



Where the River Monster Roams

Somenea wants to see the creature in the river very badly. She prepares a lookout to spot the creature, but what will she find? Is it what she expects?



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"Look, it's the monster!" Somenea rushed to the edge of the school yard. "Where?" Somenea's friend Sokhom turned around with a smirk. "Too bad, Somenea, it just disappeared into the water. It was the coolest thing I've ever seen."



Somenea had been waiting weeks to see the monster. Ever since Keo's dad saw something strange by the river, the monster was all the kids at school could talk about. Somenea had even set up a lookout in her yard. It had everything: a blanket to cover her, a place for snacks, and most importantly, a net to throw on the monster! And now she had missed her chance!



"What's all this talk of monsters?" asked Teacher Chey. "We just saw a monster in the river, it was a baby Godzilla!" Sokhom said. "It had skin that looked like armor and bony plates on its back!" "Really?" Teacher Chey said excitedly. "That sounds like the Siamese crocodile that people have been talking about." "I'm not afraid of Siamese monsters, I'll protect the school!" Somenea said, swinging her arms around wildly like swords. "No, Somenea. Siamese crocodiles. They're very rare animals," said Teacher Chey. "My friend is visiting the area to look for them. She's a wildlife research specialist. She'll be excited to hear about this."



The next day, Teacher Chey introduced his friend, Ms. Sett, to the class. Somenea's arm immediately shot up and she asked, "Do you chase monsters?" "No, I don't chase monsters," Ms. Sett said with a smile. "I am looking for crocodiles though, and crocodiles are descendants of dinosaurs, so you could say I'm looking for dinosaurs."



Somenea thought dinosaur hunting sounded like a great adventure. When she saw Ms. Sett outside the school after class, she ran right up to her. "Can I help you look for the crocodile?" she asked, tugging at her arm. "I've already set up a monster . . . I mean dinosaur lookout at home."



"Sure!" said Ms. Sett, as she set down her map of the area. "The more information we have about how the Siamese crocodile lives, the more we'll be able to do to save it from extinction." "Extinction?" Somenea asked. "What's that?" "It's when there are no more of an animal anywhere in the world," replied Ms. Sett. "Oh, wow. That's sad. We need to help them," Somenea said. "Do you think you could build one of your amazing crocodile-spotting forts here, by the fence?" "Definitely," said Somenea. "I'll build the best lookout ever." "We call those lookouts blinds," said Ms. Sett. "They help us observe animals without being seen by them."



Sokhom and Keo helped Somenea build a crocodile blind in the corner of the school. Teacher Socheata even gave them a cover for it. "This looks great, team!" said Ms. Sett.



"I found a net," said Somenea. "So we can throw it on the Siamese crocodile and capture it! We'll be heroes!" "If you're going to be my wildlife research assistant, you won't be catching any crocodiles," Ms. Sett said. Somenea was surprised. "Why not?" she asked.



"Our job is to observe animals, that just means to look at them and understand their lives. We want to know what they eat, where they travel, and how many there are." "So you're only learning about the animals?" Somenea said. "Can't you just read a book?" "That's a great question!" Ms. Sett said. "We're learning specifically about what they do here, in this location. We also take notes on the other animals we see, since they might have an effect on the crocodiles. Then we can help your community make good decisions about how to best protect the animals, ourselves, and our resources."



"How will we know when to look for the Siamese crocodile from our fort?" asked Somenea. "We won't," responded Ms. Sett. "That's the hard part but also the fun part of being a wildlife researcher. We often spend weeks looking for animals. You'll need to watch the river as much as possible. I'll stop by in a few days to see what you've found. Good luck!" Somenea asked students and teachers for their help, and for the next week they all took turns, from sunrise to sunset, looking for animals from the blind.



They wrote down the animals they saw, when they saw them, and what they were doing. The list of animals grew longer each day. Some students even saw the Siamese crocodile, including Sokhom. He made sure to remind Somenea that he'd seen it twice now. But it never showed up when Somenea was watching.



