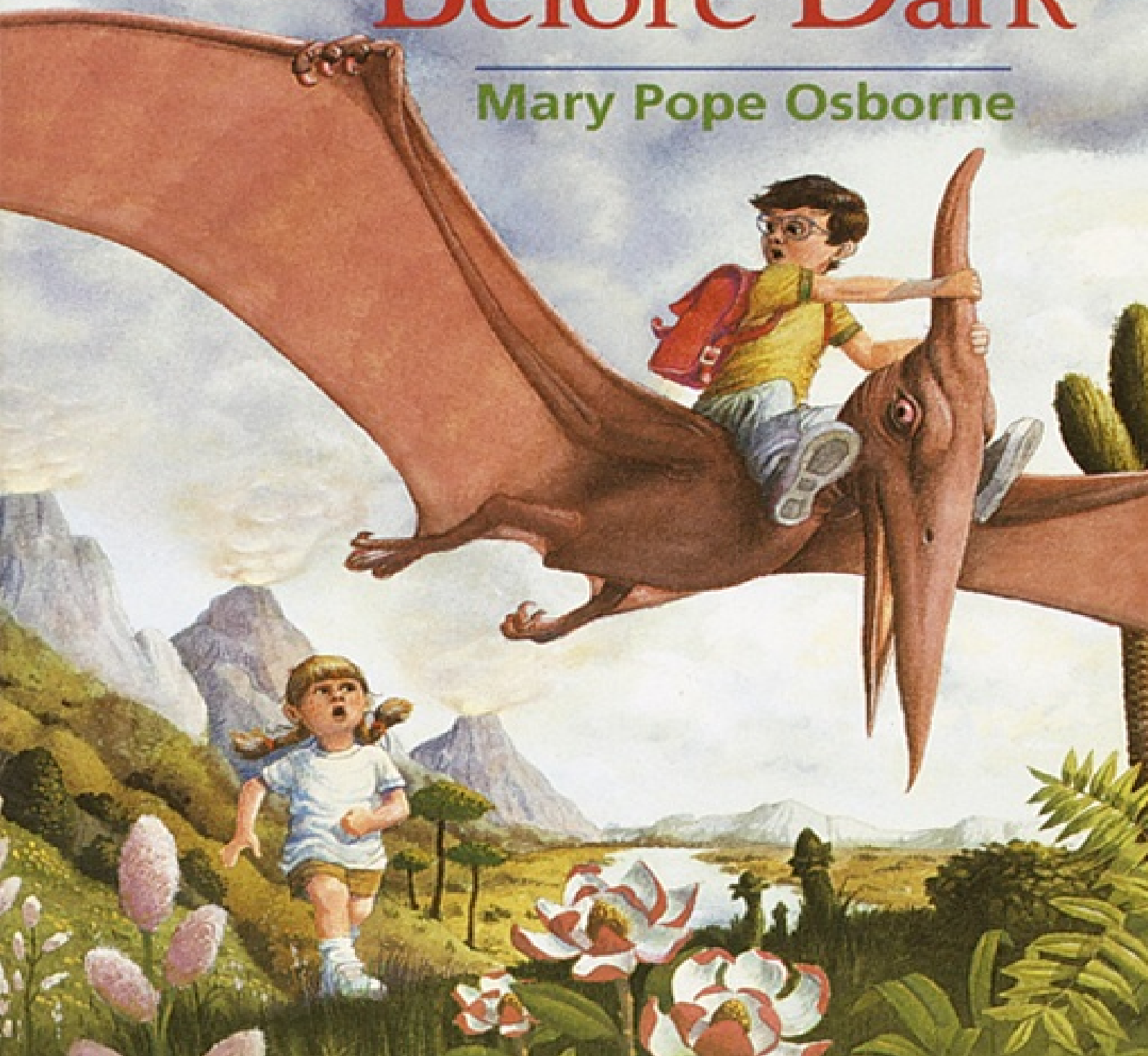


MAGIC  TREE HOUSE #1

# Dinosaurs Before Dark

Mary Pope Osborne



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Here's what kids have to say to

Mary Pope Osborne, author of  
the Magic Tree House series:

*WOW! You have an imagination like no other.*—Adam W.

