NINA DOS RIOS

MEET THE SMITH FAMILY



TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide accompanies the introductory story in the series. It includes a vocabulary list with simple definitions, notes on American culture for readers from other countries, and discussion questions for classroom or home use.

Readability: This story scores at a 3rd-grade level (Spache Readability Formula), suitable for readers around ages 8–9 or ESL learners at an early-intermediate level.

Meet the Smith Family Readability

Original Spache Readability Formula	**Revised Spache Readability Formula**
Score: 3.4 Reading Difficulty: Very Easy Grade Level: Third Grade Age Range: 8-9	Revised Score: 3.03 Reading Difficulty: Very Easy Grade Level: Third Grade Age Range: 8-9

Here's the Story with all the words not on the Spache 3000 words in Bold:

MEET THE SMITH FAMILY by Nina Dos Rios

The **Smith** family lives in the **United States** of **America**. They are a close-**knit**, fun-**loving** family who **enjoy** spending time together. They also **enjoy adventures**.

Sometimes, **however**, an **adventure** begins at home.

It was **Saturday** morning at the **Smith** house.

Dad was **sitting** at the kitchen table, reading a book. Dad is **Pastor Smith** at the **local Baptist** Church. **Mom** says he is "tall, dark, and **handsome**." He is **thirty** seven years old. He is **studious** and hard working. When **someone** is in need, he is always ready to help **generously**.

Dad likes to laugh, too. He just doesn't always see the funny side as **quickly** as **Mom** does. **Mom** was **making** breakfast. She is two years younger than Dad. She is tall, but not as tall as he is. She works part time as a **nurse** in a **nursing** home. She is **sensible**, **calm**, and **generous**.

Mom also has a quick **wit** and a good **sense** of **humor**.

Their oldest child is **Jackson**. **Jackson** is twelve years old, **athletic**, and caring. He grew tall this summer. Now that he is **going** into the **seventh grade**, he is almost as tall as **Mom**. He watches out for his younger brothers and sisters.

Jackson is **usually patient**.

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Usually.

The twins, **Ethan** and **Emily**, are eight years old. They are both four feet eight inches tall—**exactly** the same **height**. They both have **sparkling** blue eyes and **blonde** hair like their mother.

Ethan is fun **loving** and **mischievous**. He **usually** leads the twins' **pranks**. He has a quick **sense** of **humor** and is very good at **coming** up with ideas with **Emily**.

Emily is fun **loving**, too. She and **Ethan** often have the same ideas at almost the same time. But **Emily** is not **usually** in **charge** when the twins get into **mischief**.

Still, when **trouble** comes, **Emily usually** has second thoughts.

Their little sister, **Sophia**, is six years old, small, and dark like Dad. She likes to wear her long, straight hair tied in pretty **ribbons**.

Sophia is **serious** and **calm**. She is **inquisitive** and **studious**.

The **Smith** children were very different from one another.

But they all love one thing: **Adventure**.

And on this **Saturday** morning, the **adventure** began with a dog.

"Skip!"

Jackson was standing in the **hallway**.

"Skip! Where are you?"

No one answered.

Ethan came **running** into the **hallway**.

"What's happening?"

"Skip is missing."

Emily followed him. She **asked Jackson.** "Where did you last see him?"

"I don't know," **Jackson** said.

Ethan grinned. "Maybe he's hiding."

Emily looked at him. "Maybe."

Sophia appeared behind them. "Dogs don't **usually** disappear," she said **seriously**.

Ethan smiled. "Skip does."

Jackson sighed. "Come on. Help me find him."

The children spread out. **Jackson** went into the **bedroom**.

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He looked beside the bed. "Skip?"

Nothing.

Then he heard a noise. Scratch, scratch, scratch!

Jackson looked under the bed. "There you are!"

But Skip was already **moving**. The **mischievous** dog jumped on top of the bed.

"Skip!" **Jackson** reached for him. Skip jumped down and ran out of the room.

Ethan laughed. "He **fooled** you!"

"**Ethan**!" **Jackson** called. "Help me catch him!"

Ethan and **Emily** ran after Skip.

Sophia followed at a much **slower pace**.

Skip raced down the hall and into the **living** room.

"Where did he go?" **Emily asked**.

Ethan looked around. Then he pointed. "There!"

