

A STORY ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Join Suhail and Shamsa as they visit the desert camp and learn all about the wildlife in the desert! The ten year old twins have been promised a day of fun in the desert and are all excited and ready to go!

A Day in the Desert is a warm and lively book that takes you on a desert adventure and teaches you to respect and nurture the desert.



لجنة التوعية والتثقيف البيئي
E.C.A Committee
Sharjah المشاركة



الهيئة العامة بيئتنا المشتركة



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A Day in the Desert

Learn about the environment with
SUHAIL and SHAMSA!



Learn about the environment with Suhail and Shamsa !

Come, lets explore the desert together !

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A Note to Parents

The desert is home to a breathtaking diversity of flora and fauna. The animals and plants found in this expanse of sun-drenched sands are well adapted to the harsh conditions that dominate the environment.

This warm and lively book for children takes you through a day in the desert spent with ten-year-old twins Suhail and Shamsa. Join them as they learn all about the desert environment; check out fun facts about the trees and animals around the desert camp; and learn tips on how to keep the desert safe for everyone. Your child will have fun reading through the book on his own, and will enjoy unfolding the pages of this story which teaches him about Arabian wildlife. You, too, could learn with him!

Here is how you can get more from this book:

- Talk to your child about the desert, and all the beautiful animals and plants found there.
- Make your child understand the concept of the environment, and why it is important that we leave nature unspoilt.
- Read through the story slowly with your child, and show him all the pictures in the book.
- Explain any difficult words or concepts, and answer any questions your child may have.
- Try to plan a trip to the desert camp yourselves so that your child can experience first-hand what Suhail and Shamsa did!
- Make sure you follow the tips given in the book- your children learn best through example!

We do hope you and your children enjoy this book, as much as we enjoyed creating it for you!

Get ready, get set before you go!

A lot of careful planning goes into a trip to the desert.

- Plan your trip well ahead, and inform a friend about your trip and when you plan to be back.
- Remember to pack plenty of water, comfortable clothing and sunglasses- it can get really hot out there!
- Do a thorough check of your vehicle and make sure it is in topnotch condition before you venture into the desert.
- Keep these handy- a torch and matches, essential spare parts, tool kit, and a basic first aid kit.
- Don't forget your mobile phone and charger!
- Read up about the animals and plants you can expect to see around you and in the camp.
- Do a trial run with setting up the sleeping tents in your backyard.
- Take large garbage disposal bags with you so that you can keep the desert clean.
- Remember to keep some emergency contact numbers with you.
- Get set to have a lot of fun!





Stay safe in the desert !

