



**Graham Salisbury** (b. 1944) was born in Pennsylvania but grew up in Hawaii. Growing up with a distant mother and without a father, who was killed in World War II, Salisbury lacked guidance. His characters explore choices similar to those he faced—making and keeping friends and learning honesty and courage. Their struggles, like Salisbury’s, also take place in a Hawaiian setting. Among his many writing awards are the Boston Globe/Horn Book award and a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year award.



**SETTING A PURPOSE** As you read, pay attention to how a tragic event affects Vinny. Write down any questions you have while reading.



As you read, save new words to **myWordList**.

When Vinny and three others dropped down into the ravine,<sup>1</sup> they entered a jungle thick with tangled trees and rumors of what might have happened to the dead boy’s body.

The muddy trail was slick and, in places where it had fallen away, flat-out dangerous. The cool breeze that swept the Hawaiian hillside pastures above died early in the descent.

There were four of them—Vinny; his best friend, Joe-Boy; Mo, who was afraid of nothing; and Joe-Boy’s *haole*<sup>2</sup> girlfriend, Starlene—all fifteen. It was a Tuesday in July, two weeks and a day after the boy had drowned. If, in fact, that’s what had happened to him.

<sup>1</sup> **ravine** (rə-vēn’): a deep, narrow valley made by running water.

<sup>2</sup> **haole** (hou’lē): in Hawaii, a white person or non-native Hawaiian.

Vinny slipped, and dropped his towel in the mud. He picked it up and tried to brush it off, but instead smeared the mud spot around until the towel resembled something someone's dog had slept on. "Tst," he said.

Joe-Boy, hiking down just behind him, laughed. "Hey, Vinny, just think, that kid walked where you walking."

"Shuddup," Vinny said.

20 "You prob'ly stepping right where his foot was."

Vinny moved to the edge of the trail, where the ravine fell through a twisted jungle of **gnarly** trees and underbrush to the stream far below. He could see Starlene and Mo farther ahead, their heads bobbing as they walked, both almost down to the pond where the boy had died.

"Hey," Joe-Boy went on, "maybe you going be the one to find his body."

"You don't cut it out, Joe-Boy, I going . . . I going . . ."

"What, cry?"

30 Vinny scowled. Sometimes Joe-Boy was a big fat babooze.

They slid down the trail. Mud oozed between Vinny's toes. He grabbed at roots and branches to keep from falling. Mo and Starlene were out of sight now, the trail ahead having cut back.

Joe-Boy said, "You going jump in the water and go down and your hand going touch his face, stuck under the rocks. *Ha ha ha . . . a ha ha ha!*"

Vinny winced. He didn't want to be here. It was too soon, way too soon. Two weeks and one day.

40 He saw a footprint in the mud and stepped around it.

The dead boy had jumped and had never come back up. Four search and rescue divers hunted for two days straight and never found him. Not a trace. Gave Vinny the creeps. It didn't make sense. The pond wasn't that big.

He wondered why it didn't seem to bother anyone else. Maybe it did and they just didn't want to say.

Butchie was the kid's name. Only fourteen.

Fourteen.

50 Two weeks and one day ago he was walking down this trail. Now nobody could find him.

The jungle crushed in, reaching over the trail, and Vinny brushed leafy branches aside. The roar of the waterfall got louder, louder.

**gnarly**

(när'lē) *adj.*

Something that is *gnarly* has many knots and bumpy areas on its surface.

Starlene said it was the goddess that took him, the one that lives in the stone down by the road. She did that every now and then, Starlene said, took somebody when she got lonely. Took him and kept him. Vinny had heard that legend before, but he'd never believed in it.

Now he didn't know what he believed.

60 The body had to be stuck down there. But still, four divers and they couldn't find it?

Vinny decided he'd better believe in the legend. If he didn't, the goddess might get mad and send him bad luck. Or maybe take *him*, too.

*Stopstopstop! Don't think like that.*

"Come on," Joe-Boy said, nudging Vinny from behind. "Hurry it up."

Just then Starlene whooped, her voice bouncing around the walls of the ravine.