Skip was **sitting quietly** between the chairs.

Emily giggled. "He thinks we can't see him."

Ethan whispered, "Let's **sneak** up on him."

Emily started toward the chairs. Then she stopped. "Maybe we shouldn't."

Ethan looked at her. "Why not?"

"Because **Jackson** is **going** to **blame** us if Skip gets away again."

Ethan thought about that. "Good point."

Then Skip jumped up and ran. "SKIP!"

The twins chased him down the hall.

Mom looked up from the kitchen. "What is **going** on?"

"Skip!" **Jackson shouted**.

Mom smiled. "I see."

Dad came out of the kitchen, still holding his book. "What's happening?"

"Skip is **running** away," **Jackson** said.

Dad watched the dog disappear around the corner. "Perhaps he wants some **exercise**."

Mom laughed.

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Dad looked at her. "What?"

"Nothing," **Mom** said, still smiling.

Dad looked **puzzled**.

Sophia followed the sound of Skip's **collar**. She **quietly** walked toward Skip's **crate**.

"**Everyone**," she said.

Nobody heard her.

"**Everyone**!"

The others stopped **running**. **Sophia** pointed at the **crate**. "Look."

Jackson walked over. He looked inside.

There was Skip. He was **sitting quietly** in his **crate**, looking as **innocent** as **possible**.

Jackson put his hands on his **hips**. "Skip, you are a very **naughty** dog."

Skip **wagged** his tail.

Ethan laughed. **Emily** laughed, too. Even **Sophia** smiled.

Mom laughed.

Dad looked at **everyone**. "What?"

Mom shook her head. "Nothing, dear."

Dad looked at Skip. Then he looked at the children. "I think we have a very clever dog."

Sophia nodded. "Very clever."

Jackson sighed. "And very **naughty**."

Skip **wagged** his tail. He didn't look sorry at all.

And that was how the **Smith** family's **Saturday** morning began— with a **mischievous** dog, six family **members**, a lot of **running**, and the first of many **adventures**.

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Vocabulary List of Words and Simple Definitions

Use this list to pre-teach words before reading, or as a reference while reading. Grouped by type to make classroom pre-teaching easier.

People & Family

pastor	The leader of a Christian church
close-knit	A family or group that loves and supports each other closely
oldest	The first-born; older than all the others
nurse / nursing (home)	A person who cares for sick or elderly people; a home where elderly people live and are cared for

Describing People

handsome	Good-looking (usually said about a man)
studious	Enjoys studying and learning
generous / generously	Giving a lot, without expecting anything back
sensible	Able to make good, practical decisions
quick wit / sense of humor	Able to think of clever or funny things to say quickly
athletic	Good at sports and physical activities
patient	Able to wait calmly without getting upset
mischievous	Enjoys playful tricks; a little naughty in a fun way
inquisitive	Curious; likes to ask questions and learn how things work
serious	Thoughtful and not silly; not joking
calm	Peaceful; not upset or excited
sparkling	Shining brightly (often used for eyes)
blonde	Light-colored (hair)

Actions & Reactions

enjoy	To like doing something
grinned / smiling	Showing a big, happy smile
giggled	Laughed in a light, quick way
sneak (up on)	To move quietly so no one notices you

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whispered	Spoke very quietly
shouted	Spoke very loudly
nodded	Moved your head up and down to say yes or agree
wagged (his tail)	Moved side to side (used for a dog's tail, showing happiness)
stopped	Came to a halt; quit moving
blame	To say someone caused a problem
fooled	Tricked someone into believing something that wasn't true
moving	Not staying still; in motion
charge (in charge)	Being the leader; the one responsible for deciding what happens

Feelings & States

puzzled	Confused; not understanding something
innocent	Not guilty; looking like you did nothing wrong
naughty	Behaving badly, usually in a small or funny way
trouble	A problem, often caused by misbehaving
mischief	Playful bad behavior; harmless trouble

Places & Things

hallway	A long, narrow passage inside a house connecting rooms
bedroom	A room where someone sleeps
living room	A room in a house for relaxing and spending time together
crate	A cage or box, here used as a safe space for a dog
collar	A band worn around an animal's neck, sometimes with a tag
pranks	Playful tricks

Other Useful Words

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adventure	An exciting or unusual experience
pace	Speed of walking or moving
height	How tall someone or something is
hips	The part of the body where the legs meet the waist
grade (e.g. "seventh grade")	A level or year in school
thirty(-seven)	The number 37
possible	Able to happen or be true
exercise	Physical activity done to stay healthy or active

American Culture Notes

These notes explain details in the story that may be unfamiliar to readers from other countries.

