

## Reading Activity: The Forest Guardian

### The Forest Guardian

Esma lived in a small suburb just outside a large city. She was surrounded by apartment buildings, just like her own, and lived around the corner from many convenient services, such as grocery stores and clothing outlets. Not too far away, there was a beautiful forest with a trail that Esma used most days to take her dog for a walk. From the moment she moved there, Esma felt a deep connection to the trees that surrounded the suburban town.



One afternoon, Esma arrived at the entrance to the walking path with her dogs and she noticed a sign that read "Path Closed" and it was blocked off with a chain. She noticed two pieces of large construction equipment parked beyond the chain. When she looked to her left, she noticed a large sign that showed a housing development project was about to begin. She couldn't believe it! "They shouldn't destroy the forest and trail just to make more houses, they already have enough," Esma thought. She must do something!

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The next day, Esma began researching to learn more about the development project, timelines, and which company would be in charge. She decided she would go talk to them and maybe she could show them just how special the forest was. When she arrived at the path, she saw three people talking. She called them over and said, "You can't possibly be destroying this beautiful forest! It's where I go to walk my dog every day. The community needs this forest and trail, and so do all the species that live within it."

"Slow down," said one of the people, "I know this forest is important, but we need the land to develop houses and other services, such as a fire department for your community. As the population gets bigger, we need these things."

"Plus," one of the other people said, "if we don't do this project, I won't have a job."

"Me neither," followed the third person.

Esma felt stumped. She hadn't thought of the need for this development, she only knew that she wanted to save the forest. "Well, I'm sorry," she said, "but I can't let you do this! We need this forest. I must protect it!"

The next day Esma organized a demonstration at the entrance to the forest trail. Lots of people from her local community gathered with signs that read "Save Our Forest" and "Protect the Plants" and they stood in front of the construction site all day! At the end of the day, the local mayor came by and asked Esma what was going on. She explained what was happening and he invited her to attend the next town hall meeting to share her perspective.

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A few days later, at the next town hall meeting, Esma explained the importance of conserving the forest and protecting it for now and for future generations to come. She described all of the negative impacts this project would have on the forest. Members from the development project then explained their reasoning for needing to clear the forest, and the services that they were required to build based on the population of the suburb. After much discussion and debate, the town agreed that the development project was important, but so was the conservation of the forest. They agreed to consult an environmental conservation scientist who helped them to develop a plan to do both. They would protect parts of the forest while still create the services and houses required!

Esma was relieved. She was relieved that she would still have a place to walk her dog and that the forest, including all the beautiful species that lived within it, would be protected for now and future generations. Esma realized that achieving sustainability meant more than just passion, but it required empathy, compromise, and a willingness to listen to all perspectives. She understood that sustainability could only be achieved if people came together, united by one common goal that was rooted in understanding.