70 "Let's go," Joe-Boy said. "They there already."

Moments later, Vinny jumped up onto a large boulder at the edge of the pond. Starlene was swimming out in the brown water. It wasn't murky brown, but clean and clear to a depth of maybe three or four feet. Because of the waterfall you had to yell if you wanted to say something. The whole place smelled of mud and ginger and iron.

Starlene swam across to the waterfall on the far side of the pond and ducked under it, then climbed out and edged along the rock wall behind it, moving slowly, like a spider. Above,  
80 sun-sparkling stream water spilled over the lip of a one-hundred-foot drop.

Mo and Joe-Boy threw their towels onto the rocks and dove into the pond. Vinny watched, his muddy towel hooked around his neck. Reluctantly, he let it fall, then dove in after them.

The cold mountain water tasted tangy. Was it because the boy's body was down there decomposing?<sup>3</sup> He spit it out.

He followed Joe-Boy and Mo to the waterfall and ducked under it. They climbed up onto the rock ledge, just as Starlene  
90 had done, then spidered their way over to where you could climb to a small ledge about fifteen feet up. They took their time because the hand and footholds were slimy with moss.

<sup>3</sup> **decomposing** (dē'kəm-pōz'ing): starting to decay and fall apart.



Starlene jumped first. Her shriek echoed off the rocky cliff, then died in the dense green jungle.

Mo jumped, then Joe-Boy, then Vinny.

The fifteen-foot ledge was not the problem.

It was the one above it, the one you had to work up to, the big one, where you had to take a deadly zigzag trail that climbed up and away from the waterfall, then cut back and forth to a foot-wide ledge something more like fifty feet up.

That was the problem.

That was where the boy had jumped from.

Joe-Boy and Starlene swam out to the middle of the pond. Mo swam back under the waterfall and climbed once again to the fifteen-foot ledge.

Vinny started to swim out toward Joe-Boy but stopped when he saw Starlene put her arms around him. She kissed him. They sank under for a long time, then came back up, still kissing.

Vinny turned away and swam back over to the other side of the pond, where he'd first gotten in. His mother would kill him if she ever heard about where he'd come. After the boy drowned, or was taken by the goddess, or whatever happened to him, she said never to come to this pond again. Ever. It was off-limits. Permanently.

But not his dad. He said, "You fall off a horse, you get back on, right? Or else you going be scared of it all your life."

His mother scoffed and waved him off. “Don’t listen to him, Vinny, listen to me. Don’t go there. That pond is  
120 haunted.” Which had made his dad laugh.

But Vinny promised he’d stay away.

But then Starlene and Joe-Boy said, “Come with us anyway. You let your mommy run your life, or what?” And Vinny said, “But what if I get caught?” And Joe-Boy said, “So?”

Vinny mashed his lips. He was so weak. Couldn’t even say no. But if he’d said, “I can’t go, my mother won’t like it,” they would have laughed him right off the island. No, he had to go. No choice.

So he’d come along, and so far it was fine. He’d even gone  
130 in the water. Everyone was happy. All he had to do now was wait it out and go home and hope his mother never heard about it.

When he looked up, Starlene was gone.

He glanced around the pond until he spotted her starting up the zigzag trail to the fifty-foot ledge. She was moving slowly, hanging on to roots and branches on the upside of the cliff. He couldn’t believe she was going there. He wanted to yell, *Hey, Starlene, that’s where he died!*

But she already knew that.

140 Mo jumped from the lower ledge, yelling, “Banzaiiii!” An explosion of coffee-colored water erupted when he hit.

Joe-Boy swam over to where Starlene had gotten out. He waved to Vinny, grinning like a fool, then followed Starlene up the zigzag trail.

Now Starlene was twenty-five, thirty feet up. Vinny watched her for a while, then lost sight of her when she slipped behind a wall of jungle that blocked his view. A few minutes later she popped back out, now almost at the top, where the trail ended, where there was nothing but mud and a few plants  
150 to grab on to if you slipped, plants that would rip right out of the ground, plants that wouldn’t stop you if you fell, nothing but your screams between you and the rocks below.

