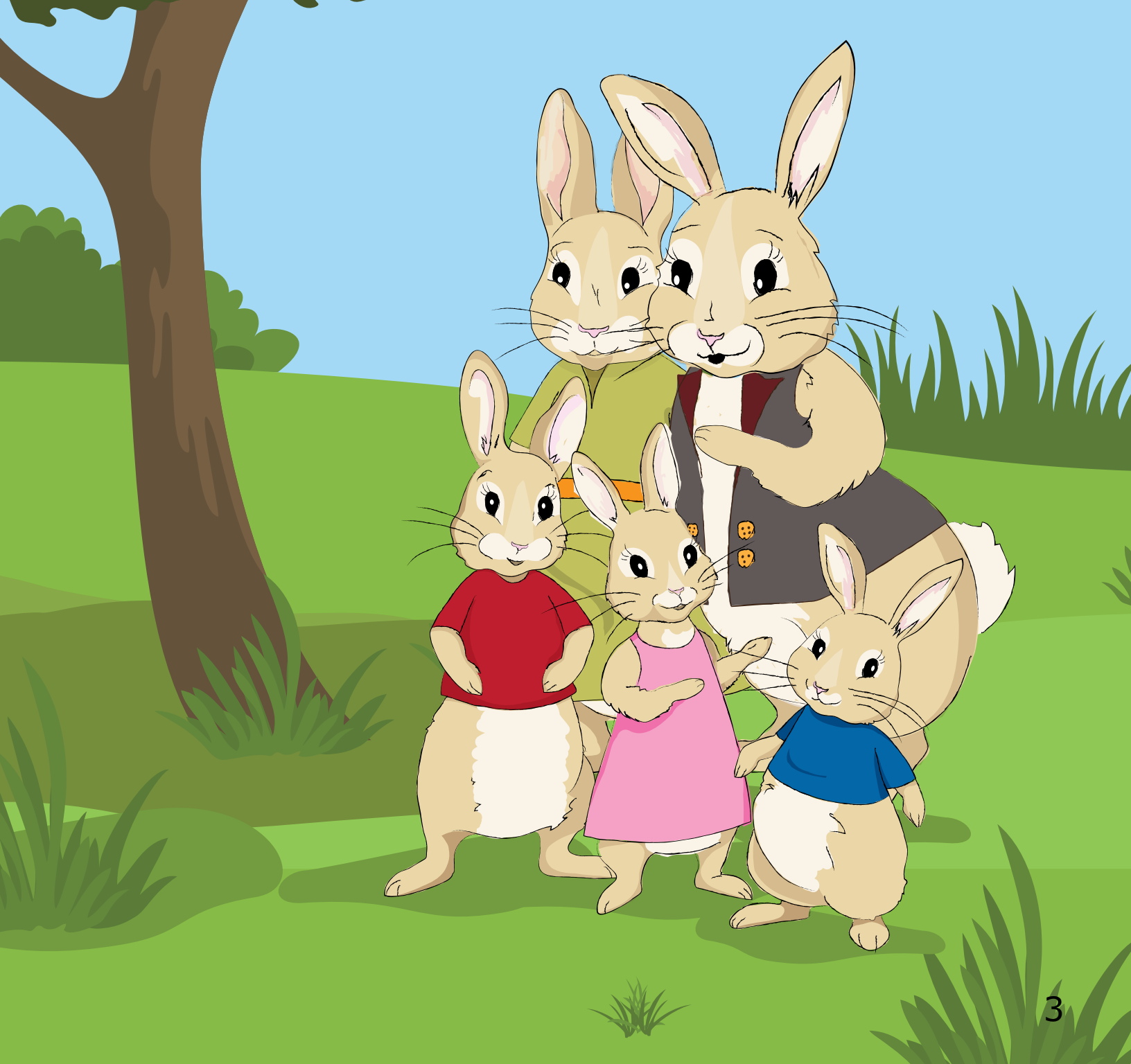
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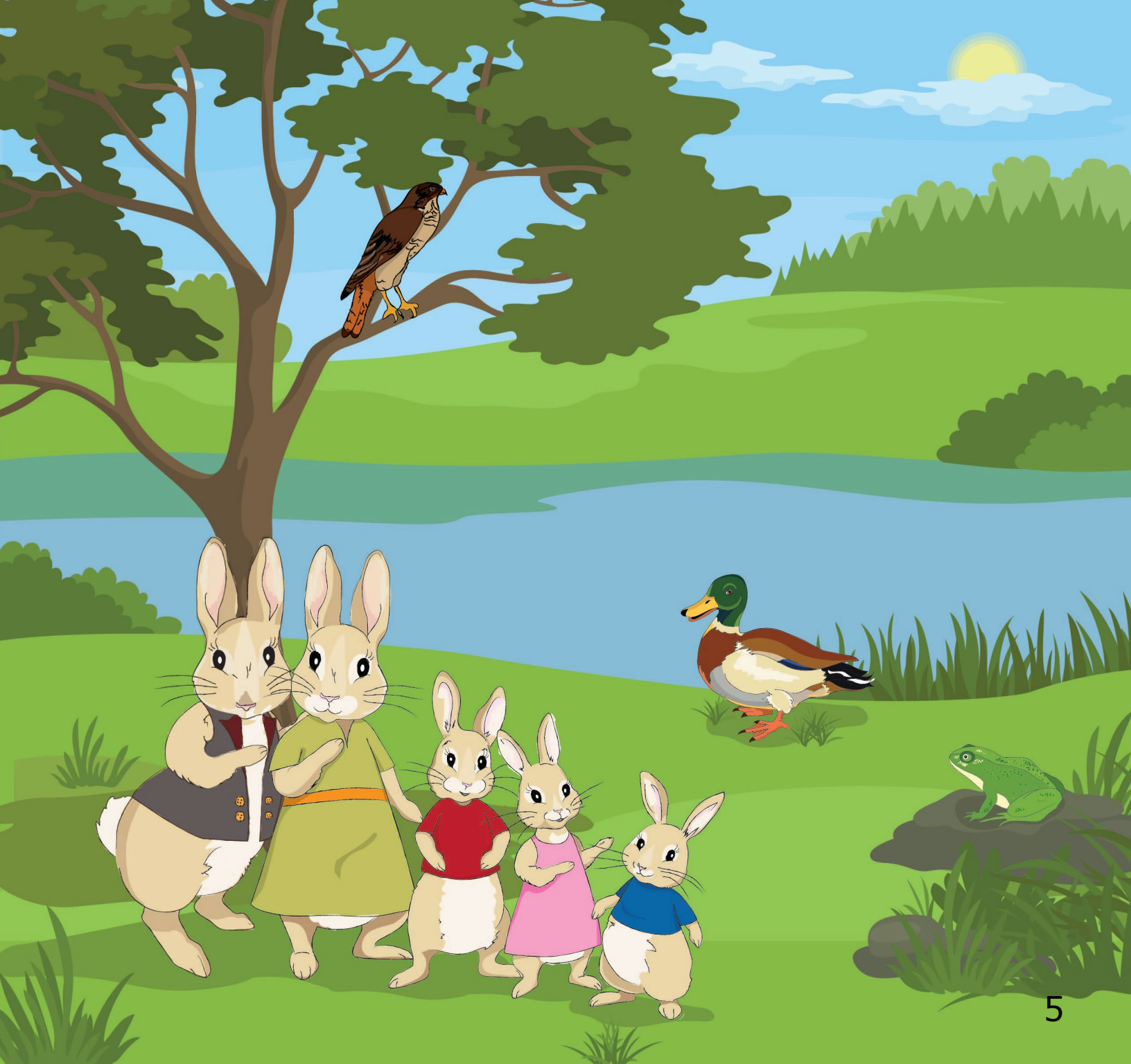
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In a lovely meadow next to a neighboring forest and pond, there lives a family of rabbits. The family includes Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit and their three children, Gustaf, Cedric, and Lily. The meadow is a perfect place for the Rabbits and the other families who live in the community. In fact, the meadow ecosystem is everyone's favorite place to live because it perfectly meets the needs of every organism that lives there.





