

# Help! We've Been Invaded by Aliens

By Julia Pferdehirt

A Readers Theater script to accompany chapter 7 (The Elm Street Clubhouse) of the historical fiction book [\*Wisconsin Forest Tales\*](#).

Author Julia Pferdehirt wrote this Readers Theater script as a way to introduce chapter 7 of the [\*Wisconsin Forest Tales\*](#) book and give students an opportunity to read aloud with classmates. In the first part of the script, students take turns reading at each asterisk (\*). A short play follows with several parts to be assigned.

## Help! We've Been Invaded by Aliens

\* Imagine this... the TV announcer stops your favorite program with these words:

### **“Emergency Alert. Aliens sighted in Wisconsin”**

The worried-looking announcer appears on the TV screen.

\* “The announcer says, “Silently and secretly, dangerous aliens have crossed Wisconsin’s borders. While you were going about your daily lives, alien life forms have invaded our towns, cities, and woodlands.

\* Disguised as harmless garden plants, animals or insects, these invaders burrow into the roots of trees or attach themselves to birds and animals. Some have crawled into the motors of boats or traveled by truck, hidden in crates and boxes.

\* Believe me, these aliens are up to no good. Scientists have discovered them hiding in the forests of Wisconsin. Some are living in our lakes and rivers. Some could be in your own back yard!”

\* The announcer’s serious face gazes from your TV screen. He says, “Citizens of Wisconsin be aware and alert – these alien invaders are taking over!” Now, back to our regular program...

\* Guess what! Everything said in this imaginary announcement is true. Aliens *have* invaded Wisconsin. But, if you're thinking of creatures from outer space, think again. These aliens are plants, animals, and insects from other parts of the world.

\* Scientists call these aliens "invasive species." They are dangerous because they don't belong here.

\* Invasive species come from other countries far from Wisconsin. In their "home" countries, these plants, animals and insects are controlled by natural enemies. But here in Wisconsin, they have no natural enemies. So, they grow and multiply too fast.

\* One potential new "invader" is the emerald ash borer. This insect came from Asia. In Michigan, these insects have killed many ash trees.

\* The bad news? Emerald ash borer could easily come to Wisconsin. Foresters are on the lookout. Will emerald ash borers be joining the long list of other invaders like garlic mustard plants or gypsy moths that are already in Wisconsin? The good news? You can help stop invasive species.

\* Madison Girl Scout Troop 639 helped by raising beetles called *Galerucella californiensis*. These beetles aren't as fancy as their name, but they are one kind of beetle that defoliates and weakens purple loosestrife, a weed that damages Wisconsin wetlands.

\* Purple loosestrife is an alien invader. It grows so quickly it crowds out native plants. One plant will grow more than five feet tall and produce between two and three *million* seeds each year!

\* The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources fights purple loosestrife by giving beetles to volunteers like Troop 639. Volunteers raise these beetles with purple loosestrife plants in net-covered pots. Then, the volunteers transport the beetles to a wetland where purple loosestrife grows and let them loose.

\* The beetles hunt for purple loosestrife. Then they eat and eat and eat some more. Thanks to Troop 639, Wingra Marsh in Madison is winning the fight against purple loosestrife.

\* That's good news! You can do something about invasive species too. You can learn to spot gypsy moths hitchhiking on your camping equipment. Boat owners can check their boats for zebra mussels. You can pull up and remove plants that don't belong in our woodlands and yards.

\* In this play, you'll meet some kids who discovered a not-so-nice surprise at their favorite camping spot. Find out what they did to join the battle against alien invaders.

## **Help! We've Been Invaded by Aliens**

### **Characters:**

*Three narrators, Mom, Dad, Emily, Britta, Alex, Josh and Chris, the Naturalist.*

**Narrator #1:** The Millers love the woods. Every year they take a camping vacation. They pack up sleeping bags and tents, a camp stove and coolers. They bring all the fixings for S'mores and hobo dinners. And, every year, on the day school ends in June, the family piles into the van and takes off for a county, state or national forest in Wisconsin.

**Narrator #2:** The Millers are lucky to live in Wisconsin. There are so many different forests where they can hike and camp!

**Narrator #3:** This year, they're headed to the north woods to one of their favorite camping spots. It's called Northern Highland – American Legion State Forest. It's 220,000 acres with 900 lakes.

**Narrator #1:** What? Nine hundred lakes in one state forest?

**Narrator #3:** That's right! Over two million people visit this state forest each year.

**Narrator #2:** And, best of all, because we're residents of Wisconsin, all this belongs to us!

**Narrator #1:** The Millers are ready to go. They jump into the van and head for the north woods.

**Dad:** Great job packing the van everybody. It's a long drive. I can't wait to get there.

**Mom:** Remember, last summer we went to Copper Falls State Park? Two years ago we camped at Northern Highland – American Legion State Forest. Guess what? We reserved campsite number 429 at the Crystal Lake campground. This is the same campsite we used on our last trip. You liked camping right by the lake and being close to a nature trail too!