Vinny’s stomach tingled just watching her. He couldn’t imagine what it must feel like to be up there, especially if you were afraid of heights, like he was. *She has no fear*, Vinny thought, *no fear at all. Pleasepleaseplease, Starlene. I don’t want to see you die.*

Starlene crept forward, making her way to the end of the trail, where the small ledge was.

160 Joe-Boy popped out of the jungle behind her. He stopped, waiting for her to jump before going on.

Vinny held his breath.

Starlene, in her cutoff jeans and soaked T-shirt, stood perfectly still, her arms at her sides. Vinny suddenly felt like hugging her. Why, he couldn't tell. *Starlene, please.*

She reached behind her and took a wide leaf from a plant, then eased down and scooped up a finger of mud. She made a brown cross on her forehead, then wiped her muddy fingers on her jeans.

170 She waited.

Was she thinking about the dead boy?

She stuck the stem end of the leaf in her mouth, leaving the rest of it to hang out. When she jumped, the leaf would flap up and cover her nose and keep water from rushing into it. An old island trick.

She jumped.

Down, down.

180 Almost in slow motion, it seemed at first, then faster and faster. She fell feetfirst, arms flapping to keep balance so she wouldn't land on her back, or stomach, which would probably almost kill her.

Just before she hit, she crossed her arms over her chest and vanished within a small explosion of rusty water.

Vinny stood, not breathing at all, praying.

Ten seconds. Twenty, thirty . . .

She came back up, laughing.

*She shouldn't make fun that way*, Vinny thought. It was dangerous, disrespectful. It was asking for it.

190 Vinny looked up when he heard Joe-Boy shout, "Hey, Vinny, watch how a man does it! Look!"

Joe-Boy scooped up some mud and drew a stroke of lightning across his chest. When he jumped, he threw himself out, face and body parallel to the pond, his arms and legs spread out. *He's crazy*, Vinny thought, *absolutely insane*. At the last second Joe-Boy folded into a ball and hit. *Ca-roomp!* He came up whooping and yelling, "Wooo! So good! Come on, Vinny, it's hot!"

Vinny faked a laugh. He waved, shouting, "Naah, the water's too cold!"

200 Now Mo was heading up the zigzag trail—Mo, who hardly ever said a word and would do anything anyone ever challenged him to do. *Come on, Mo, not you, too.*

Vinny knew then that he would have to jump.

Jump, or never live it down.

Mo jumped in the same way Joe-Boy had, man-style, splayed out in a suicide fall. He came up grinning.

Starlene and Joe-Boy turned toward Vinny.

Vinny got up and hiked around the edge of the pond, walking in the muddy shallows, looking at a school of small  
210 brown-backed fish near a ginger patch.

Maybe they'd forget about him.

Starlene torpedoed over, swimming underwater. Her body glittered in the small amount of sunlight that penetrated the trees around the rim of the ravine. When she came up, she broke the surface smoothly, gracefully, like a swan. Her blond hair sleeked back like river grass.

She smiled a sweet smile. "Joe-Boy says you're afraid to jump. I didn't believe him. He's wrong, right?"

Vinny said quickly, "Of course he's wrong. I just don't  
220 want to, that's all. The water's cold."

"Naah, it's nice."

Vinny looked away. On the other side of the pond Joe-Boy and Mo were on the cliff behind the waterfall.

"Joe-Boy says your mom told you not to come here. Is that true?"

Vinny nodded. "Yeah. Stupid, but she thinks it's haunted."

"She's right."

"What?"

"That boy didn't die, Vinny. The stone goddess took him.  
230 He's in a good place right now. He's her prince."

Vinny scowled. He couldn't tell if Starlene was teasing him or if she really believed that. He said, "Yeah, prob'ly."

"Are you going to jump, or is Joe-Boy right?"

"Joe-Boy's an idiot. Sure I'm going to jump."

Starlene grinned, staring at Vinny a little too long. "He is an idiot, isn't he? But I love him."

"Yeah, well . . ."

