

LET'S GO FOR A RIDE

Theme: The dangers of cycling without a helmet.

He raced around the corner, he was desperate to be first. He looked behind him , laughing because he was way ahead. When he turned his head to look at the road in front he suddenly saw a large white van in the middle of the road. He tried to squeeze the brakes on and though his tyres locked he was going too fast, he just kept going.

Why do you think he was going fast ? What is going to happen?

Here is the full story:

“I’m bored ,” said Leroy for the third time in the last half hour.

“We wouldn’t be bored if you hadn’t kicked the ball into old Grumpy’s garden,” Tom told him. They didn’t know his real name , but they called him Grumpy because he was always complaining whenever the football hit his fence. This time Leroy kicked the ball over the fence and Grumpy was quickly outside to get it and gleefully told them they wouldn’t get it back. Ashley was furious because it was his ball, he had only got it last week. Ashley had shouted at Grumpy that he would get his Dad over to get the ball back. Grumpy just made a rude sign at them and went indoors with the ball.

The boys now sat under the big tree in the park wondering what to do. They were throwing pebbles and bits of stick into Tom’s upturned cycle helmet. He was the only one who wore a helmet. Leroy lost his and didn’t have the nerve to tell his parents. Mark and Ashley never wore a helmet. When Tom first turned up at the park with one they teased him but Tom just ignored them and they soon didn’t bother to say anything. Tom’s helmet was now a part of his gear, and, it made a good target for throwing pebbles into.

What is the purpose of wearing a helmet ?

“Let’s go for a ride ,” suggested Mark.

“It’s too hot,” said Tom.

“I know,” suggested Leroy, “we could have a race around the field.” Leroy was always competitive , he had to turn everything they did into a competition. It was his idea to throw things into Tom’s helmet and he kept a score as to who succeeded in throwing the most pebbles into the helmet. He got bored once he knew he wasn’t winning. The other boys didn’t like the idea of racing.

“Let’s go down to Old Mill Stream,” proposed Mark , “we could build a dam.” He also liked the idea of paddling in the cold water to cool himself down. All the boys perked up at that idea. They hadn’t been down there for quite a while, especially since the heavy rains had made the stream overflow. But the weather had been very dry over the last few weeks and the stream was probably just right for messing about in.

The boys got to their bicycles and began to cycle towards the exit of the park. “Wait for me,” shouted Tom who was trying to get all the pebbles and bits of sticks out of his helmet before putting it on. With his helmet secured on his head he furiously peddled to catch up with the others.

Old Mill Stream was situated in a valley covered by woods. The valley was surrounded by housing estates and was a popular place for the locals to walk along.

Because the valley was steep the road took a winding route down and at places was only wide enough for one car.

On leaving the park the boys rode along a busy main road then after about half a mile turned into the estate. They were going past the road where Ashley lived. "Hang on , I want to go home and get some sweets," he shouted. The other boys followed him to his house and waited outside while he went in. He went to the sweet jar and put a handful of Fox's Glacier Fruits into his pocket. After a quick drink of water he rejoined his friends.

The boys carried on through the estate towards the top of the valley through which the Old Mill Stream flowed. It used to be called that because at the head of the valley used to be a flour mill, now there was just an old ruin. As they cycled along they chatted amiably to each other.

"Are you going to watch Match of the Day tonight," asked Mark to nobody in particular.

"Are you allowed to stay up late ?" asked Tom.

"When my mum and dad are out the sitter usually allows me," said Mark.

"My mum says I don't need a sitter now," said Ashley.

"You're lucky," said Leroy, "my parents leave me for an hour but if they're going out for a long time I have to stay with my Gran , it's so boring." Leroy was going through a period when he found most things boring !

The boys reached the top of the valley. Here, the road narrowed slightly as it wound its way down to the stream. Leroy suddenly shouted , "I'll race you to the bottom!" and he set off quickly down the lane. Tom and Mark stayed behind, they didn't like the fast speed down this steep road. But Ashley rose to the challenge and raced after Leroy. Soon they were both side by side shooting down the road.

"Come on, slow coach," shouted Leroy as he went ahead.

That made Ashley very angry, though Leroy was a good friend he did irritate his friends by his competitiveness. When he was winning he gloated and when he was losing he pretended to be bored as if he didn't care. Ashley put on a spurt and caught him up, he was determined to beat Leroy, especially as it was Leroy who lost his football.

Down in the valley Mike put his van into a lower gear as he began to climb up the lane. He had just finished a hard day at work at the old mill. The mill now had new owners who were restoring it back to a working mill. Mike was a carpenter and was putting in the new windows. He leaned forward to turn his radio on, momentarily taking his eye off the road. He found radio one and then concentrated on going around the bends that would lead him out of the valley.

Ashley and Leroy were now building up quite a speed. Leroy was beginning to panic as he nearly came off at a bend. He slowed down as he came into another bend and much to his annoyance he saw Ashley shoot on ahead of him. Ashley gave a whoop of joy as he leapt ahead of Leroy. He raced around the corner, he was desperate to be first. He looked behind him , laughing because he was way ahead. When he turned his head to look at the road in front he suddenly saw a large white van in the middle of the road. He tried to squeeze the brakes on and though his tyres locked he was going too fast, he just kept going.

Mike panicked when his mobile telephone rang, he was so tired he had forgotten where he had put it. He looked down onto the front passenger seat and found it under his coat. He put the telephone to his ear at the same time as his eyes returned to look at the road ahead. What he saw made him drop the telephone , grip the steering wheel and slam his breaks on as hard as he could. The road was too

narrow for him to swerve to one side. Before he came to a halt there was a loud crash as the cyclist hurtled into the front of his van. He was aware of a body flying into his windscreen and then he couldn't see anything as his windscreen shattered into thousands of pieces. When the van stopped he instantly jumped out, dreading what he was going to see.

Leroy heard the screeching brakes and impact before he rounded the corner. He was already applying his brakes to stop so when he came up to the van he was hardly moving. He stood there, one foot on the ground, both hands on the handle bars, watching the driver get off his van and run around to look at Ashley. The other two boys rounded the corner and quickly stopped. All the boys dropped their bicycles and ran to the scene.

Ashley was very still and he had blood flowing from his head. Mike ran back to his van to find his mobile phone and call an ambulance. Leroy couldn't look at Ashley's still body. All he could stare at were some brightly coloured sweets scattered across the road.

(Note from the author: 'This story is dedicated to a young 12 year old boy I used to teach who died from a similar accident. He, too, was not wearing a helmet. It was the saddest funeral I had ever been to.')

Discussion:

1/ How do you think Leroy was feeling at the end of the story ?

Do you think Mike should be feeling guilty ?

2/ It is impossible to say if Ashley would have survived if he had been wearing a helmet. He certainly would have had a better chance of survival. Talk about other activities , such as skateboarding, where protective clothing should be worn.