**Emily:** The campsite on Crystal Lake? Oh! I loved the wildflowers. Remember the lady's slippers?

**Britta:** I liked watching the sunsets over the lake.

**Alex:** I liked the hiking trails.

**Mom:** Josh, what do you like best about camping in the state forest?

**Josh:** My favorite thing is always the same wherever we camp. The S'mores!

**Alex:** You're right about that. Josh always manages to get more S'mores than anybody.

**Narrator #2:** The Millers will have a long drive. Northern Highland American Legion State forest is about four hours by car from their home in Madison.

**Narrator #3:** Let's skip the long drive and catch up with them the next day. The kids were awake at sunrise. Mom and dad, of course, slept until 7:00. They ate breakfast, washed up and are ready to have some fun.

**Emily:** First thing I want to do is follow that trail into the woods. I want to see the wildflowers. I even brought my guidebook to find their names.

**Alex:** As long as it involves hiking, I'm happy to go.

**Josh:** Remember the lady's slippers?

**Narrator #1:** The kids got permission to hike a trail along Crystal Lake.

**Dad:** You go on ahead. Your mom and I will catch up.

**Narrator #2:** Emily, Britta, Josh, and Alex hit the trail. They followed the shoreline of the lake for a long time. Then the trail heads into the woods.

**Emily:** This is where the wildflowers grow.

**Britta:** I'm looking for lady's slippers.

**Josh:** I'm looking for those white flowers near the big rocks...what are they called? Dutch something...

**Alex:** Dutchman's breeches. They're right here in Emily's wildflower book.

**Narrator #3:** The woods were cool and pleasant. But, as the kids hiked, they didn't see lady's slippers or Dutchman's breeches. Everywhere they looked, they saw a new kind of plant.

**Alex:** What is this plant with the ragged-edged leaves and the little white flowers. It's everywhere we look.

**Narrator #3:** Just then, mom and dad appeared on the trail.

**Mom:** Well, what have our great wildflower hunters found?

**Emily:** I don't understand, Mom. The lady's slippers are gone. Just disappeared.

**Britta:** And the Dutchman's breeches used to cover the entire ground around those big rocks.

**Josh:** Now some mystery plant with white flowers is all over. The leaves have edges like ragged teeth.

**Alex:** Whatever they are, they've taken over since the last time we were here.

**Josh:** And I don't like it!

**Narrator #1:** Mr. and Mrs. Miller stooped down to look. The plants grew about a foot high. At the top of some plants small, white flowers grew, each with four petals shaped like teardrops.

**Dad:** You're right, they sure seem to have taken over since we were here two years ago.

**Narrator #2:** The Millers hiked most of the morning. At noon, with the sun hot overhead, their stomachs were roaring for food. They took a shortcut along the road back to their campsite – and lunch!

**Britta:** Great lunch! Why does food always taste so amazing when we're camping?

**Emily:** At home, I don't like peanut butter and jelly. Out here, I'll eat two sandwiches and look for more!

**Josh:** I have a great idea. How about starting a campfire and making some S'mores?

**Dad:** We'll have S'mores tonight. I have a plan for this afternoon.

**Alex:** More hiking? Fishing? How about canoeing?

**Dad:** Actually I was thinking of paying a visit to the naturalist at the nature center. We can ask about new hiking trails and check out the calendar for programs.

**Emily:** Good idea. And, while we're there, I want to ask the naturalist what happened to our wildflowers.

**Britta:** And find out about those mystery plants. Where'd they come from? And who told them they could just take over the woods?

**Narrator #1:** After lunch, the Millers hung out on the beach for awhile.

**Mom:** The campground brochure says the naturalist is Chris MacDonald. And, there's a "Talk with the Naturalist" time at the nature center at 3:00 this afternoon. Until then, let's have some "quiet time."

**Narrator #2:** The kids skipped rocks along the lake edge. Mom hauled a chair down to the beach and began to read a book. Dad spread a towel on the sand, lay down, and closed his eyes. Soon, the soft rumble of snoring mixed with the sound of waves and gulls.

**Josh:** Emily, asking the naturalist about those plants is a good idea.

**Alex:** I know things change in nature. Sometimes animals move to other places, so I guess plants could move too. But, somehow, it doesn't seem right.

**Emily:** That's exactly what I was thinking. Why would one kind of plant just move in and push out all the wildflowers?

**Britta:** And where did the wildflowers go?

**Josh:** I'm going to get some paper and a pencil. I'll sketch this mystery plant and find out what the naturalist knows.

**Narrator #3:** Josh raced to the campsite and returned with a pencil and his large, hard-covered sketchbook. Josh dreamed of being an artist someday and carried his sketchbook everywhere.

