

Years 7 & 8

1st Place and Best Overall: Leo Ford

Year 7, Perth Waldorf School

### The Vixen

The blood red vixen paced around her den; her soot-black paws padded on the packed dirt ground. Although she seemed silent and composed on the outside, inside of her was a hurricane of questions, thoughts and worries. Should she go out into the open to hunt? It was the two-leggeds hunting season, the most dangerous time in the forest. All the other foxes try to make themselves scarce at this fateful time of year.

But how could she stay here? If she stayed here, then all her kits would die of starvation. She looked over at them now. They were sleeping peacefully in a big pile in the darkest corner of the den. They had no idea how much danger they were in. Should she risk her life and go out? Or should she stay here and doom her kits to starvation? How could she live with that? She'd rather die herself . . . With her mind fully made up, the blood red vixen with soot black paws stalked out of her den.

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The vixen smelt the ground. She was following the fresh scent of a hare, and she was getting closer. It was just after sunrise; the forest was most beautiful at this time of day. The sun shone through beads of dew that hung like Christmas decorations on leaves and cobwebs. Moss and lichen clung to the trees, wildflowers sprinkled the floor, and the tinkling of streams and the sweet melody of birdsong could be heard harmonizing all throughout the forest. The vixen would have normally enjoyed herself if the sticky veil of worries wasn't hanging over her like a foreboding storm cloud. Suddenly a twig snapped. The vixen froze. The sound came from behind a tangled blackberry bush. She stood poised, as still as a statue, the only things moving were her heart, which was a hummingbird trying to escape the cage of ribs that it was trapped in. And her mind, which was a mad-man's newest creation, the cogs, pulleys and levers working as hard as they could trying to figure out what to do next. Finally, after some contemplation, the vixen broke out of her trance and slowly – ever so slowly – crept forward and peered through a gap in the leaves and the entwined spiky canes. On the other side of the thorny wall-like black berry bush was a small clearing, bathed in dappled sunshine. Inside the clearing was a small fawn-brown hare, the one that she had been hunting! It was nibbling the fresh green shoots that were sprouting up all around the clearing, and it was unaware that it was being watched.

*This is what will save my kits from starvation,* thought the vixen.

She would just make the jump over the bush.

Just as she was about to pounce there was a horrible sound. BANG! The hare bolted. BANG! BANG! BANG! Gunshots! And they were getting closer! The banging sounds were now accompanied by whinnying, thundering hoofs and barking. The hunters! The vixen barely had time to process the thought as she was fleeing as fast as her paws would take her.

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With her heart pounding in her head and adrenaline coursing through her veins, the vixen ran for her life, away from the men with guns and the ferocious hunting dogs with their dagger-like teeth. Her paws barely touched the ground.

She was an arrow launched from a bow.  
A wildfire tearing through the forest.  
A drop of rain falling.  
A monsoon flood.  
A bolt of lightning.  
A tidal wave.  
A tumbling rapid.  
A shooting star.  
A gust of wind.  
A streak of red.  
A shadow.  
A flash.  
A hunter.  
A hunted.  
*A red fox.*

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Inch by inch the vixen was losing the hunters. They fell further and further back, until she couldn't hear them anymore. She stopped, panting. She heard the tinkling of a nearby stream and trotted over. Just as the vixen was climbing down the muddy slope towards the cool clear water, there was a bone-chilling snap. A fiery pain rose up her hind leg. She looked down and saw to her horror that her back paw was caught in the razor-sharp jaws of a bear trap. The vixen howled in agony.

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It was torture lying a mere metre away from the water that she most desperately needed. The vixen had tried prising the stubborn jaws of the trap open, that didn't work. She had tried calling for help, that also didn't work. And she had tried wrenching her paw out, that only made it worse. She lay there for hours, her mind creating horrifying images of her kits lying in the den, waiting for her, slowly starving, or, even worse, going out into the open in search of food and water only to be killed by the hunters. She hated two-leggeds, they were nothing but pain and suffering. The sun slowly rose higher and higher until it was directly above the trapped vixen. Its warmth was no longer pleasant. Just as the vixen was closing her eyes and giving up, she heard footsteps. She opened her eyes and saw . . . a two-legged. She emitted a low growl. The two-legged cautiously approached. She looked different

from the others somehow. Her movements were slow and fluid, her hair was long and silver, and she smelt of herbs.

The vixen growled louder, the two-legged raised both of her hands as if to say, "Don't worry, I won't hurt you." The vixen showed her teeth. The two-legged climbed down the bank to the stream, she cupped her hands and filled them with the sweet, life-giving water. She then climbed carefully up the bank towards the trapped vixen. She held her hands out to the vixen, who stopped growling. Her mind told her to bite the two-legged's hands, but all her instincts went against that, if she bit her hand then the water would be dropped and gone to waste. Begrudgingly the vixen drank from the two-legged's hand. The cool water slipped down her throat, instantly soothing it.

The two-legged picked up a strong stick from the ground and wedged it into the jaws of the trap. It opened slightly, just enough for the vixen to pull her paw out, she whined. How could a movement so simple be so painful? The two-legged reached into her brown fur cloak and pulled out some strange smelling herbs. She put them into her mouth and chewed, then spat it onto her calloused hand. It had turned into a kind of paste. She gently rubbed it onto the vixen's injured leg, and it immediately started to turn numb. The two-legged ripped a strip off her soft brown cloak and tied it firmly around the vixen's paw.

Then she reached into her cloak once more and pulled out a hare. (Could it have possibly been the same hare that the vixen was hunting?) She put the offering down in front of the vixen who picked it up in her jaws. The vixen made eye contact with the two-legged. Her amber eyes were full of gratitude, the two-legged's were alight with what seemed like happiness.

They sat there for a while, the shining golden connection flowing between fox and human, until the vixen stood up and limped in the direction of her den. The two-legged raised her hand in farewell.

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*Maybe, just maybe, not all two-leggeds are bad,* thought the blood red vixen with soot-black paws as she disappeared into the forest.

The End