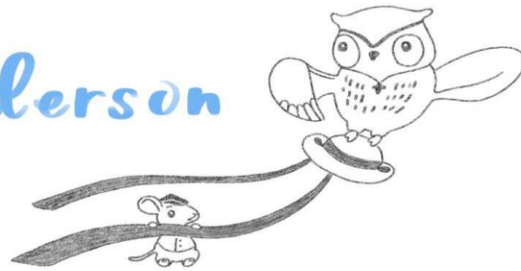


Sonja Anderson



Reader's Theater: A Play to Read Aloud

Joe Meets a Bear

Excerpted and Adapted from *Sophie's Gold Rush* by Sonja Anderson

Former Yosemite National Park Ranger Joe Young, a recovering addict, has met up with an old friend in Yellowstone National Park. The friend, Marcus, works at Yellowstone as a ranger. Bears have been reported along a popular trail, and Marcus has asked Joe to help him investigate before closing the trail.

Characters:

- Narrator 1
- Narrator 2
- Joe, a recovering gambling and alcohol addict and former Yosemite National Park Ranger
- Marcus, a ranger at Yellowstone National Park and former college buddy of Joe
- Sarah, a ranger at Yellowstone National Park
- Grizzly Bear

I'm _____, and I play Narrator 1.

I'm _____, and I play Narrator 2.

I'm _____, and I play Joe.

I'm _____, and I play Marcus.

I'm _____, and I play Sarah.

I'm _____, and I play the Grizzly Bear.

Narrator: Joe arrives at the trail head just in time to see his friend, Marcus, answer his cell phone.

Marcus: Hi, Sarah. I thought you'd be here already. Is everything okay?

Sarah: Sorry, Marcus. Can't make it.

Marcus: Oh, no! What happened?

Sarah: I twisted my ankle last night and it's swelled up like a watermelon. There's no way I can go hiking until the swelling goes down. Maybe you should close the trail until I find someone who can fill in for me.

Marcus: Okay, take it easy. Bad news, Joe, we usually have three people to check for bears, but Sarah can't make it. We'll have to close the trail.

Joe: We can do it. I've checked for bears lots of times in Yosemite. We don't want to close the trail unless we have to. It's such a popular trail for families, and it's the height of tourist season! Besides, I've got my bear spray here and we'll make lots of noise. We'll be fine! I didn't pack a lunch, though. Do you think we'll be back by noon?

Marcus: Yep, and I packed two sandwiches, just in case.

Joe: Let's go!

Narrator 1: Joe was so happy to be back in nature that he almost skipped down the pine-scented trail. Squirrels darted from tree to tree and gray jays, mountain bluebirds, and black-billed magpies flitted across bits of open sky. Small, unseen mammals rustled in the undergrowth. Insects buzzed.

Narrator 2: Each thud of Joe's boots seemed to carry him further away from his worries, fears, and problems. He and Marcus talked as if no time at all had passed since college. They remembered their training and talked just as much to any bears that might be hiding in the forest, to avoid startling them.

Joe: Ever hear from your old roommate? Nice guy. RIGHT, BEAR?

Marcus: At Christmas. Time sure flies, you know, BEAR?

Narrator 1: As they went down the trail, they shared stories of their lives—the good and the bad things that had happened in the years since they had seen each other. Suddenly, Marcus held up his hand. Joe almost ran into him and realized that they had been so engrossed in their conversation that they had forgotten to call out to the bears for several minutes.

Marcus: Look, Jo. Deep gouges in that tree trunk.

Joe: Yes, and on the trail, there! Fresh grizzly tracks! They are bigger than my whole hand!

Marcus: Uh-oh. Cub tracks, too. HEY BEAR, IT'S OKAY, BEAR!

Joe: JUST US, BEAR!

Narrator 2: A few feet further down the trail, Marcus stooped to look at something. He grabbed a stick and pushed aside a pile of sticks and leaves.

Marcus: Uh-oh. That's a dead elk.

Joe: The bears will be back for that. Time to get out of here!

Grizzly Bear: Grunt. Grunt. Grunt.

Marcus: Too late.

Narrator 1: Both men turned slowly toward the sound. Blocking the way back, a large grizzly bear stood on her hind legs. She sniffed the air and then opened her mouth wide.

Grizzly Bear: GROWL!

Marcus and Joe: It's okay, bear. It's o—kay.

Narrator 2: Marcus and Joe backed away, keeping their eyes lowered. Nearby, ferns waved and rustled. Were the cubs joining their mother? The mama bear's ears flattened, and she lowered her head. Was she about to attack?

Marcus: Bear spray ready, Joe! She might be bluffing, but she could charge. Wait for my signal.

Joe: Can't—get—the—spray—bottle—out. It's stuck!

Marcus: Uh-oh. Here she comes. Remember to wait for my signal!

Narrator 1: Joe's heart pounded so hard he was sure that even the bear could hear it. Joe could hear the bear's ragged breath and see her sharp teeth. His hands shook, but he forced himself to focus on getting the bear spray out of the holster. At last! With a flick of his finger, he released the safety cap. Would Marcus ever give the signal? The bear got closer and closer.

Marcus: Not yet! Wait, okay, NOW!

Narrator 2: A gust of wind sent Marcus's bear spray sideways. The bear kept coming. Joe sent his spray in a zig-zag pattern as he had been trained years before. Marcus emptied the rest of his can the same way. Would it work? Just a few short feet away from them, the bear stopped at last. Two cubs came out of the ferns to join her on the trail. All three bears stared at the two men. At long last, they turned around and disappeared into the ferns.

Joe: Phew! That was close!

Marcus: Good thing we didn't panic. I wasn't sure you'd ever get that bear spray out!

Joe: I thought the bear's teeth would be around my neck before you thought it was close enough to use it!

Narrator 1: Both men laughed.

Marcus: Say, how does a grizzly catch a fish without a fishing rod?

Joe: I don't know. How?

Marcus: With his BEAR hands. Get it?

Joe: Um, why wouldn't the teddy bear eat his dinner?

Marcus: Tell me.

Joe: Because he was already stuffed!

Marcus: Good one, Joe!

Narrator 2: Near death by grizzly bear must make bad jokes extra funny, because Joe and Marcus kept each other in stitches all the way back.