The Rabbit family especially loves specific characteristics of their home environment. The soil is perfect for digging the dens and tunnels that they call home. An abundance of tender grasses, plants, and flowering buds are available to nibble on, and the pond nearby provides the Rabbit children a *thirst-quenching* sip when their throats are *parched*. Also, there are bushes to hide under and trees to provide shade on sunny days.

The Rabbits have interesting neighbors in their community, too. The Bullfrog family lives by the pond and is part of the larger frog population in the environment. The Bullfrogs raise their tadpoles in the pond water, where they all become excellent swimmers. The Bullfrogs share the pond with the Ducks, who swim around looking for insects and plant roots to eat. There are other families of different populations in and around the pond, including fish and insects.





Nearby, the Hawk family lives in the high branches of the oak trees on the edge of the meadow. The hawks enjoy their tree-top view because it helps them in their hunt for food. The Oak tree family is one of the oldest members of the community. Why, they've been here for decades! Each family in the meadow environment is part of the larger population of plants and animals that makes up the community of organisms in the ecosystem.





It is this *thriving* community of different populations of living organisms that inspires Mr. Rabbit to think it is getting a little crowded. He thinks to himself, "My family is a growing family. Pretty soon we'll need more space. I wonder if there is an environment that better suits our needs?"



So one day, Mr. Rabbit turns to his wife and proclaims, "Mrs. Rabbit, it's wonderful here, but I think it's a bit crowded. It's time we relocate to a new community that has more space for our family to grow." Mrs. Rabbit is shocked, of course, because she had been thinking the very same thing. After a short conversation, they decide to call on their friendly real estate agent, Myrna the mole.

Even though you wouldn't think it (because moles live underground and have limited vision), Myrna is the best agent around. Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit explain to Myrna that they want to see homes in other environments that offer more space as part of the ecosystem move-in package.

Myrna explains, "There's a whole world out there that offers plenty of space and a wide variety of resources. How about if I take you to this beautiful location I know, and you can decide if the environment fits you and you fit the environment?"