*I love your books. If you stop writing books, it will be like losing a best friend.*—Ben M.

*I think you are the real Morgan le Fay. There is always magic in your books.*—Erica Y.

*One day I was really bored and I didn't want to read ... I looked in your book. I read a sentence, and it was interesting. So I read some more, until the book was done. It was so good I read more and more. Then I had read all of your books, and now I hope you write lots more.*—Danai K.

*I always read [your books] over and over ... 1 time, 2 times, 3 times, 4 times ...* —Yuan C.

*You are my best author in the world. I love your books. I read all the time. I read everywhere. My mom is like freaking out.*—Ellen C.

*I hope you make these books for all yours and mine's life.*—Riki H.

Magic Tree House® books, too!

*Thank you for opening faraway places and times to my class through your books. They have given me the chance to bring in additional books, materials, and videos to share with the class.—J. Cameron*

*It excites me to see how involved [my fourth-grade reading class] is in your books ... I would do anything to get my students more involved, and this has done it.—C. Rutz*

*I discovered your books last year ... WOW! Our students have gone crazy over them. I can't order enough copies! ... Thanks for contributing so much to children's literature!—C. Kendziora*

*I first came across your Magic Tree House series when my son brought one home ... I have since introduced this great series to my class. They have absolutely fallen in love with these books! ... My students are now asking me for more independent reading time to read them. Your stories have inspired even my most struggling readers.—M. Payne*

*I love how I can go beyond the [Magic Tree House] books and use them as springboards for other learning.—R. Gale*

*We have enjoyed your books all year long. We check your Web site to find new information. We pull our map down to find the areas where the adventures take place. My class always chimes in at key parts of the story. It feels good to hear my students ask for a book and cheer when a new book comes out.—J. Korinek*

*Our students have "Magic Tree House fever." I can't keep your books on the library shelf.—J. Rafferty*

*Your books truly invite children into the pleasure of reading. Thanks for such terrific work.—S. Smith*

*The children in the fourth grade even hide the [Magic Tree House] books in the library so that they will be able to find them when they are ready to check them out.—K.*

Mortensen

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*My Magic Tree House books are never on the bookshelf because they are always being read by my students. Thank you for creating such a wonderful series.—K. Mahoney*

MAGIC TREE HOUSE® #1

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# Dinosaurs Before Dark

by Mary Pope Osborne



illustrated by Sal Murdocca

A STEPPING STONE BOOK™  
Random House  New York

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SUMMARY: Eight-year-old Jack and his younger sister Annie find a magic tree house, which whisks them back to an ancient time zone where they see live dinosaurs.

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*For Linda and Mallory,*

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*who took the trip with me*

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*Excerpt from Magic Tree House #2: The Knight at Dawn*





# 1

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## Into the Woods

“Help! A monster!” said Annie.

“Yeah, sure,” said Jack. “A real monster in Frog Creek, Pennsylvania.”

“Run, Jack!” said Annie. She ran up the road.

Oh, brother.

This is what he got for spending time with his seven-year-old sister.

Annie loved pretend stuff. But Jack was eight and a half. He liked *real* things.

“Watch out, Jack! The monster’s coming! Race you!”

“No, thanks,” said Jack.

Annie raced alone into the woods.

Jack looked at the sky. The sun was about to set.

“Come on, Annie! It’s time to go home!”

But Annie had disappeared.

Jack waited.

No Annie.

“Annie!” he shouted again.

“Jack! Jack! Come here!”

Jack groaned. “This better be good,” he said.

Jack left the road and headed into the woods. The trees were lit with a golden late afternoon light.

“Come here!” called Annie.

