

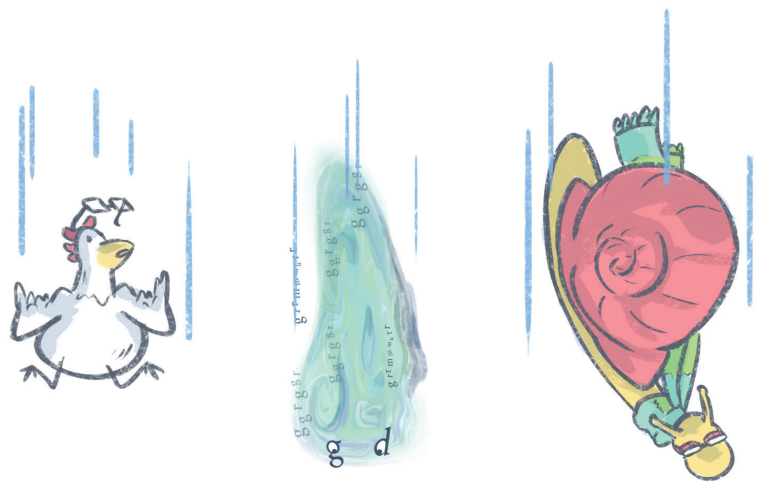
Royal Fireworks Language Arts by Michael Clay Thompson

Book 5 of the Poodle Series

Poodle

and the

Art of the Comma



Michael Clay Thompson

Illustrations by Christopher Tice



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This book features QR codes that link to audio of Michael Clay Thompson narrating the text so that readers can follow along.

With special appreciation to my wife, Dr. Myriam Borges Thompson, whose contributions of editing and literary sense have informed this book, as usual.

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Dramatis Personae

Poodle A chicken

What? A beagle

Sidney A snail

Maybe A mouse (the director)

Bizzie A mouse (Maybe's assistant)

Dickinson A wind monster

Burgull A consonant monster

Gawk An indignant desert bird

Vermeer A painter

Author Unknown





Act One: Monsters

Through space and time he'd trekked,
and Poodle now was wrecked.

He'd crossed a gap.

What a flap.

He'd need a nap.

He snugged in bed, ducked his head,
pulled up his blankie, and closed his eyes.

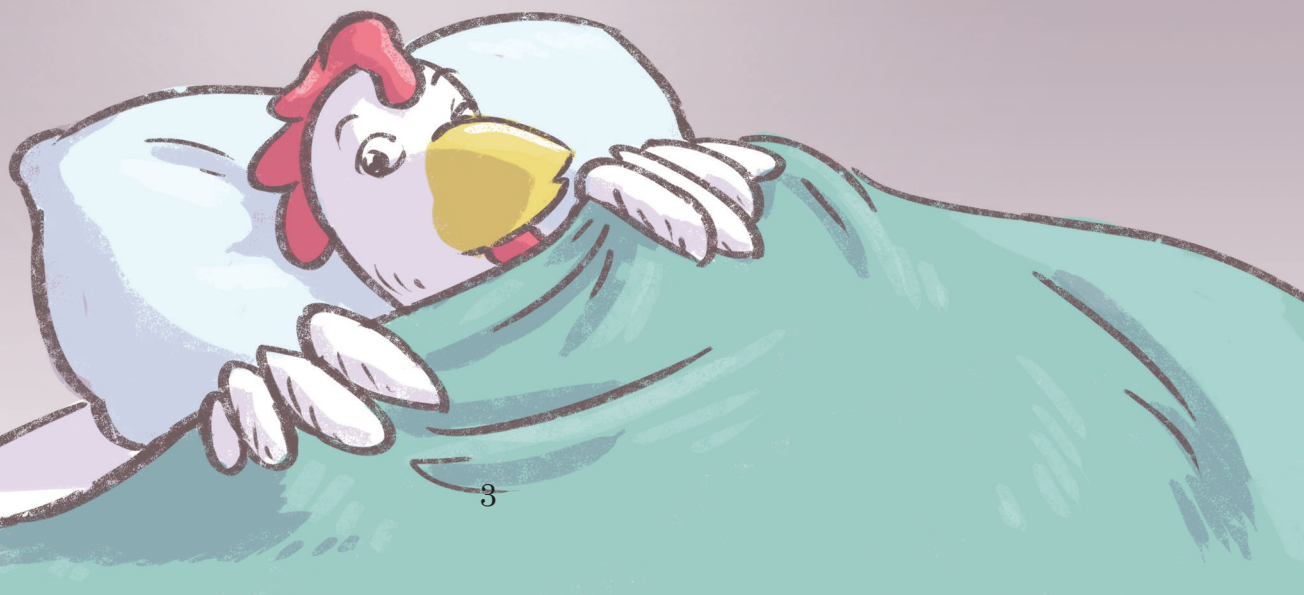
But then....

He opened one eye. No, the other one.

He scanned left. He peeked right.

He listened.

Cautiously, he whispered to the quiet room,
“Are there any monsters under my bed?”

