

Sloth and the Picnic Breeze

A little adventure about one smaller step

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Ages 3-5



Shush! A leaf slid onto Sloth's nose. He blew it off, and it slid onto his nose again. Beside the Great River, two wooden trays waited for his picnic. "Thirteen leaves for my lunch," Sloth told Aro, the macaw. "And a little shade for you." Aro lifted a wing over her head. The sunshine was warm, and the little breeze kept playing with the leaves.



Sloth spread his lunch leaves across the big tray. He touched each one as he counted. But the breeze nudged a leaf under his paw. Had he counted that one? His paw stopped. "I'll start again," he said. He began at one. The leaves rustled together, and his paw stopped again. Aro stayed beside him. Their picnic was waiting, but Sloth still didn't know how many leaves he had.



To keep the leaves still, Sloth stacked them in one tall pile. The breeze couldn't shuffle them now. But the leaves underneath were hidden. "My lunch has turned into a sandwich," he said. Aro peered at the pile. "A very leafy sandwich." Sloth gave a little chuckle. Then he looked at the two trays. One enormous job had become one enormous pile. That hadn't helped him count.



Aro lowered her wing. "We can take our time," she said. Sloth rested both paws. The big tray had room for two short rows. The little tray could hold the rest. "Try a smaller step," he murmured. He slid one leaf from the pile, then another. He made a row of five, and another row of five. A strip across the tray held them gently in place.



Sloth touched the two rows. "Five and five. That's ten. These ten can stay together." He put the remaining leaves on the little tray. Then the breeze fluttered past again. This time Sloth left his ten alone. "Try a smaller step," he said. He touched only the extras, moving each a little away from the next. "One, two, three, four." His paw reached the end. Ten together and four extras made fourteen.



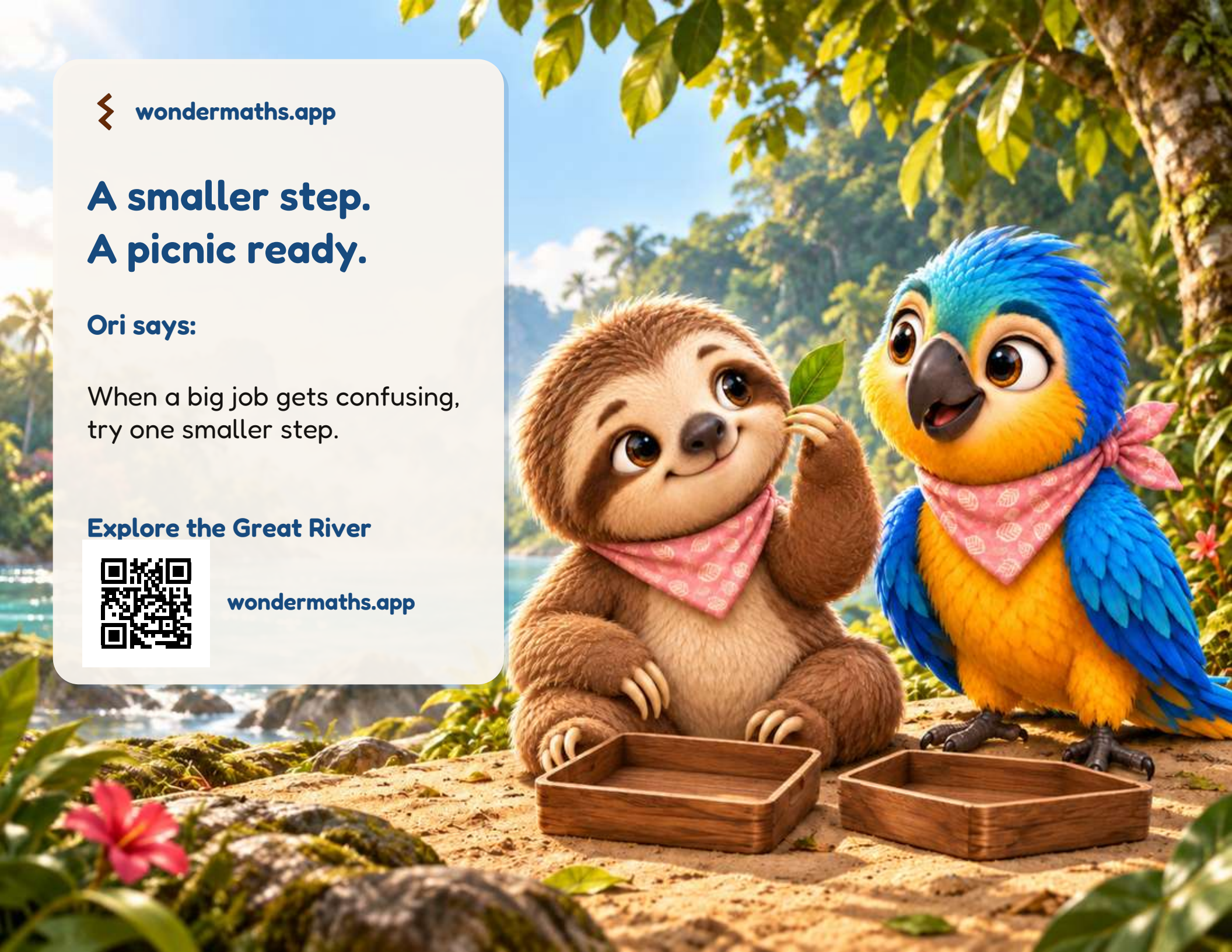
He wanted thirteen for his picnic, so one leaf could come off. Sloth lifted the last extra and set it beside Aro. He checked the little tray again. "One, two, three. Ten and three make thirteen!" The two rows stayed snug. The three extras stayed separate. Nothing needed to start all over again. Sloth leaned back. Now he could tell what he had, even when the breeze came visiting.



Aro lifted her wing for shade again. Sloth remembered his promise. He picked up the spare leaf and laid it gently on her head. It made a little roof over her beak. "My very own picnic hat!" Aro said. She tipped it toward him. Sloth giggled. The leaf that had been one too many was just right for something else. His lunch still held thirteen, and his friend had her little patch of shade.



They settled beside the river. Sloth kept the ten together and brought the little tray close. Aro's hat rustled softly. "Try a smaller step," Sloth said, with a smile. "That got our picnic ready." He didn't have to hurry his paws or do the whole job at once. He had found a way that fit. And Ori says: Little one, when a big job gets confusing, try one smaller step.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