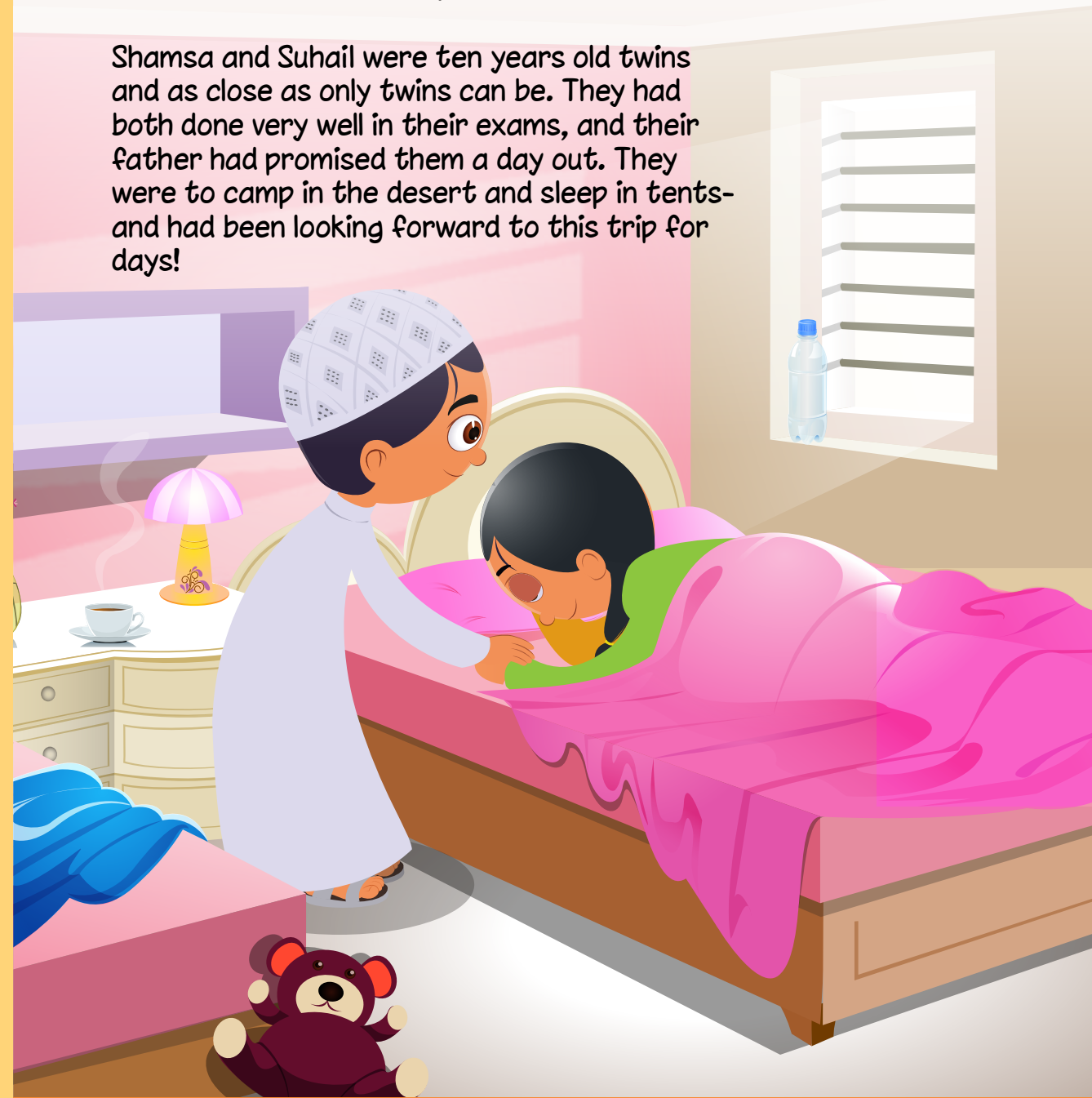
The desert is beautiful- but can be dangerous too, if you are not careful!

- When in the desert, drink plenty of water so that you stay hydrated.
- Always check for signs of heat exhaustion- dizziness, sweating, weakness, nausea, headache and fainting. If this happens, get out of the heat, drink water or a rehydration drink and loosen clothing till you can get proper medical advice.
- Stung or bitten? Stay calm. Try to identify the animal, and seek medical advice. Use a sharp flat blade to remove the sting from the wound, but make sure you don't squeeze the poison sac!
- All waste and garbage should be carefully collected in disposal bags and taken back with you. Remember, any waste left in the desert can be hazardous to the wildlife there! Also, never bury waste - desert sands shift with the wind, and it may not stay buried.
- Remember to stay on the tracks as otherwise you may harm or destroy the habitat of desert plants and animals.
- Take nothing from the desert, and leave nothing behind!

A day in the desert !

"Shamsa, get up!" Her brother Suhail shook her awake. The little girl sat up in a trice. Today was the day their parents were taking them to Al Khaif in the desert!

Shamsa and Suhail were ten years old twins and as close as only twins can be. They had both done very well in their exams, and their father had promised them a day out. They were to camp in the desert and sleep in tents- and had been looking forward to this trip for days!



The Arabian Desert contains the world's largest expanse of unbroken sand!



The Arabian Oryx is on the list of endangered species and is protected in specific areas in the UAE.

Did you know?

