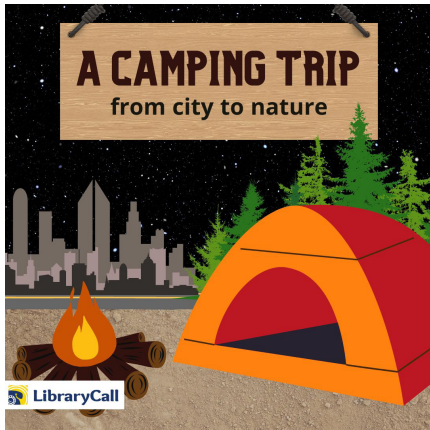


A Camping Trip from city to nature



By Lauren Kratz Prushko

To listen call:

Dominic, Sonia, and Zareena are three best friends that call themselves The City Squad.
(city noise sound effect)

“I like that name for us, The City Squad. It’s catchy!” said Zareena.

“Yeah, we’re a group of friends who know everything there is to know about having adventures in a big city. But this summer, we’re going on our first camping trip!,” laughed Sonia.

“That’s why we need to stick together,” said Dominic nervously.

We’ve never left the city before, and the wildest animals I have ever seen are the pigeons that try to eat my pretzel in the park.”

“Don’t worry, Dominic. I checked out a bunch of library books about camping, and my dad and I made a list of all the supplies we’ll need and shared them with everyone,” explained Zareena.

Zareena is very organized and loves to plan, just like her dad.

“Well, I am ready for some action!” cheered Sonia. “Let’s shimmy, snap, hop home and get ready for tomorrow! I can’t wait to roast marshmallows under the stars with you guys!”

“Okay, but I am not going to shimmy, snap and hop with any bears,” said Dominic.

The Squad went home to pack all the supplies they would need for their camping trip with their families. They followed the checklist that Zareena’s dad had printed out for everyone. Dominic, Sonia, and Zareena each grabbed their oversized backpacks, sneakers, and water

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bottles to store the water they would need to stay hydrated during their hikes. Sonia's mom and Dominic's grandfather brought extra flashlights and batteries and a lantern with matches to use at night. Everyone made sure they had their sleeping bags and first-aid kits with bandaids. Finally, Zareena's dad had a surprise for the City Squad, a three-person tent to put up for their first adventure at the campsite.

Early the following day, Zareena and her dad stood side by side with their clipboards and checklists as they loaded Sonia's mom's large van. "Are you checking off the extra marshmallows I requested?" Sonia asked as she looked over their shoulders.

"Yes, Sonia, and I see that you wrote that in a purple glitter pen on my typed list," said Zareena as she rolled her eyes.

"Are you checking off the extra toilet paper and organic natural mosquito repellent?" asked Dominic. "I will spray all of us and everything with that repellent when we get to the campsite. Ugh, I don't like mosquitoes!" (mosquito sound effect) continued Dominic as he looked over their shoulders at the list.

"Don't worry, Dominic," laughed Zareena's dad. "Everything is here, and I don't like mosquito bites either, so thank you for that important reminder." He patted Dominic on the shoulder.

"Let's shimmy, snap and hop to the van!" Sonia and her mom cheered together.

When they arrived at the campsite, the City Squad and their families tumbled out of the van. Zareena and Sonia spun around surrounded by spruce trees. Dominic looked up to see the sunlight shining down on him through the branches. There was a table and bench near a peaceful and clear lake. They couldn't wait to explore more. But first they needed to set up camp!

"First things first, I think we should pitch our tent. What do you guys think?" asked Zareena.

"Sure," said Sonia as she and Dominic started to unpack their tent. The Squad stood around, looking at the tent spread out on the ground. They had no idea where to start.

"Ugh, this looks like a lot of work," complained Dominic, "and I don't want to sleep on top of any rocks or sticks or have any wild animals see us while we sleep!"

"Don't worry Dom, we'll stick together like you always say. This is just something else that The City Squad will get through." encouraged Sonia as she put her arms around Dominic and Zareena's shoulders.

Sonia read the directions out loud, and after each step, Zareena and Dominic would look at the pictures to make sure they were doing each step correctly. They worked together by taking the thin, flexible poles that held the tent up and sliding them through the loops outside the tent. Zareena's dad and Sonia's mom came over and helped fasten the tent to the ground with stakes and large rocks to ensure it would be secure and not fly away with the wind.

