

Building a Bridge

by R. Howard



Summer vacation had just begun, and Alex and Maria were ready to spend all day outside. They decided to walk to the neighborhood park, where there was a river that they liked to swim in when it was particularly hot. Alex and Maria began to sweat as they walked, even though their house was only ten minutes away from the park's entrance.

When they got to the river, they saw that it was too shallow to swim in. The rocks that made up the bed of the river were even poking out of the water in some places, glistening in the sun. Alex and Maria were frustrated. On the other side of the river, about fifty yards away, and in a welcoming courtyard, there was a fountain spewing water in beautiful arcs.

"We should go play in the fountain," Maria said.

"How will we get there?" asked Alex.

They thought for a moment. They knew if they walked upriver, they would eventually come to a walkway that crossed the river, but it was so hot, and they were eager to get to the fountain.

Maria looked around the grassy riverbank and noticed a few logs and branches lying close to the water. "We could build a bridge!" she said. She ran over to a thick tree branch that looked long enough to be placed across the river. Together, she and Alex hefted the branch onto their shoulders and walked it to the water. Here, they stopped. How would they get the branch across?

Maria suggested throwing it down into the water and seeing if it reached the other side. That seemed imprecise to Alex - what if the branch did not reach the other side of the river, and got stuck or swept away by the water? Then they would be unable to walk all the way across the river.

Maria wondered if they could measure the distance from the riverbank they stood on to the other shore. They put the log carefully down and decided to test the distance with lighter, thinner branches. They found a few wispy branches by the spot where they had first found the log, and they tied the branches together using their hair bands.

On their first attempt, they tied two branches together and went back to the river to test the length. The branches barely reached the center of the swirling water. After tying two more branches together to the initial branches, Alex and Maria were able to get the thin makeshift model bridge to touch the far bank.

"Hooray!" Maria said. "Now we know how long the log needs to be."

They set the tied branches on the ground next to the log. The log was luckily the exact length of the tied branches. Now Alex and Maria had to figure out how to make sure the log was secure on both sides of the bank before they walked across it to reach the other side of the river.

"I know!" Alex said. She began to gather thinner branches, like the ones they had tied together, which were pliable and easy to bend. She twisted them together into a tight bundle, then laid them horizontally across the edges of the log. Then she and Maria hauled some of the stones out of the river and placed them on the branches on either side of the log. In this way, they were able to stabilize the log-at least on one side-in order to run across.

When Alex and Maria got to the other side of the river, they secured the other side of the log with more branches and rocks, and looked back at their handiwork. It had been a good day's work, but now they were free to enjoy the cool water in the fountain.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What did Alex and Maria want to build?

- A. a pool
- B. a car
- C. a fountain
- D. a bridge

2. What is the main challenge faced by the characters in this story?

- A. how to swim in a river so shallow that rocks are poking out of the water in some places
- B. how to get from one side of the river to the other without using the walkway
- C. how to find the distance from one side of the river to the other without measuring tools
- D. how to make sure the log they use for their bridge is secure on both sides of the river

3. Which of the following sentences from the story provides evidence that Maria was deliberate and thoughtful in her actions?

- A. "Maria looked around the grassy riverbank and noticed a few logs and branches lying close to the water."
- B. "Maria wondered if they could measure the distance from the riverbank they stood on to the other shore."
- C. "She ran over to a thick tree branch that looked long enough to be placed across the river."
- D. "Alex and Maria were frustrated."

4. Which sentence from the text supports the idea that Alex and Maria used teamwork to build the bridge?

- A. "Alex and Maria began to sweat as they walked, even though their house was only ten minutes away from the park's entrance."
- B. "Together, she and Alex hefted the branch onto their shoulders and walked it to the water."
- C. "'I know!' Alex said. She began to gather thinner branches, like the ones they had tied together, which were pliable and easy to bend."
- D. "'Hooray!' Maria said. 'Now we know how long the log needs to be.'"

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. the importance of girl power and teamwork
- B. two girls solving a problem together
- C. the benefits of urgency when working toward goals
- D. the difference between two girls' plans to get across a river

6. Read this sentence: "Now Alex and Maria had to figure out how to make sure the log was **secure** on both sides of the bank before they walked across it to reach the other side of the river."

What is the meaning of the word **secure** in this sentence?

- A. secure (*adjective*): self-confident
- B. secure (*adjective*): fastened, stable
- C. secure (*verb*): to make safe or lock up
- D. secure (*verb*): to obtain or get ahold of

7. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

The friends placed rocks on either side of the log to hold down the lighter branches; _____, the log was stable enough to walk on.

- A. before
- B. as a result
- C. especially
- D. meanwhile

8. It was important to measure the distance across the river before putting the log in the water.

Use evidence from the story to prove or disprove this statement.

9. What are two ways Alex helps to solve the problem facing her and Maria?

10. If Alex and Maria had not worked together to solve their problem, what might have happened? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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Use evidence from the story to prove or disprove this statement.

It was important to measure the distance across the river. If the distance had not been measured, the log might have gotten stuck or swept away, as Maria realized. It was not important to measure the distance across the river. The log was exactly the right length, so the girls could have saved time by putting it in the water before doing anything else.

9. What are two ways Alex helps to solve the problem facing her and Maria?

Alex helps Maria carry the log to the river. She also comes up with an idea for making the log secure.

10. If Alex and Maria had not worked together to solve their problem, what might have happened? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Without Alex, Maria might not have secured the log, which could have come loose when she tried to cross it. Without Maria, Alex might not have measured the distance across the river, so she wouldn't have known whether the log was the right length for a bridge. If the girls had not carried the log together, it might have been impossible for either of them to move it.