Outside, their spacious 4 wheel vehicle was all ready to take them. Two large tents, sleeping bags, plenty of delicious food and drink were packed tightly into the back. The twins sat on the rear seat wearing their safety belts. Their mother, a plump, smiling woman, sat with them. She smiled at the twins, amused to see their excitement. "Don't jump around so much - you'll tire yourselves before we reach!" she warned.

They were to pick up their grandfather on the way. Grandpa knew a lot about the desert!

Grandpa was waiting for them when they drove up to his cottage. He was a jolly looking elderly man with a trim white beard. "Hello, children!" he beamed at them as he joined their father in front. "Ready to have fun?"

Grandpa had a surprise for them too! He had brought along a large box with a red ribbon around it. When he put it in Shamsa's hands the little girl squealed- the box was wriggling! "Open it!" her parents urged. She opened the box carefully- and inside was the sweetest little hare you ever saw! Shamsa, who loved animals, scooped up the little hare at once. Hare yawned hugely and promptly fell asleep.

It was a two hour drive to Al Batayeh, which was where Al Khaiif was located. It was very hot outside, but inside the air conditioned vehicle, they were very comfortable. On the way, Grandpa told them all about the desert.

"We must always stay on the tracks in the desert!" he told them. "The desert ecosystem in Sharjah is protected by His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, our ruler, who has made sure the animals and plants in the desert are safe!"



He tugged at hare's long ears, adding, "There are many animals like hare that live in the desert, and if you drive off the track you could run over them and kill them, or destroy their homes. In fact, if you aren't careful, you can get punished and your vehicle taken away. Our agency EPAA (the Environment and Protected Areas Authority) takes good care of the animals and plants!"

"Will we see wild hares?" Shamsa asked him. "Well, if we are lucky, we will! That's how I found hare- his mother had been killed by hunters and he was all alone!"

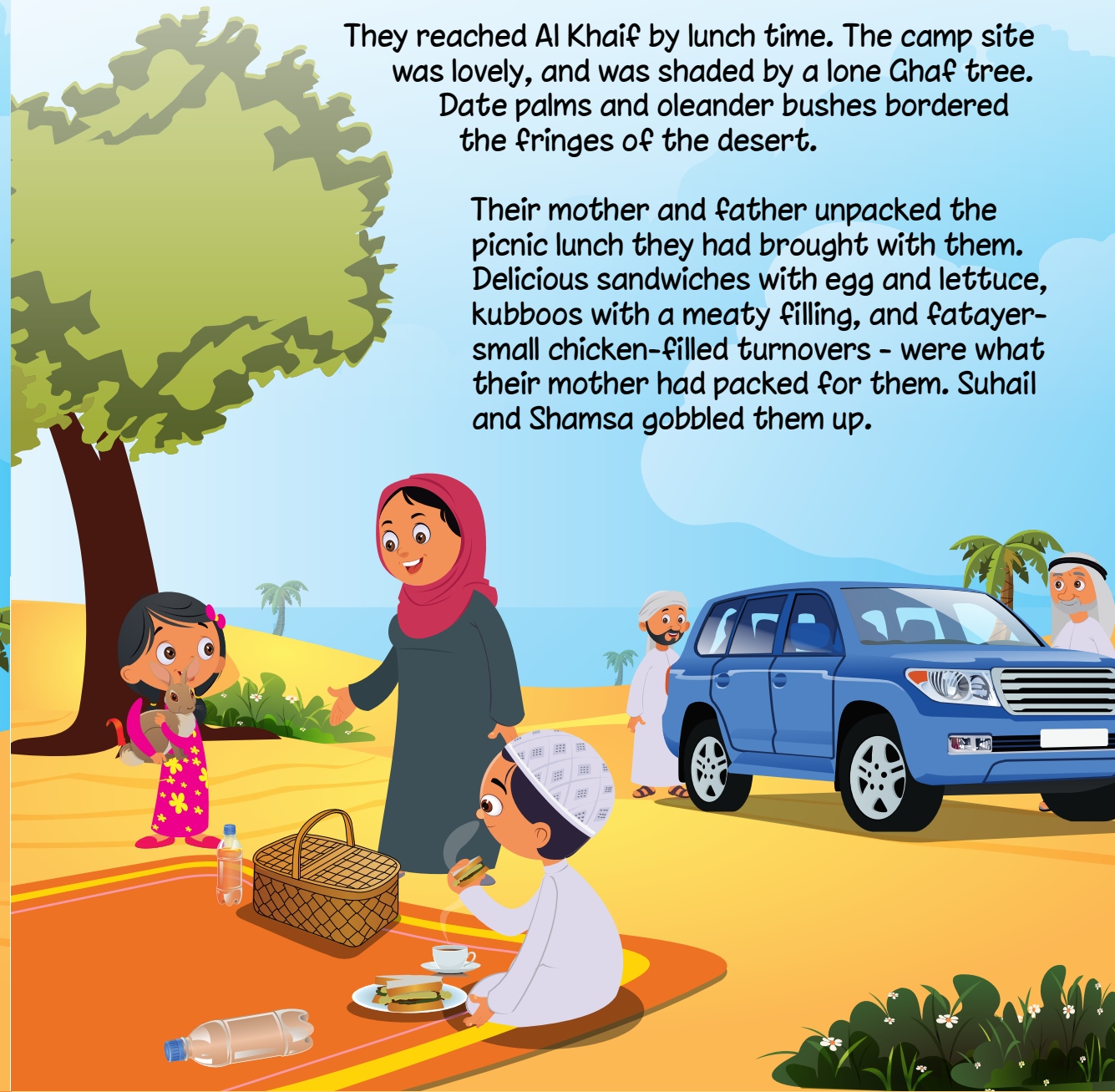
"Oh!!! How sad!" tender hearted Shamsa hugged the little hare closer to her. "Why do people hunt these poor animals?"