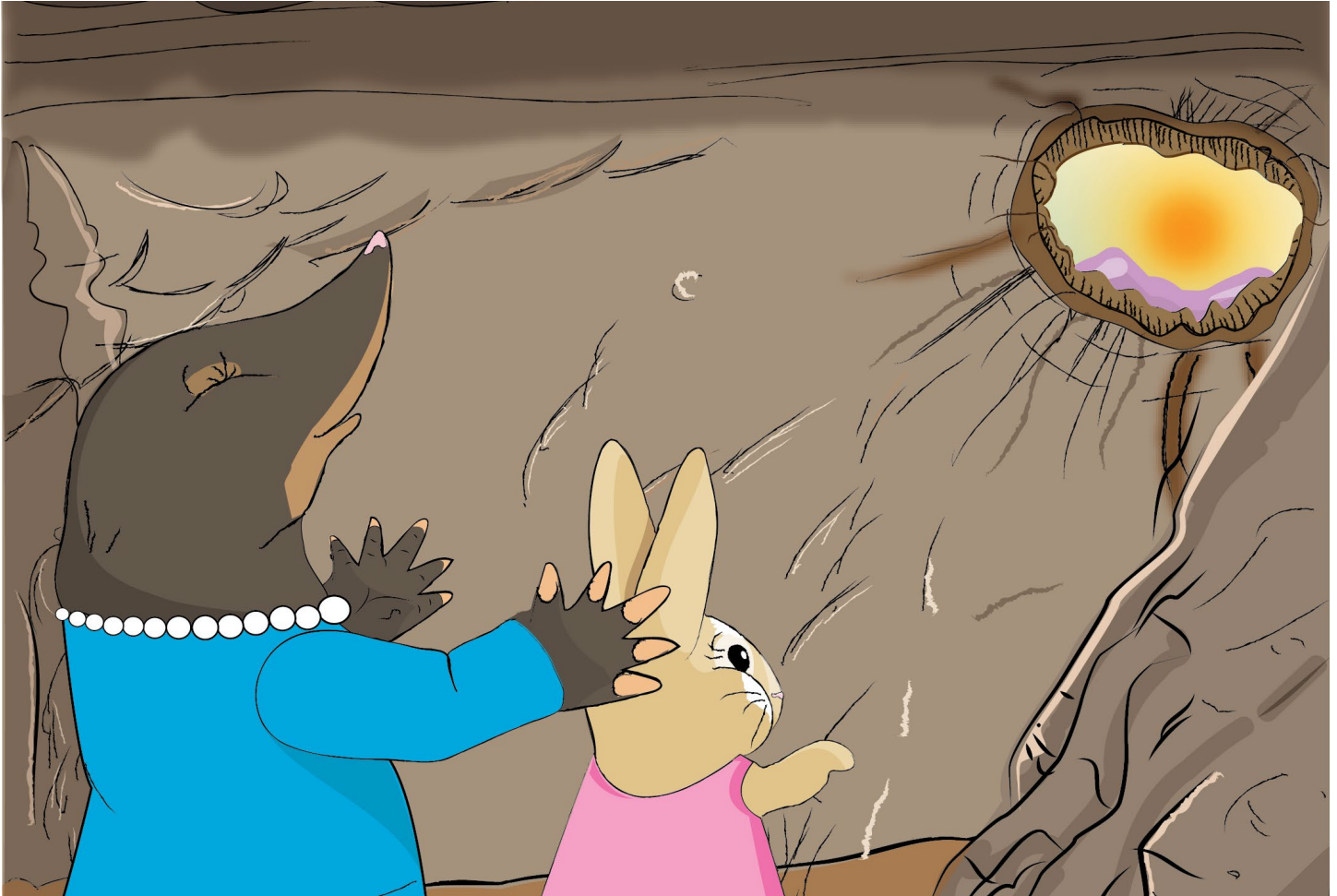
Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit think this is a grand idea, so they gather Gustaf, Cedric, and Lily and one by one dive down into the tunnels with Myrna.



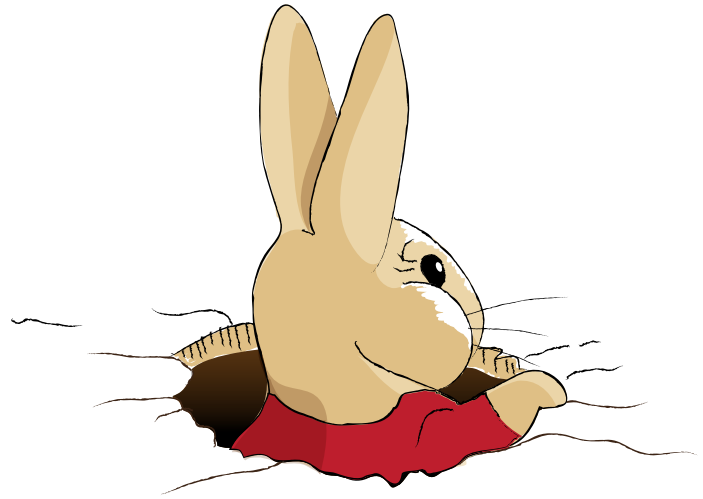
The little group scampers through the tunnel system, turning this way and that.



Scampering to the left, veering to the right, until finally Myrna stops and whips around to say, "We're here. Welcome to the land of plenty of space! Let's pop up, shall we, and see if this environment is a good fit for your family."



One by one, the Rabbits pop out of the hole. For the first few moments they can only stand there blinded by the bright shining sun while Myrna starts her sales pitch.