"Go to it, big boy. I'll be watching."

Starlene sank down and swam out into the pond.

240 *Ca-ripes.*

Vinny ripped a hank<sup>4</sup> of white ginger from the ginger patch and smelled it, and prayed he'd still be alive after the sun went down.

He took his time climbing the zigzag trail. When he got to the part where the jungle hid him from view, he stopped and smelled the ginger again. So sweet and alive it made Vinny wish for all he was worth that he was climbing out of the ravine right now, heading home.

But of course, there was no way he could do that.

250 Not before jumping.

He tossed the ginger onto the muddy trail and continued on. He slipped once or twice, maybe three times. He didn't keep track. He was too numb now, too caught up in the insane thing he was about to do. He'd never been this far up the trail before. Once he'd tried to go all the way, but couldn't. It made him dizzy.

260 When he stepped out and the jungle opened into a huge bowl where he could look down, way, way down, he could see their three heads in the water, heads with arms moving slowly to keep them afloat, and a few bright rays of sunlight pouring down onto them, and when he saw this, his stomach fluttered and rose. Something sour came up and he spit it out.

It made him wobble to look down. He closed his eyes. His whole body trembled. The trail was no wider than the length of his foot. And it was wet and muddy from little rivulets of water that bled from the side of the cliff.

270 The next few steps were the hardest he'd ever taken in his life. He tried not to look down, but he couldn't help it. His gaze was drawn there. He struggled to push back an urge to fly, just jump off and fly. He could almost see himself spiraling down like a glider, or a bird, or a leaf.

His hands shook as if he were freezing. He wondered, *Had the dead boy felt this way?* Or had he felt brave, like Starlene or Joe-Boy, or Mo, who seemed to feel nothing.

Somebody from below shouted, but Vinny couldn't make it out over the waterfall, roaring down just feet beyond the ledge where he would soon be standing, **cascading** past so close its mist dampened the air he breathed.

280 *The dead boy had just come to the ravine to have fun,* Vinny thought. Just a regular kid like himself, come to swim

**rivulet**

(rĭv' yə-līt) *n.* A rivulet is a small brook or stream.

**cascade**

(kās-kād' ) *v.* Something that can cascade will fall, pour, or rush in stages, like a waterfall over steep rocks.

<sup>4</sup> **hank** (hāngk): a coiled or looped bundle of something, such as rope or yarn.

“The next few steps were the hardest he’d ever taken in his life.”

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and be with his friends, then go home and eat macaroni and cheese and watch TV, maybe play with his dog or wander around after dark.

But he’d done none of that.

Where was he?

Inch by inch Vinny made it to the ledge. He stood, swaying slightly, the tips of his toes one small movement from the **precipice**.

290 Far below, Joe-Boy waved his arm back and forth. It was dreamy to see—back and forth, back and forth. He looked so small down there.

For a moment Vinny’s mind went blank, as if he were in some trance, some dream where he could so easily lean out and fall, and think or feel nothing.

A breeze picked up and moved the trees on the ridge-line, but not a breath of it reached the fifty-foot ledge.

Vinny thought he heard a voice, small and distant. Yes. Something inside him, a tiny voice pleading, *Don’t do it. Walk away. Just turn and go and walk back down.*

300 “. . . I can’t,” Vinny whispered.

*You can, you can, you can. Walk back down.*

Vinny waited.

And waited.

Joe-Boy yelled, then Starlene, both of them waving.

Then something very strange happened.

Vinny felt at peace. Completely and totally calm and at peace. He had not made up his mind about jumping. But something else inside him had.

310 Thoughts and feelings swarmed, stinging him: *Jump! Jump! Jump! Jump!*

But deep inside, where the peace was, where his mind wasn’t, he would not jump. He would walk back down.

**precipice**

(prĕs’ĕ-pĭs) *n.*

A *precipice* is an overhanging or extremely steep area of rock.

*No! No, no, no!*

Vinny eased down and fingered up some mud and made a cross on his chest, big and bold. He grabbed a leaf, stuck it in his mouth. *Be calm, be calm. Don't look down.*

After a long pause he spit the leaf out and rubbed the cross to a blur.