"That wasn't too bad, right, Dominic?" Zareena asked as she brushed her hands on her shorts.

"I had fun, but it's still strange being away from the city. No car horns beeping, and who knows if we'll see a bear!"

"That's why the campsite has these bear-proof storage containers for our food," said Dominic's grandfather, as he passed by. These containers will also prevent other animals, like raccoons, from smelling our food and coming over here for a visit and a snack."

“I think it’s time to follow the trail and hike through the woods,” Sonia said excitedly. She ran over to the lake to fill up her water bottle.

“Sonia, wait!” shouted Domnic. “I don’t think you should drink that water. I read that water found in lakes can contain microscopic bugs that can make you sick if you swallow them!”

“Wow! Okay, I guess I got a little too excited! The water in the lake may look beautiful but it’s not to drink. Thanks for heads up Dom. I like learning new things!”

The Squad gathered the grownups, and everyone checked to make sure they had enough water in their bottles, using the water they had brought.

Zareena led the way with a map from the campsite’s welcome center and a compass she had brought, which she shared with Sonia and Dominic.

“The compass’s needle always points to the magnetic north pole,” explained Sonia.

Luckily, the Squad had learned about the four cardinal directions in school: North, South, East, and West. The group enjoyed following the different trails and spotting deer, scampering squirrels, and watching birds in the trees with their binoculars. The Squad made sure to stay on the trails to avoid poison ivy and hidden snakes. Sonia also reminded everyone not to pick the flowers or berries and leave them for other people to see and animals to eat.

When the group returned to their campsite, they decided it was time to eat, but first, they would have to build their campfire.

“How about you and your grandpa build our campfire?” suggested Zareena. “But, first, I will read out loud the directions from the camping

guide. Dominic and his grandpa looked at each other and smiled.

“Zareena, your planning ahead made our first camping trip so much fun already!” cheered Sonia as she walked past.

“Thanks Sonia, now first, put dry crushed paper in the center of the fire-pit.” Sonia’s mom handed them the paper they had brought with them.

“Second, put small dry sticks around the paper upright.”

“I am just using the sticks I have found on the ground, right, Grandpa?” asked Dominic.

“Right, Dom,” Dominic’s grandpa agreed. We don’t want to break off any living branches from the trees. So we are leaving this campsite just as we found it and even cleaner!”

“Third, ask an adult to light the paper with matches, and then after the sticks start to burn, add larger logs around the fire.”

“Here’s the logs we bought from the campsite welcome center,” said Sonia’s mom.

The City Squad and their families gathered around the campfire (campfire sound effect) as the sun set. Zareena’s dad laid a grill over the flames, started to boil water in a pot, and then added spaghetti.

“How come this spaghetti tastes better when cooked and eaten outdoors!” exclaimed Dominic.

Sonia nodded in agreement. “I think most things taste better over a campfire. Which reminds me, is it time for s’mores?”

Everyone laughed and got their clean sticks ready to roast some marshmallows. The City Squad made sure not to hold their marshmallows too

close to the crackling flames, (campfire sound effect) or the marshmallows would burn, and they turned their sticks often to heat the marshmallows evenly.

When the marshmallows turned toasty brown, the Squad slid their marshmallows off their sticks and immediately smushed the toasted marshmallows onto a graham cracker. They then added some pieces of chocolate bar. They completed the scrumptious sandwich

by putting another graham cracker on top and gently squeezed it together. Everyone opened their mouths wide and bit. So delicious!

Once it was dark, they sat around the campfire, listening to it crackle and pop and watching the flames dance. Whenever a breeze blew too much smoke in one direction, they giggled and shifted spots around the fire. After taking turns telling stories while holding flashlights under their faces, it was time to sleep.

The City Squad stood together and looked up at the sky filled with stars and listened to the chorus of crickets (cricket sound effect) and the hooting of the owls. (owl sound effect)

“I love camping!” said Dominic as he curled up in his sleeping bag in the corner of the tent. Zareena and Sonia looked at each other and started to laugh.

“Maybe we should change our name from the City Squad to the Nature Squad,” suggested Zareena.

“Well, I wouldn’t go that far,” said Dominic sleepily.

Sonia leaned her head on Zareena’s shoulder, and the City or Nature Squad fell asleep. (campfire sound effect)