“Would you just look at the space you have here? There’s no pond taking up real estate. It’s not so crowded with trees or even extra shrubs. In fact, there are only desert plants and various cactus populations out here. With all the bright sunlight, it’s difficult to see the other community members, but the Coyote family is nearby, and the Rattlesnake family lives just a few rocks away. Why, you might even meet a cousin in the jackrabbit population. I know they are hares and not rabbits, but aren’t you related somehow?”





When Myrna turns to ask the Rabbits what they think, Mrs. Rabbit pants, "How—pant pant—do the members—pant—of this community take this heat? What do they—pant pant—do for water? What does anyone eat? . . . All . . . we . . . see—pant pant—are sand, rocks, and cactus. Where's the shade?"



"Oh," says Myrna. "The jackrabbits eat sage plants and cactus, and their long ears help get rid of body heat. Plus, they dig shallow beds in the sand and rest during the day. They move about more in the cooler hours of the evening."



The Rattlesnake family stays tucked up in between the rock *crevices* when it's hot and then uses the heat stored up by the rocks to stay warm. They become active later when the temperatures are cooler. The Cactus family really knows how to manage their water supply. They store most of it in their stems. Since they don't have true leaves, they don't lose much at all."



While Mrs. Rabbit and Myrna chat, Cedric and Gustaf fight over the scrap of shade by the prickly pear, and Lily digs a shallow bed in the sand like jackrabbits are known to do. Mr. Rabbit tries time and time again to dig a proper tunnel and den in the sand, but try as he might, the hole just collapses.



Mr. Rabbit turns to Myrna and Mrs. Rabbit and says, "This desert environment might be perfect for the community members who live here, but I can't build a proper den, and I know for sure we don't like this high heat and low water."

"Okay," says Myrna, "I've got just the place for you where there is plenty of space, and you'll never have to worry about hot temperatures."



So one by one, Myrna and the Rabbits drop back into the cool dark tunnels and start making their way to the next location. The little group scampers through, going this way and that, turning left, then veering right, until finally Myrna stops, whips around, and says, "We're here. Let's pop up, shall we, and see what we can see."



They each pop up and just stand there staring. The first thing they notice is the *barren* landscape and the cold, frosty wind blowing and swirling through their fur coats.

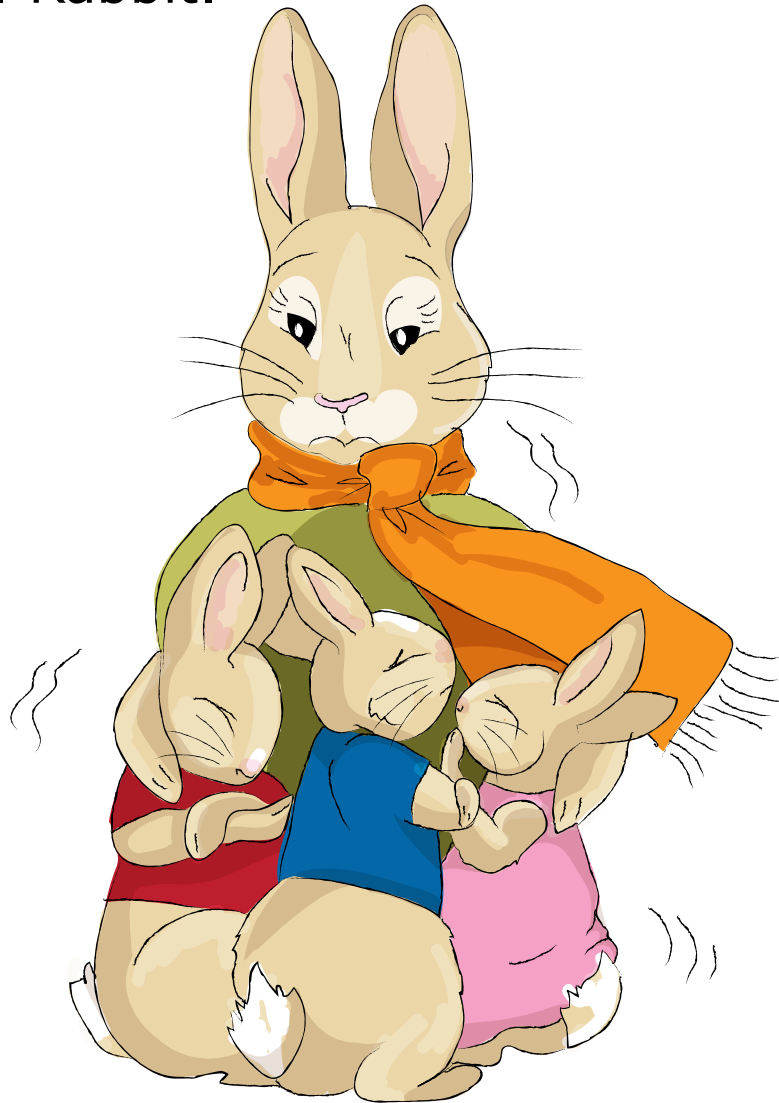




"Well," says Myrna, "You can see there's plenty of space, and it's definitely not as hot as it was in the desert environment. The populations that live in the community, like the Caribou family, love to nibble the moss that grows here. The Arctic foxes have extra fat and thicker coats to help them enjoy the cool temperatures. Arctic hares have coats that turn white in the winter just to blend in with the snow. Say, are you related to them? They might be your long-lost cousins."