320 They walked out of the ravine in silence, Starlene, Joe-Boy, and Mo far ahead of him. They hadn't said a word since he'd come down off the trail. He knew what they were thinking. He knew, he knew, he knew.

At the same time the peace was still there. He had no idea what it was. But he prayed it wouldn't leave him now, prayed it wouldn't go away, would never go away, because in there, in that place where the peace was, it didn't matter what they thought.

330 Vinny emerged from the ravine into a brilliance that surprised him. Joe-Boy, Starlene, and Mo were now almost down to the road.

Vinny breathed deeply, and looked up and out over the island. He saw, from there, a land that rolled away like honey, easing down a descent of rich Kikuyu grass pasture-land, flowing from there over vast highlands of brown and green, then, finally, falling massively to the coast and flat blue sea.

He'd never seen anything like it.

Had it always been here? This view of the island?

He stared and stared, then sat, taking it in.

He'd never seen anything so beautiful in all his life.

**COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION** With a small group, discuss how Vinny's feelings and behavior are influenced by the boy's tragic death. Refer to events in the story to support your ideas.

## Describe Stories: Character and Setting

Like real people, characters have personalities, drive, and life-changing events. To describe characters in terms of how they appear in stories, you can use these terms:

- **Character traits** are the qualities shown by a character, such as physical traits (tall, brown eyes) or expressions of personality (kind, anxious).
- **Character motivation** is the reason or reasons a character acts, feels, or thinks in a certain way.
- **Character development** is how a character changes throughout a story.

Think about your impressions of the characters in “The Ravine.” What traits and motivations does Vinny exhibit throughout the story?

In a story like “The Ravine,” the setting is a key factor in the events of the story and how the characters react to it and each other. The **setting** is the time and place in which the action occurs. The time can be a particular time of day, season, year, or historical period. The place can be an outside location, a room, a building, or a country.

Setting can affect characters by influencing their values, beliefs, and emotions or by affecting the way they live and interact with other characters. What impact does the setting have on Vinny?

## Make Inferences

Readers often make inferences to figure out something an author has not explained. An **inference** is a logical guess that is based on facts and one’s own knowledge and experience. To support your inference, you may need to **cite evidence**, or provide examples and quotations from the story. For example, you can make an inference about Vinny and Joe-Boy’s friendship.

### Evidence from the Story

- Joe-Boy is Vinny’s “best friend.”
- Joe-Boy teases Vinny about finding the body.

### My Own Knowledge

Sometimes friends tease each other in a friendly way, but this teasing does not seem kind.

### Inference

They may be friends, but Joe-Boy is not especially nice to Vinny.



## Analyzing the Text

### Cite Text Evidence

Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- 1. Summarize** Review lines 38–65. In your own words, describe what Vinny knows about the dead boy. Explain his thoughts and feelings about this past event.
- 2. Draw Conclusions** Review lines 71–100. What are some examples of language the author uses to describe the setting? Why is the setting important to the story?
- 3. Cite Evidence** Reread lines 110–132 and think about what the author wants us to understand about Vinny. What words would you use to describe Vinny’s character traits?
- 4. Make Inferences** Before jumping, the characters perform certain rituals. Reread lines 163–206 to review how they prepare to jump. What inferences can you make about the characters’ feelings and their reasons for these rituals?
- 5. Analyze** Consider Vinny’s feelings and actions throughout the story. How is Vinny different by the end of the story? How is he the same?
- 6. Critique** Review the story’s ending in lines 319–339 and examine the descriptions the author provides. Do you think the ending makes the story more powerful? Why or why not?

## PERFORMANCE TASK



### Writing Activity: Informative

**Essay** Write a two- or three-paragraph essay to compare and contrast the character traits of Vinny and Joe-Boy.

- Introduce your topic by briefly describing the characters and their relationship to each other.
- Next, tell about how their character traits are different. Use examples from the text to support your ideas.
- Then indicate the character traits that the boys share or that are similar. Include evidence from the text.