- **Pastor vs. Priest:** In Roman Catholic Church, the religious leader of a parish is a priest. Priests do not marry or have children. In this story, Dad is a pastor — the leader of a Protestant church. Protestant churches are a different branch of Christianity than the Catholic Church. It is normal and expected for a pastor to be married and raise a family, as Dad does here.

  The Biblical basis for this is found in:

  - **1 Timothy 3:2–5:** *"This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that rules his own house well, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*
  - **1 Timothy 3:12:** *"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."*
  - **Titus 1:6:** *"If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.*

  This is why the story can show him as both a religious leader and a father at the breakfast table.

- **Baptist Church**: "Baptist" is the name of one specific Protestant denomination (there are many others, such as Methodist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian). Churches like this are often central to community life in the U.S., especially in smaller towns.

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- **Nursing Home:** In many developing countries, especially in Latin America and the Philippines, elderly family members almost always live with their adult children or extended family, and it is uncommon — sometimes even seen as neglectful — to place a parent or grandparent in a separate care facility.
  In the U.S., however, a nursing home is a common and accepted option: a residential facility where elderly people live and receive daily medical and personal care from staff, including nurses like Mom. Families may still visit often, but the elderly person lives there rather than at home. This reflects a real cultural difference in how families care for aging relatives, not a lack of family closeness.
- **House layout**: The Smith house has a hallway with separate rooms, and each child has their own bedroom. In many countries, homes are smaller and children often share a room or sleep in a shared family space. A house with a hallway and individual bedrooms for each child is common in the U.S. but is not how most families around the world live.
- **Pets:** Skip has his own crate, a collar, and is chased around and worried over like a member of the family. Many American families spend significant time, attention, and money caring for pets — sometimes more than would be typical in other cultures, where animals may be kept but treated more practically and with less emotional investment.
- **Seventh grade**: In the American school system, seventh grade is usually for students around 12–13 years old (roughly middle school, between elementary and high school). It is a time when children enter puberty and shoot up in height.
- **Feet and inches:** The U.S. measures height in feet and inches rather than centimeters. For reference, "five feet two inches" is about 157 cm, and "four feet eight inches" is about 142 cm.
- **Family roles**: The story shows a fairly traditional division of roles (Dad works outside the home in ministry, Mom works part-time and manages the household), which is one common family structure in the U.S., though far from the only one.

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Discussion Questions

Before Reading

1. Look at the title and think about the word "family." What do you expect this story to be about?
2. Have you ever lost a pet or seen someone else's pet run away? What happened?

During/After Reading — Comprehension

3. How many children are in the Smith family? What are their names?
4. What are the twins' names, and how are they described as being different from each other, even though they look alike?
5. Where did the children finally find Skip?

Inference and Character

6. The story never directly says "Jackson is responsible," but shows it through his actions. Find one thing Jackson does that shows he is responsible.
7. Ethan and Emily often think of the same ideas, but they don't always agree on what to do. Find an example of this in the story.
8. Why do you think they think differently in that moment?
9. Sophia is described as "serious and calm," but she is also the one who solves the mystery. Why do you think her personality helped her find Skip?
10. Mom laughs and says "Nothing" to Dad's book comment. Why do you think this is funny to her but not to him right away?

Personal Connection

11. Which Smith family member do you think is most like you? Why?
12. Do you have brothers, sisters, or cousins? Do any of them act like Jackson, Ethan, Emily, or Sophia?
13. What is an "adventure" that has happened in your own home or family?

Vocabulary in Context

14. Find the word "mischievous" in the story. Which two characters are described this way? Can you think of a time you or someone you know was mischievous?
15. The story says Emily "usually has second thoughts." What do you think this phrase means, based on how she acts in the story?

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Optional Extension Activity

Ask students to draw or describe their own family the way Nina Dos Rios describes the Smiths — one sentence for each person's age, appearance, and one personality trait shown through an action rather than just stated.

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