"There are many who like to hunt" Grandpa told her. "Right now, hunting is not permitted in the UAE- but it may be allowed in some places, later on. Those who hunt must stay within these areas, and cannot hunt everywhere!"

They reached Al Khaif by lunch time. The camp site was lovely, and was shaded by a lone Ghaf tree. Date palms and oleander bushes bordered the fringes of the desert.

Their mother and father unpacked the picnic lunch they had brought with them. Delicious sandwiches with egg and lettuce, kubboos with a meaty filling, and fatayer- small chicken-filled turnovers - were what their mother had packed for them. Suhail and Shamsa gobbled them up.



Fun Facts for kids...

There are more grains in a cubic foot of desert sand, than there are people in the world!



Most of the water that hits the ground in the deserts of UAE evaporates within minutes!



Camels are called the Ships of the Desert as they can cross a desert easily.



A crescent shaped sand dune is called a Barchan.

Desert Trivia

When the children finished eating, their father made sure that they picked up every bit of litter from their picnic. "Never leave any trash lying around," he told them. "Especially not plastics- any animals like rats or camels that try to eat plastic will choke and die. We must always leave nature unspoilt and clean!"

Shamsa and Suhail collected all the trash and put it into a large plastic rubbish bag, which they carefully put back in their basket.

After lunch, their father and Grandpa pitched up their tents. Each tent had a separate area for sleeping which was cordoned off by a brightly coloured cloth.

Suhail and Shamsa checked out the sleeping bags they would sleep in at night. Shamsa wanted hare to sleep with them. The baby hare loved the little girl and was even now cuddled in her arms.

Their mother was looking at the plants under the shady tree near their picnic spot. There were oleander bushes and desert hyacinth plants under the big umbrella-shaped tree.