Mrs. Rabbit and the kids all huddle together, shivering with teeth chattering so loud it sounds like someone tap dancing. "I d-d-d-don't th-th-th-think-k our c-c-c-c-coats are thick-k-k-k-k en-n-n-n-nough," chatters Mrs. Rabbit.

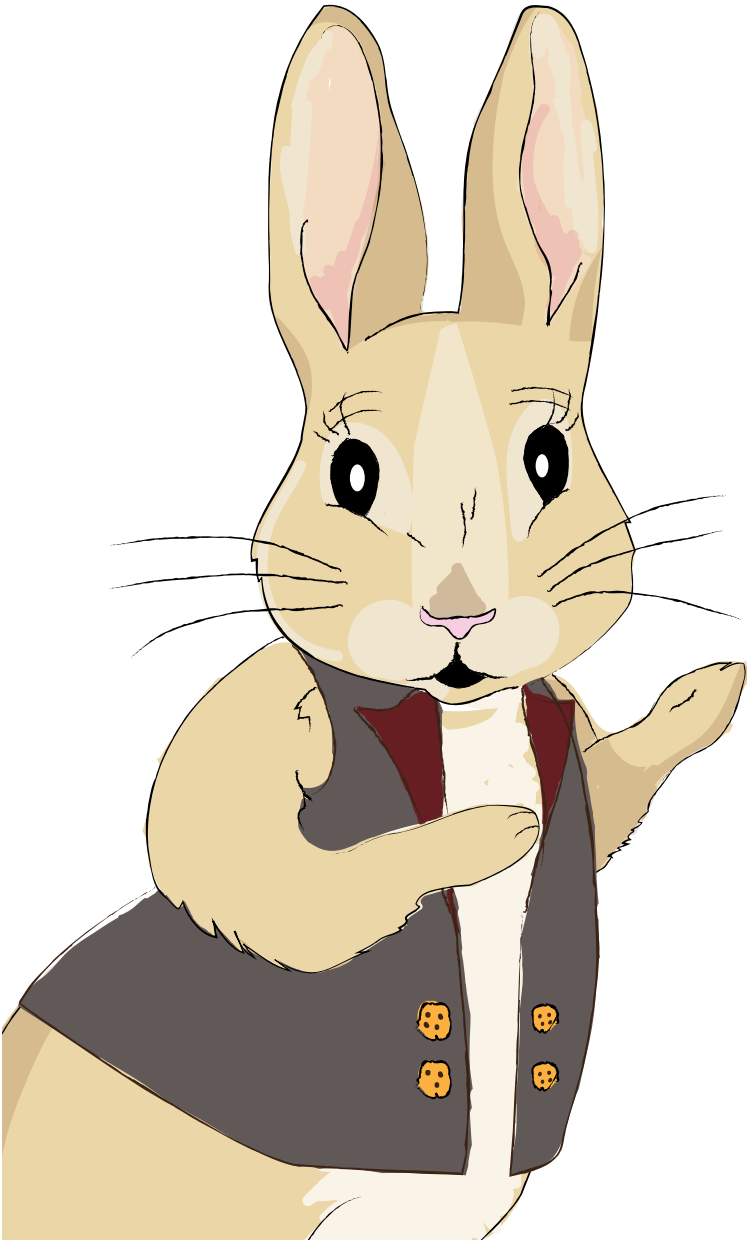


In the meantime, Mr. Rabbit tries to dig test holes for their new den and can't seem to get more than an inch deep. "What's wrong with this soil, Myrna?" Mr. Rabbit asks.

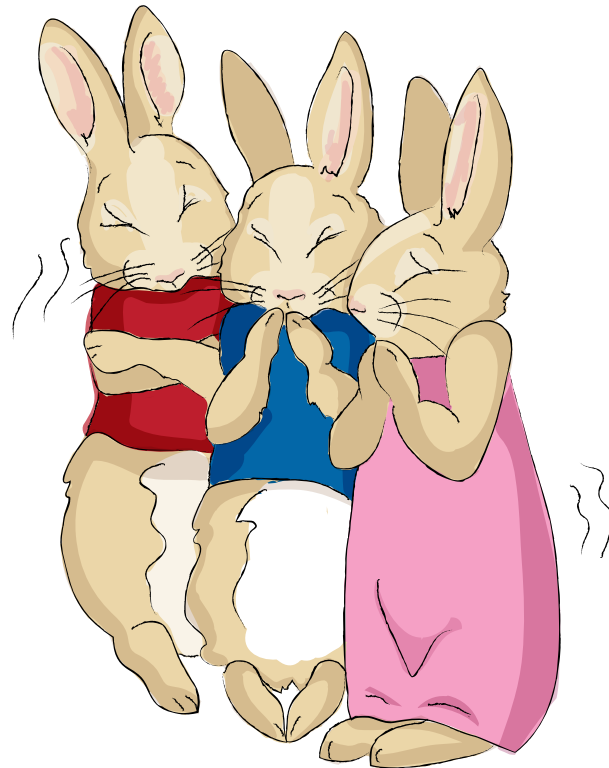
"Oh there's nothing wrong with the soil." says Myrna. "It's called permafrost because it's mostly frozen. The plants here have networks of shallow roots to take advantage of the uppermost layer."