There she was. Standing under a tall oak tree. “Look,” she said. She was pointing at a rope ladder.

The longest rope ladder Jack had ever seen.

“Wow,” he whispered.

The ladder went all the way up to the top of the tree.

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There—at the top—was a tree house. It was tucked between two branches.

“That must be the highest tree house in the world,” said Annie.

“Who built it?” asked Jack. “I’ve never seen it before.”

“I don’t know. But I’m going up,” said Annie.

“No. We don’t know who it belongs to,” said Jack.

“Just for a teeny minute,” said Annie. She started up the ladder.

“Annie, come back!”

She kept climbing.



Jack sighed. “Annie, it’s almost dark. We have to go home.”

Annie disappeared inside the tree house.

“An-nie!”

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Jack waited a moment. He was about to call again when Annie poked her head out of the tree house window.

“Books!” she shouted.

“What?”

“It’s filled with books!”

Oh, man! Jack loved books.

He pushed his glasses into place. He gripped the sides of the rope ladder, and up he went.

Jack crawled through a hole in the tree house floor.

Wow. The tree house was filled with books. Books everywhere. Very old books with dusty covers. New books with shiny, bright covers.

“Look. You can see far, far away,” said Annie. She was peering out the tree house window.

Jack looked out the window with her. Down below were the tops of the other trees. In the distance he saw the Frog Creek library. The elementary school. The park.

Annie pointed in the other direction.

“There’s our house,” she said.

Sure enough. There was their white wooden house with the green porch. Next door was their neighbor’s black dog, Henry. He looked very tiny.

“Hi, Henry!” shouted Annie.

“Shush!” said Jack. “We’re not supposed to be up here.”

He glanced around the tree house again.

“I wonder who owns all these books,” he said. He noticed bookmarks were sticking out of many of them.

“I like this one,” said Annie. She held up a book with a castle on the cover.

“Here’s a book about Pennsylvania,” said Jack. He turned to the page with the bookmark.

“Hey, there’s a picture of Frog Creek in here,” said Jack. “It’s a picture of *these* woods!”

“Oh, here’s a book for you,” said Annie. She held up a book about dinosaurs. A blue bookmark was sticking out of it.

“Let me see it.” Jack set down his backpack and grabbed the book from her.

“You look at that one, and I’ll look at the one about castles,” said Annie.

“No, we better not,” said Jack. “We don’t know who these books belong to.”

But even as he said this, Jack opened the dinosaur book to where the bookmark was. F

couldn't help himself.

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He turned to a picture of an ancient flying reptile. A Pteranodon.

He touched the huge bat-like wings.

“Wow,” whispered Jack. “I wish I could see a Pteranodon for real.”

Jack studied the picture of the odd-looking creature soaring through the sky.

“Ahhh!” screamed Annie.

“What?” said Jack.

“A monster!” Annie cried. She pointed to the tree house window.

“Stop pretending, Annie,” said Jack.

“No, really!” said Annie.

Jack looked out the window.

A giant creature was gliding above the treetops! He had a long, weird crest on the back of his head. A skinny beak. And huge bat-like wings!

It was a real live Pteranodon!

The creature curved through the sky. He was coming straight toward the tree house. It looked like a glider plane!



The wind began to blow.

The leaves trembled.

Suddenly the creature soared up. High into the sky. Jack nearly fell out the window trying to see it.

The wind picked up. It was whistling now.

The tree house started to spin.

“What’s happening?” cried Jack.

“Get down!” shouted Annie.

She pulled him back from the window.

The tree house was spinning. Faster and faster.

Jack squeezed his eyes shut. He held on to Annie.

Then everything was still.

Absolutely still.

Jack opened his eyes. Sunlight slanted through the window.

There was Annie. The books. His backpack.

The tree house was still high up in an oak tree.

But it wasn’t the *same* oak tree.

Jack looked out the window.

He looked down at the picture in the book.

He looked back out the window.

The world outside and the world in the picture—they were exactly the same.