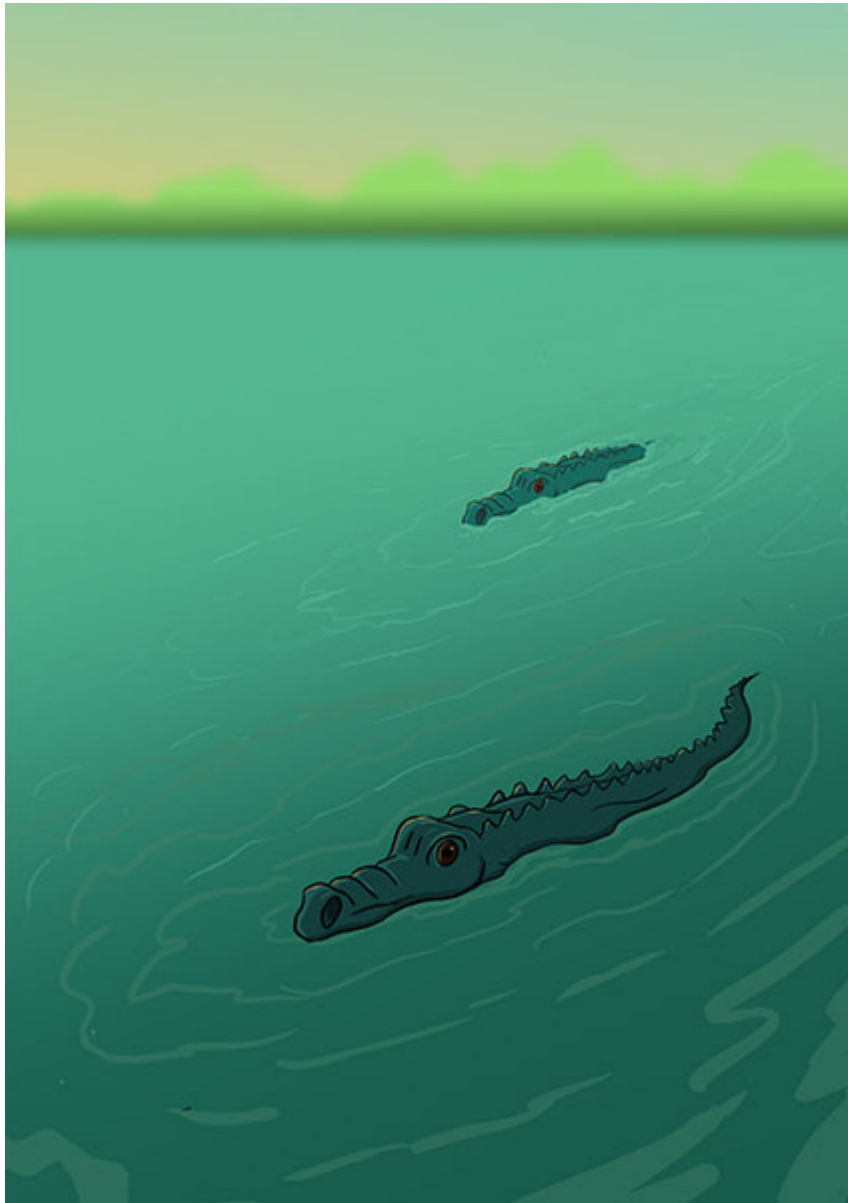
On the day that Ms. Sett was set to return, Somenea and her mother got up early to take a turn on the sunrise watch at the blind. Somenea looked out at the river but only saw a small odd looking piece of wood drifting in the water. Then the piece of wood turned.



"Wait!" exclaimed Somenea. "Is that the crocodile?" The piece of wood began to rise out of the water. It was the crocodile's head! Somenea could now see the distinct bony plates on its back. "It is! It's the Siamese crocodile!" she whispered excitedly.



Later that day, Somenea was eager to share her notes with Ms. Sett. "We saw so many animals. And the best part . . . we saw the Siamese crocodile five times!"



"That's wonderful, Somenea," Ms. Sett said. "My research team also saw the Siamese crocodile up river. That means that there is enough food and places for the Siamese crocodile to live here. Thanks to your research, we might be able to introduce Siamese crocodiles back into this area and help save them."



Somenea and Ms. Sett presented the results of their research to the town and mayor the next evening. People were excited that they could be part of helping to save the Siamese crocodile.



Even Sokhom was impressed. "You make a pretty good dinosaur hunter!" he said with a grin. "Hopefully we can see more of them now." "You did a great job, Somenea," Ms. Sett added. "You can be part of my research team anytime!"





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Original Story แม่น้ำเจ้าพระยา (Where the River Monster Roams), Author: The Asia Foundation - Let's Read. Illustrator: Khoem La. Published by The Asia Foundation - Let's Read,

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