Mr. Rabbit explains, "This will never do. My family needs a place with plenty of space for our home, not too hot and not too cold, and somewhere where we can have a nice comfortable burrow to live in."

"I've got the perfect place for you! It's a nice warm temperature all year round. There's 100% access to water, and it's absolutely beautiful!" says Myrna.



"Okay," says Mr. Rabbit.  
"Let's go before my kids  
turn into bunny pops!"



All the Rabbits shiver and shake as they pop down the hole and follow Myrna to the next location. They scamper and jump through the tunnels, turning to the right, veering to the left, and hopping and scurrying down long passages. After going quite a distance, they enter a strange room with strange-looking devices in it.



Myrna turns to the family and says, "This is the place you'll love. It is stunningly beautiful; it is filled with lots of soft, flowing plantlike forms; it has plenty of water; and it's really exotic. There's only one catch. To see your new home, you have to put on this special gear."



The rabbits have never even seen anything like the equipment Myrna distributes, but they are so interested in the new location and the possibility of it meeting their needs that they follow Myrna's example and put on everything.

"Your family will love this," Myrna says. "I'll describe the area using the speaker system in this mask. If you have any questions, just click the button on the side of the mask to talk."



Myrna waddles in her swim fins over to the special hatch and turns the wheel to open the lid. Then she says, "Come on, everyone. Jump in!" So one by one, the Rabbits and their kids jump into the hole, and Myrna jumps in after them.

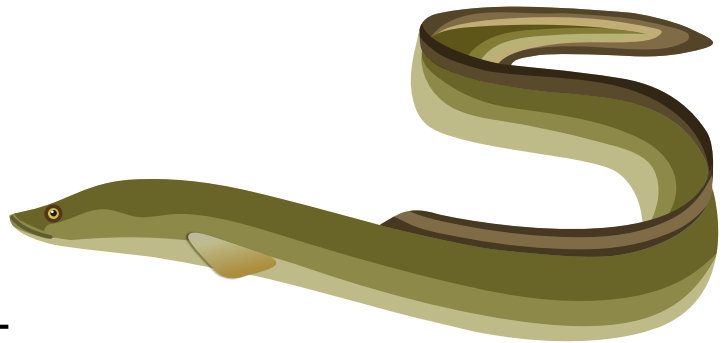


You can imagine their surprise when they realize they are underwater in a coral reef community. Myrna clicks the button on her mask and says, "As you can see, the temperatures are really moderate. There is plenty of space and plenty of water. You don't have to worry about seeking the shade on a hot day because the water filters the light for you. For your dining pleasure, you can nibble on any seaweed you find in the area."

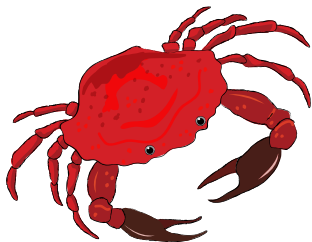


"This coral reef community supports different populations of fish, eels, crabs, and coral," Myrna says. "Coral are small animals that build and live in beautiful colonies called reefs. The coral eat a daily feast of plankton that float by in the surrounding water. Some fish hunt other fish for food, but the Clown Fish family actually eats algae that live in the coral. I'm sure it makes for a crunchy lunch."

"Ms. Moray Eel hides in the crevices and spaces between the coral and the rocks. She lunges out



to catch fish that swim too close. The Crab family goes along the bottom, feeding on the scraps of everyone's meals. They are a true clean-up crew. What do you think? How do you like it? Isn't it beautiful?"



Mr. and Mrs. Rabbit can scarcely answer as they watch Cedric, Gustaf, and Lily play hide and seek around the coral beds.





Mrs. Rabbit turns to Myrna and asks about the annual cost of oxygen refills for scuba equipment while Mr. Rabbit swims over to the first patch of ground he sees. As he digs, the sand mounds up, and the hole gets deeper. But no matter how deep Mr. Rabbit digs, the water floods the space.





Wearily, he turns around and slowly swims back to his wife and Myrna. "This isn't going to work. It's beautiful, there's space, the temperature is perfect, and there's plenty of water. Unfortunately, there are several issues. The water is too salty to drink, the scuba equipment is too expensive, the seaweed is chewy, and I can't build a home in a flood zone. What are we going to do?"

Myrna squints up at Mr. Rabbit and says, "Your home definitely needs to support your family's needs. I guess this community isn't the best fit, either. I have only one more place for you to see. I don't know if this is a good idea, but it's the last option."