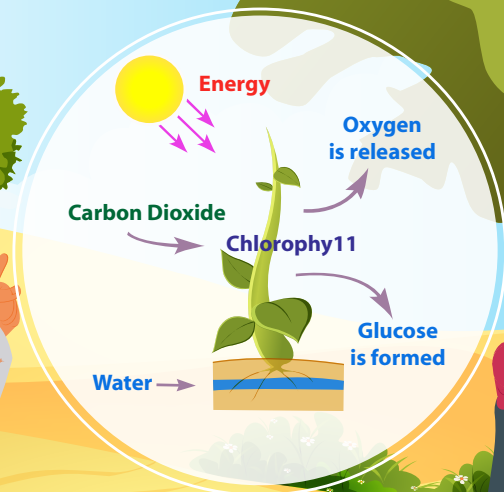
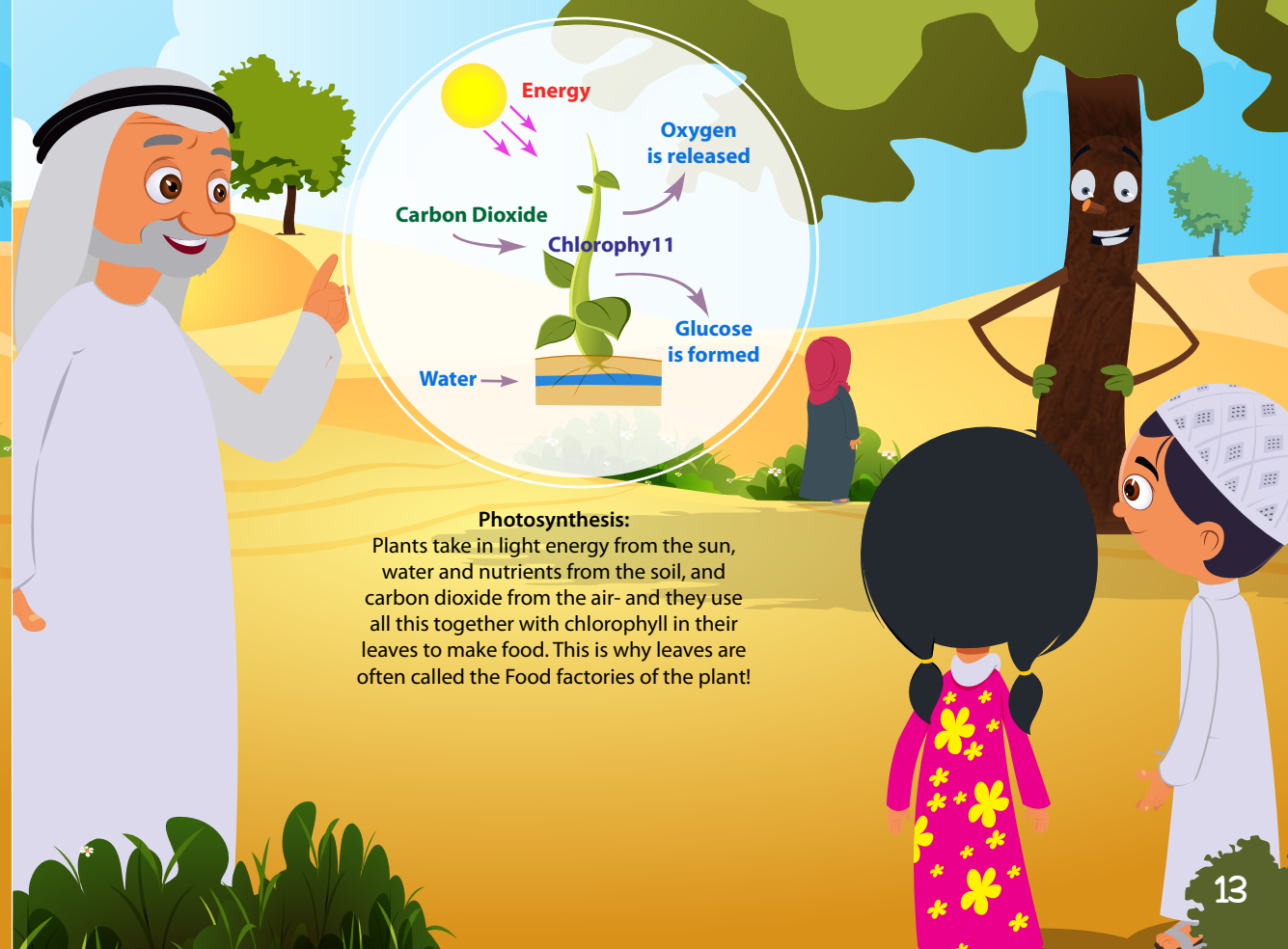


Grandpa asked the children, "Do you know what the name of this tree is?"