**Narrator #1:** About fifteen minutes before 3:00, the Millers headed out to meet the camp naturalist. After giving a warm welcome to Northern Highland – American Legion State Forest, Chris the naturalist showed a video, passed out trail maps and answered questions about everything from campfire building to wild mushrooms to fishing licenses. At the end of the program, Alex raised his hand.

**Alex:** What happened to the wildflowers near Crystal Lake? When we were here two years ago, we found lady's slippers.

**Britta:** And Dutchman's breeches in the clearing near the big rocks.

**Emily:** But now, the whole area is taken over by these funny plants with white flowers.

**Josh:** I sketched one of these plants. The leaves have jagged edges, like round teeth. The flowers have four, white petals.

**Emily:** What we want to know is, where did the wildflowers go?

**Narrator #2:** As Chris, the naturalist, looked at Josh's drawing, he frowned and shook his head. Whatever the mystery plant was, the Millers could see Chris wasn't happy about it.

**Chris:** Your drawing tells me everything I need to know. Your mystery plant is called garlic mustard. And it is an alien invader.

**Emily:** What?

**Britta:** An alien?

**Alex:** Of course, you're joking.

**Chris:** No. Garlic mustard really is an alien invader. It's called an invasive species. The first garlic mustard seeds were brought to North America many years ago. People planted them in their gardens. But garlic mustard doesn't stay where it's planted. The plants grow fast and close together. Give it a couple of years and....

**Josh:** ...it just takes over!

**Chris:** Exactly.

**Britta:** So that's where the wildflowers went! This garlic mustard plant grows so fast and so thick that the wildflowers don't have enough room.

**Chris:** Exactly! They'll even crowd out the young trees.

**Emily:** But the lady's slippers. The beautiful, white trilliums and Dutchman's breeches. Are they all gone?

**Chris:** No. Not all the wildflowers are gone. But garlic mustard is a real problem.

**Alex:** Can't you do something?

**Chris:** Actually, there's something *you* can do.

**Narrator #3:** Chris led the Millers into the nature center. He disappeared into an office and returned with big, black plastic bags.

**Chris:** Imagine a movie about invading aliens trying to take over Wisconsin. Some people would be defenders. They'd surround the cities to keep the aliens from taking more land. Other people would be offensive fighters. They'd march into alien territory to win back all the land the aliens had taken.

**Britta:** Let me guess. You want us to be offensive fighters?

**Chris:** That's right. We need alien fighters to pull up garlic mustard wherever they find it.

**Emily:** Will the wildflowers return then?

**Chris:** Garlic mustard is a stubborn alien. Seeds can live in the soil as long as seven years.

**Josh:** So the alien fighters have to pull up garlic mustard for seven years?

**Chris:** Exactly right again, Josh. But, every year more land will be returned to the wildflowers and trees. Will you sign up to be an alien fighter?

**Narrator #1:** The whole Miller family agreed to pull garlic mustard wherever and whenever they saw it. By the time their camping vacation was finished, they'd delivered eight big trash bags filled with garlic mustard plants to the naturalist's office for disposal.

**Narrator #2:** The kids attended a workshop about invasive species run by Chris. They returned home armed with booklets and brochures about everything from zebra mussels to gypsy moths to purple loosestrife.

**Narrator #3:** Let's return to the Millers' last night on the Northern Highland – American Legion State Forest. The whole family just returned to the campsite after watching the most beautiful pink and gold sunset over Crystal Lake.

**Mom:** What has been the best part of this vacation?

**Emily:** Canoeing on the lake.

**Alex:** Fishing. Catching them. Eating them. Anything to do with fishing!

**Britta:** The hiking was best.

**Josh:** Usually I know just how to answer this question. But this year I'm not so sure.

I like the idea that because we pulled all that garlic mustard, next year we might come back and find the wildflowers are winning the fight.

**Dad:** Pulling up plants was your favorite part of the vacation? Now that I know you get such a kick out of pulling weeds I'll put you on dandelion digging duty at home!

**Josh:** Before we head home we've got another alien invader to look for. They're called gypsy moths. Chris says we should check our car, our camper and all of our equipment for these moths. They're like uninvited hitchhikers. And, if we take gypsy moths home with us, they could hurt our trees.

**Emily:** You did take the lead in pulling up all that garlic mustard. Was being an alien fighter your favorite part of the vacation?

**Josh:** Actually, I did like being an alien fighter. Chris put my name in his “Alien Fighter Hall of Fame.” But that wasn’t my favorite part of the vacation.

**Mom:** What was?

**Josh:** S’mores, of course. Even fighting aliens isn’t as good as eating S’mores. And, speaking of S’mores, I counted the chocolate, marshmallows and graham crackers. We have enough for seven S’mores.

**Dad:** And six people.

**Josh:** As Chris would say: “exactly!” I’ve got it all worked out. One S’more each. And two for the member of the Alien Fighting Hall of Fame!