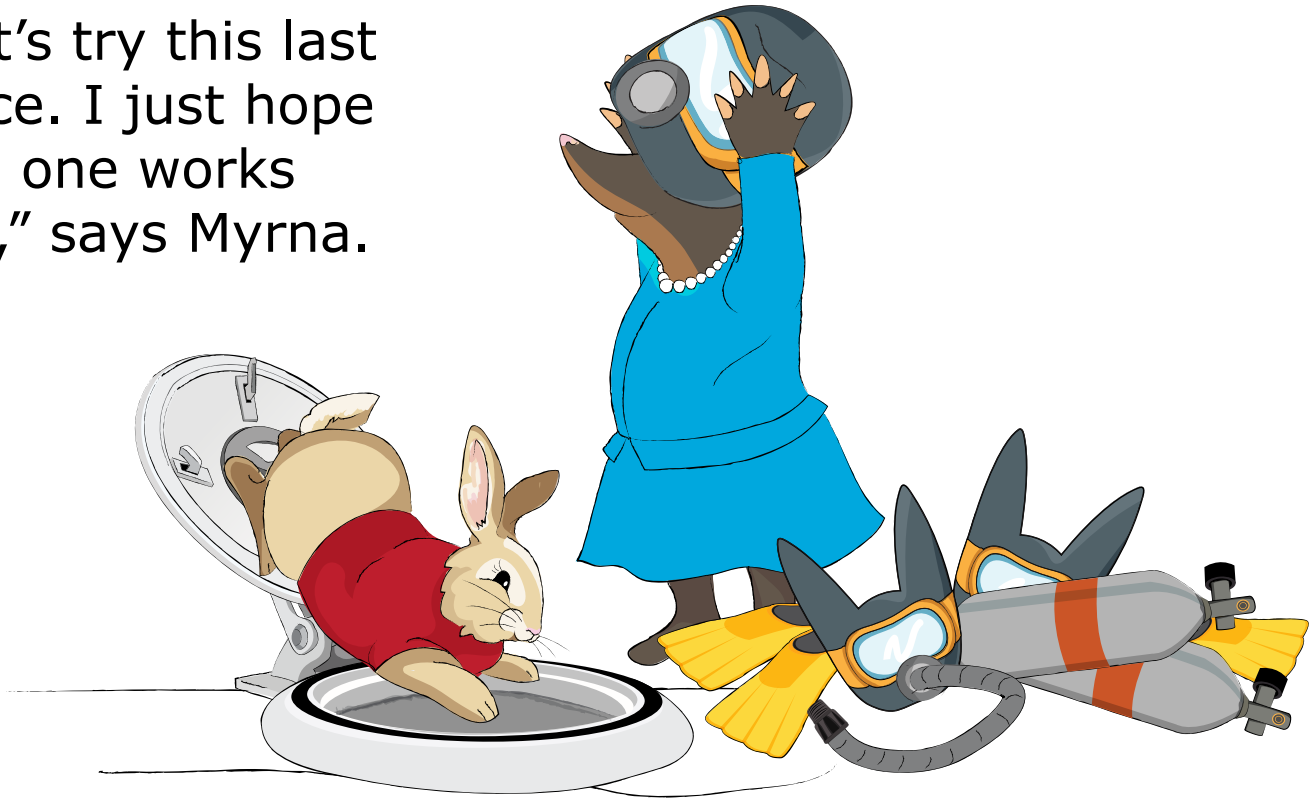
"Anything but this," says Mr. Rabbit.



So after rounding up the Rabbit children, whose coats are soaked through and through, they one by one go back up through the hole into the tunnel system.

Myrna and the drenched Rabbits put away the scuba gear and dry off enough so that they don't leave puddles and wet paw prints everywhere they hop.

"Let's try this last place. I just hope this one works out," says Myrna.



She takes the lead as they begin dashing and scampering down the tunnels. Just as everyone is starting to get tired, Myrna stops and says, "I want to remind you that this is absolutely the last place I have to show you. I just hope it meets your needs. Let's have a look."



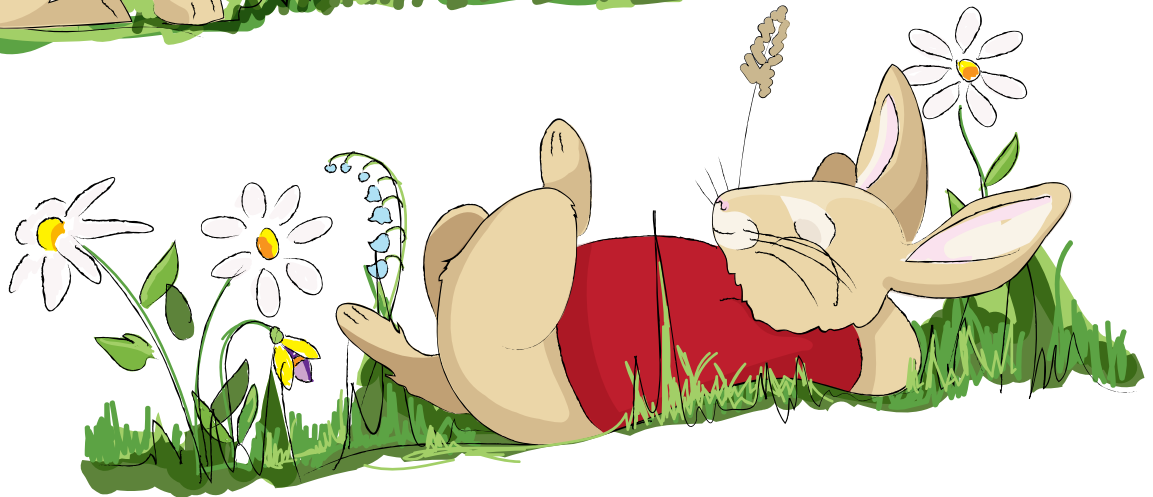
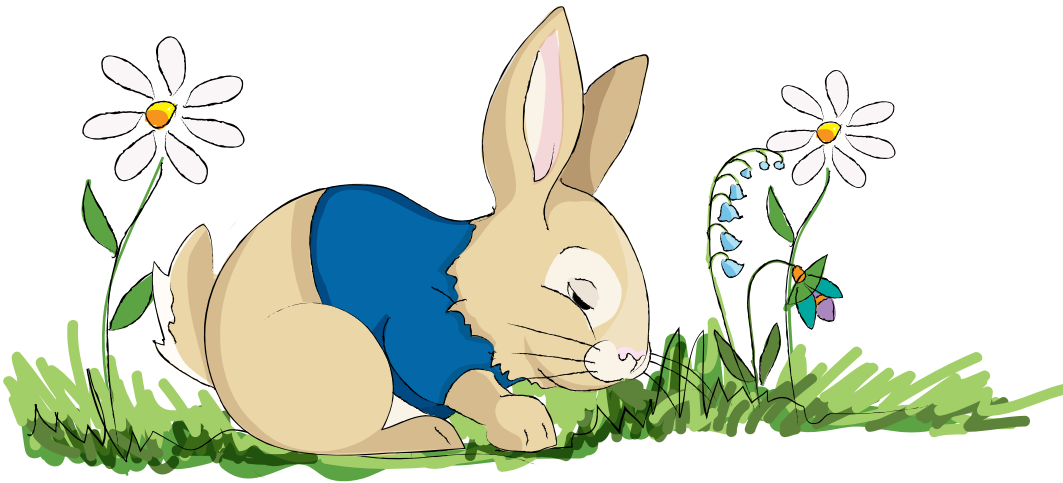
They each pop up out of the tunnels and stand there in shock but with big smiles on their faces.