Suhail knew the answer! "It's a Ghaf tree, isn't it?" he asked.

"You're right!" Grandpa told him. "Trees are very important in the environment!" He explained to them how all trees clean the air around us, by taking in a gas called carbon-dioxide and giving out oxygen, which we breathe. They do this during a process called photosynthesis during which the leaves make food using carbon-dioxide, water and nutrients from the soil.

"In fact, almost every part of the Ghaf tree is very useful to us!" their father joined in "When Bedouins used to live in deserts, they used to make food.



Photosynthesis:
Plants take in light energy from the sun, water and nutrients from the soil, and carbon dioxide from the air- and they use all this together with chlorophyll in their leaves to make food. This is why leaves are often called the Food factories of the plant!

"I can see how cool it is under the tree..." Suhail said thoughtfully.

"Yes, that's why it's called the Umbrella tree!" Grandpa told him. "Where there are Ghaf trees in the desert, there will be more dewfall as well...making it cooler! Ghaf trees are very well adapted to the desert climate." Looking up at the tree, he said, "Did you know that the Ghaf tree has roots which go down sixty meters into the ground to search for water? That's why they can survive for many months without much water at all!"

Grandpa ruffled his hair. "Ghaf trees are home to many animals and insects, as well! ...can you see those bees sucking nectar from the flowers? And look, there's a Jerboa!"



A small desert Jerboa- a mouse-like rodent - peeped out from a hole below the desert. Its whiskers twitched as it smelt the remains of their food. Shamsa found some bread crumbs and put them on the ground near the Jerboa's hole. The Jerboa came out again, sniffing, and scurried over to eat them. Licking the crumbs clean, it looked around for more.

"Sorry, Jerboa!" Shamsa laughed. "Next time!"

The adults settled down under the cool Ghaf tree for an afternoon nap, and Suhail and Shamsa started to play Hide and Seek. Shamsa closed her eyes to count, while Suhail searched for a place to hide.



Desert Facts

80% of the UAE is covered by desert, and is called the Rub- Al-Khali or the Empty Quarter.



Night temperatures in deserts can go below zero degrees Celsius!

The UAE deserts typically receive less than ten inches of rain throughout the year.



The Arabian leopard is critically endangered and less than 200 animals remained in the year 2006.

Did you know ?



He decided to climb up to the highest branch of the tree, where Shamsa could scarcely see him. Suddenly he forgot that he was supposed to be hiding, as he had seen something exciting!

"Shamsa!" he called out. "Come here, and look!"

Shamsa hadn't finished counting as yet but she squinted against the sun, looking up. "What's that?" she called back.

"You'll love this!" Suhail promised her -she wasted no time in climbing up to the branch where he sat. She was indeed delighted by what she saw!