The Pteranodon was soaring through the sky. The ground was covered with ferns and tall grass. There was a winding stream. A sloping hill. And volcanoes in the distance.

“Wh-where are we?” stammered Jack.

The Pteranodon glided down to the base of their tree. The creature coasted to a stop. Annie stood very still.

“What happened to us?” said Annie. She looked at Jack. He looked at her.

“I don’t know,” said Jack. “I was looking at the picture in the book—”

“And you said, ‘Wow, I wish I could see a Pteranodon for real,’ ” said Annie.

“Yeah. And then we saw one. In the Frog Creek woods,” said Jack.

“Yeah. And then the wind got loud. And the tree house started spinning,” said Annie.

“And we landed here,” said Jack.

“And we landed here,” said Annie.

“So that means ... ” said Jack.

“So that means ... what?” said Annie.

“Nothing,” said Jack. He shook his head. “None of this can be real.”

Annie looked out the window again. “But *he’s* real,” she said. “He’s *very* real.”

Jack looked out the window with her. The Pteranodon was standing at the base of the oak tree. Like a guard. His giant wings were spread out on either side of him.

“Hi!” Annie shouted.

“Shush!” said Jack. “We’re not supposed to be here.”



“But where is *here*?” said Annie.

---

“I don’t know,” said Jack.

“Hi!” Annie called again to the creature.

The Pteranodon looked up at them.

“Where is *here*?” Annie called down.

“You’re nuts. He can’t talk,” said Jack. “But maybe the book can tell us.”

Jack looked down at the book. He read the words under the picture:

**This flying reptile lived in the Cretaceous period. It vanished 65 million years ago.**

No. Impossible. They couldn’t have landed in a time 65 million years ago.

“Jack,” said Annie. “He’s nice.”

“Nice?”

“Yeah, I can tell. Let’s go down and talk to him.”

“Talk to him?”

Annie started down the rope ladder.

“Hey!” shouted Jack.

But Annie kept going.

“Are you crazy?” Jack called.

Annie dropped to the ground. She stepped boldly up to the ancient creature.



Jack gasped as Annie held out her hand.

Oh, brother. She was always trying to make friends with animals. But this was going to be a long way far.

“Don’t get too close to him, Annie!” Jack shouted.

But Annie touched the Pteranodon’s crest. She stroked his neck. She was talking to him.

What in the world was she saying?

Jack took a deep breath. Okay. He would go down, too. It would be good to examine this creature. Take notes. Like a scientist.

Jack started down the rope ladder.

When he got to the ground, Jack was only a few feet away from the creature.

The creature stared at Jack. His eyes were bright and alert.

“He’s soft, Jack,” said Annie. “He feels like Henry.”

Jack snorted. “He’s no dog, Annie.”

“Feel him, Jack,” said Annie.

Jack didn’t move.

“Don’t think, Jack. Just do it.”

Jack stepped forward. He put out his arm. Very cautiously. He brushed his hand down the creature’s neck.

Interesting. A thin layer of fuzz covered the Pteranodon’s skin.

“Soft, huh?” said Annie.

Jack reached into his backpack and pulled out a pencil and a notebook. He wrote:

fuzzy skin

“What are you doing?” asked Annie.

“Taking notes,” said Jack. “We’re probably the first people in the whole world to ever see

a real live Pteranodon.”

---

Jack looked at the Pteranodon again. The creature had a bony crest on top of his head. The crest was longer than Jack’s arm.

“I wonder how smart he is,” Jack said.

“Very smart,” said Annie.

“Don’t count on it,” said Jack. “His brain’s probably no bigger than a bean.”

“No, he’s very smart. I can feel it,” said Annie. “I’m going to call him Henry.”

Jack wrote in his notebook:



Jack looked at the creature again. “Maybe he’s a mutant,” he said.

The creature tilted his head.

Annie laughed. "He's no mutant, Jack."

---

"Well, what's he doing here then? Where is this place?" said Jack.