"We're home!" says Lily. "Look Momma, there's our pond. Let's go get a drink."



Gustaf starts nibbling tender grass, "Ooo, this grass tastes so juicy and tender."

Cedric is humming to himself as he rolls around in the grass under the trees.



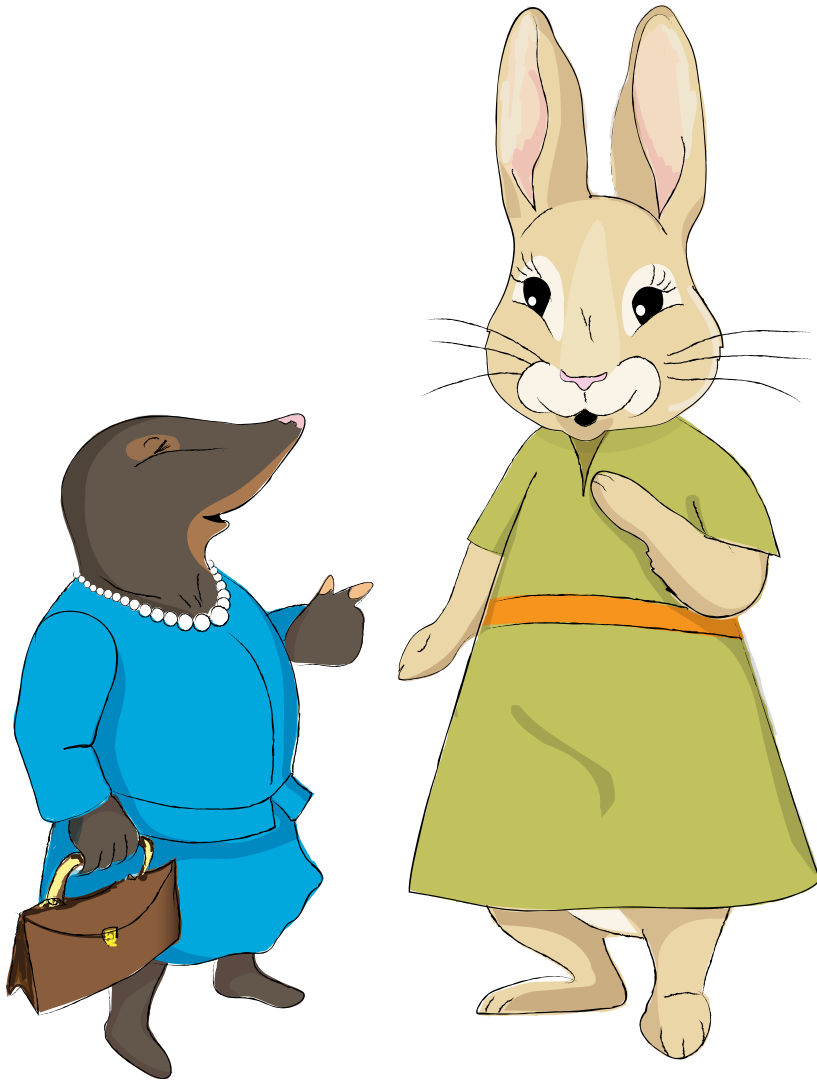
Mrs. Rabbit says, "Oh Robert, we're back in the rabbit population and able to contribute to the surrounding community of plants and animals."

Mr. Rabbit says, "You know, the soil is perfect for digging a new addition to our old home."





"Well," says Myrna, "as a real estate agent, I like to make sure your home environment meets your every need. I've always said you fit your home and your home fits you!"



"Myrna, you're a genius!" says Mrs. Rabbit. The Rabbit family happily returns to their meadow home—with plans for new additions to the den, of course.

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