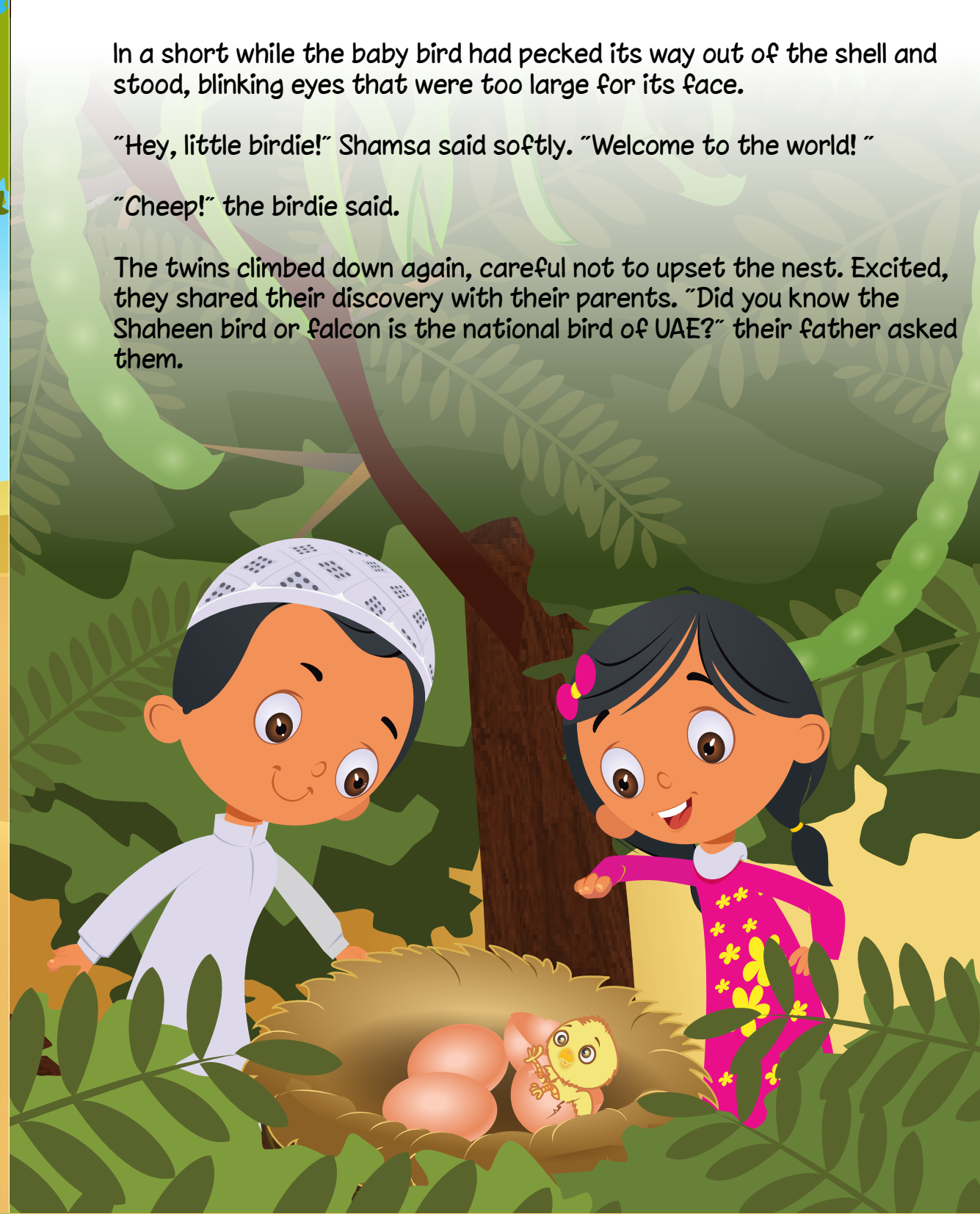
A Shaheen bird had made its nest amongst the branches, and had laid three large eggs! As the twins watched, a small crack appeared on one of the eggs...and a tiny beak pushed out through the crack!

In a short while the baby bird had pecked its way out of the shell and stood, blinking eyes that were too large for its face.

"Hey, little birdie!" Shamsa said softly. "Welcome to the world!"

"Cheep!" the birdie said.

The twins climbed down again, careful not to upset the nest. Excited, they shared their discovery with their parents. "Did you know the Shaheen bird or falcon is the national bird of UAE?" their father asked them.



Amazing Facts!

Desert plants like the Chaf tree may go without fresh water for years at a time!



The camel stores its food as fat in large humps on its back

The colour of the desert sand in each of the Emirates of the UAE is different!



Oil and coal found in deserts are the remains of forests which existed millions of years ago!

Strange but true!