Annie leaned close to the Pteranodon.

"Do you know where we are, Henry?" she asked softly.

The creature fixed his eyes on Annie. His long jaws were opening and closing. Like a giant pair of scissors.

"Are you trying to talk to me, Henry?" asked Annie.

"Forget it, Annie." Jack wrote in his notebook:

mouth like scissors?

"Did we come to a time long ago, Henry?" asked Annie. "Is this a place from long ago?"

Suddenly she gasped. "Jack!"

He looked up.

Annie was pointing toward the hill. On top stood a huge dinosaur!

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**Gold in the Grass**

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“Go! Go!” said Jack. He threw his notebook into his pack. He pushed Annie toward the rope ladder.

“Bye, Henry!” she said.

“Go!” said Jack. He gave Annie a big push.

“Quit it!” she said. But she started up the ladder. Jack scrambled after her.

They tumbled into the tree house.

They were panting as they looked out the window at the dinosaur. He was standing on the hilltop. Eating flowers off a tree.

“Oh, man,” whispered Jack. “We *are* in a time long ago!”

The dinosaur looked like a huge rhinoceros. Only he had three horns instead of one. Two long ones above his eyes and one on his nose. He had a big shield-like thing behind his head.

“Triceratops!” said Jack.

“Does he eat people?” whispered Annie.

“I’ll look it up.” Jack grabbed the dinosaur book. He flipped through the pages.

“There!” he said. He pointed to a picture of a Triceratops. He read the caption:

**The Triceratops lived in the late Cretaceous period. This plant-eating dinosaur weighed over 12,000 pounds.**

Jack slammed the book shut. “Just plants. No meat.”

“Let’s go see him,” said Annie.

“Are you nuts?” said Jack.

“Don’t you want to take notes about him?” asked Annie. “We’re probably the first people in the whole world to ever see a real live Triceratops.”

Jack sighed. She was right.

“Let’s go,” he said.

He shoved the dinosaur book into his pack. He slung it over his shoulder and started down the ladder.

On the way down, Jack stopped.

He called up to Annie, "Just promise you won't pet him."

"I promise."

"Promise you won't kiss him."

"I promise."

"Promise you won't talk to him."

"I promise."

"Promise you won't—"

"Go! Go!" she said.

Jack went.

Annie followed.

When they stepped off the ladder, the Pteranodon gave them a kind look.

Annie blew a kiss at him. "Be back soon, Henry," she said cheerfully.

"Shush!" said Jack. And he led the way through the ferns. Slowly and carefully.

When he reached the bottom of the hill, he kneeled behind a fat bush.

Annie knelt beside him and started to speak.

"Shush!" Jack put his finger to his lips.

Annie made a face.

Jack peeked out at the Triceratops.

The dinosaur was incredibly big. Bigger than a truck. He was eating the flowers off magnolia tree.

Jack slipped his notebook out of his pack. He wrote:

*eats flowers*

Annie nudged him.

Jack ignored her. He studied the Triceratops again. He wrote:

---

*eats slowly*

Annie nudged him hard.

Jack looked at her.

Annie pointed to herself. She walked her fingers through the air. She pointed to the dinosaur. She smiled.

Was she teasing?

She waved at Jack.

Jack started to grab her.

She laughed and jumped away. She fell into the grass. In full view of the Triceratops!

“Get back!” whispered Jack.

Too late. The big dinosaur had spotted Annie. He gazed down at her from the hilltop. Half of a magnolia flower was sticking out of his mouth.

“Oops,” said Annie.

“Get back!” Jack shouted at her.

“He looks nice, Jack.”

“Nice? Watch out for his horns, Annie!”

“No. He’s nice, Jack.”

Nice?

But the Triceratops just gazed calmly down at Annie. Then he turned and loped away. Down the side of the hill.

“Bye!” said Annie. She turned back to Jack. “See?”

Jack grunted. But he wrote in his notebook:

*nice*



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