"You should be careful when the mother bird is around- never go up to the nest then!" Grandpa warned. "Falcon birds have very sharp beaks and claws and are very skilful hunters!"

Meanwhile, Shamsa had gone back to the tent to check on hare who was sleeping inside her sleeping bag. Just as she was leaving the tent she froze...she had spotted a yellow and brown spotted snake behind Grandpa. The snake was draped around a bush, and was hissing!

Grandpa was also taken aback -his startled exclamation made Suhail look up. He quickly picked up a boulder and was going to throw it at the snake .

"Stop!" Shamsa stopped him. The little girl had spotted what the others had not seen- two tiny baby snakes in the oleander bush! The Mama snake was just trying to protect her little ones!

Grandpa smiled with relief. "That's a sand snake, and she won't harm us! We need to watch out for poisonous snakes, though, they can be dangerous!"



Suhail put down the boulder. "What do snakes eat, Grandpa?" he asked. The old man smiled at him. "Just what I was going to tell you!" he said. "There are many people who kill even harmless snakes when they see them! But snakes have an important part to play in their food chain- they eat rats and mice!"

The mother snake had retreated into the bush, and stood watch over her little ones. Grandpa continued, "If there weren't any snakes in the world, the rats and mice will breed unchecked!"

It was getting late in the evening and Suhail suddenly yawned hugely. Catching him, his mother smiled. "Eat something- and then it's off to bed with you!" she said. "You need to be up early tomorrow!"



Grandpa, Suhail and his father were going to a place called Al Hamra in the morning for a Desert Baggi. His father had promised to take him on the Desert Bike adventure at Al Hamra! Shamsa was more interested in playing with her hare and would stay back with her mother.

Their day out in the desert had tired them, and Shamsa and Suhail were asleep the moment their heads hit the pillow! Hare slept in the crook of Shamsa's elbow; his long ears folded over her arm, and kept her warm all night.

The next day morning Suhail, his dad and Grandpa were away bright and early. The Desert Biking at Al Hamra was an awesome experience and Suhail wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world!

He sat next to his dad on his dune buggy, and they explored long stretches of beautifully scenic desert roads in the early morning. The dune buggy had large wheels and wide tires and was designed to be driven over the sand. His dad even let Suhail hold the steering wheel some of the way-of course, there were no other vehicles nearby so it was quite safe!

Tired, they returned to the campsite in the afternoon. Mother and Shamsa had spent a nice and relaxed morning playing with hare. They were very reluctant to pack up and leave after their enjoyable day out in the desert! They had learnt a lot about the desert environment and had fun, too.

"Cheer up!" mother laughed, seeing their long faces. "We'll plan another day out very soon!"

"Squeak!" Hare agreed, thumping his tail!



On plants in deserts...

Desert plants often have long roots that can go deep down to reach underground water .



Some interesting facts !

- Deserts cover nearly one fifth of the earth's surface and have extremely diverse flora and fauna.
- Summer temperatures can reach 50 degrees Celsius, while winter temperatures can reach 0 to sub zero degrees Celsius.
- Most animals in the desert are dormant in the daytime but venture out at night, when the temperatures are cooler.
- Most desert plants store water in their leaves, stems and roots.
- Animals like the camel and jerboa are well adapted to life in the desert.
- The Bedouins were desert dwelling tribes who used to lead a nomadic life. Today many of these tribes have joined the general population.

The ghaf tree

- The ghaf (*Prosopis cineraria*) is a hardy, evergreen tree that easily survives harsh desert conditions.
- The ghaf tree is found in the deserts of the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia as well as in Iran and, further east, in the deserts of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.
- It is commonly called the Umbrella Tree as it provides shade for weary desert travelers.
- The Ghaf tree can survive for hundreds of years with little water as its roots reach far down to tap deep water resources.
- Today, groundwater supplies are dwindling due to urban expansion and Ghaf trees are dying out. Extensive grazing by camels is also decreasing the number of ghaf trees in UAE deserts.
- The ghaf tree is a symbol of UAE's tradition and culture and must be preserved for the coming generations.