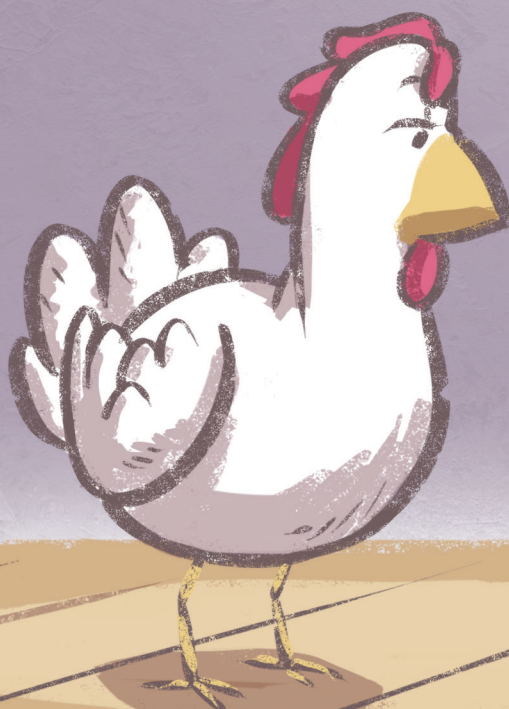




“Nope,” came a low voice from below.
“Uh-uh, not here, nope,” said another.
“Grbrno monssers, nohpp,” said a third.

“Burgull! Is that you?” Poodle cried.
“Are you under my bed?”
He jumped to the floor
and spied some consonants under his bed.
Sure enough, that consonant monster was there.

“Grbr, nope here, grk,” came the reply.
Typical Burgull.



“Burgull, you can’t hide under my bed,
even if you are a consonant monster,” Poodle said.

“Grbrburkk, help Poodle,” came gurbly words.

“Burgull, guard Poodle.”

Why had Burgull used that comma?

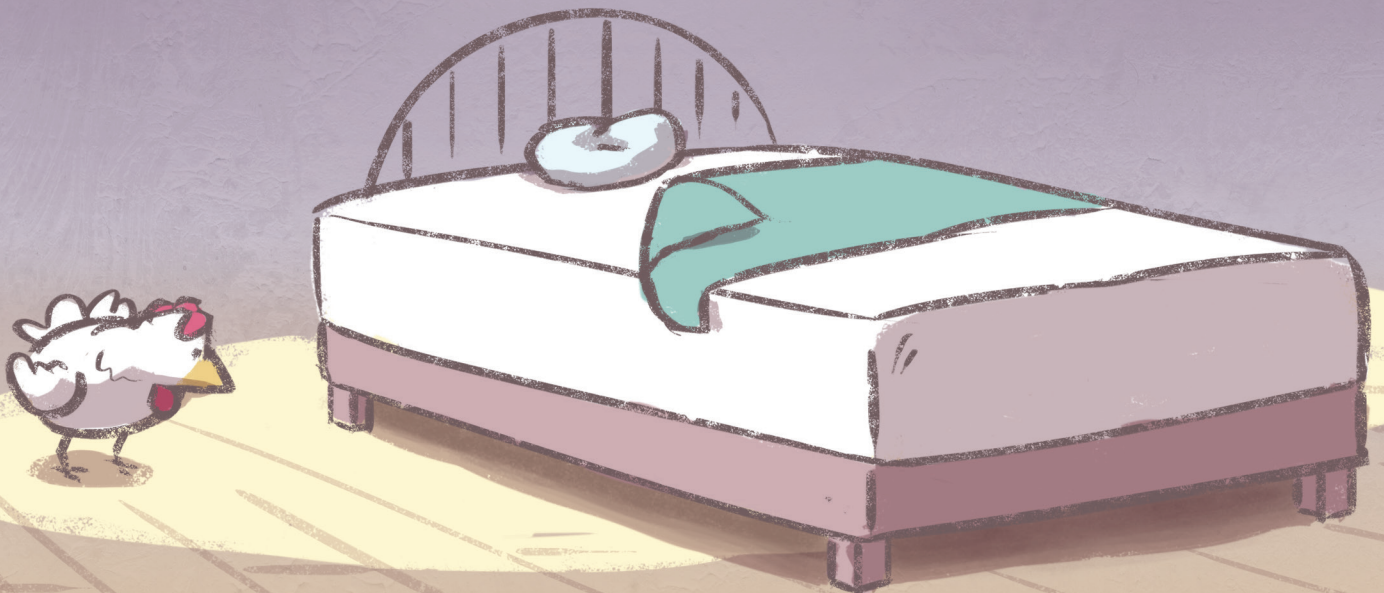
“Argh,” Poodle said, like a pirate.

The comma? He didn’t admire it.

“Burgull, who else is under there?”

“Not me, ooooooh,” came a blue voice,
which sounded like Dickinson.

“Me either, too, also, yup,” came a voice, awkward,
like Gawk, the indignant desert bird.





“Burgull, help Poodle,” came the burgly voice.

“Wait,” said Poodle, “did you say,
‘Burgull comma help Poodle’?”

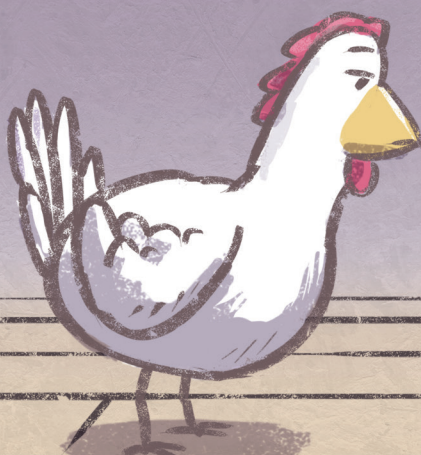
“Grurburk?” asked Burgull.

“Did you say comma?” asked Poodle.
“Between your subject and verb?”

“Grbrk?” Burgull was so confused.

“Burgull, come out of there.”
Poodle could see some scratchy *g*’s and *k*’s
sticking out from under the bed.

There was a pitiful *grk*,
and Burgull crawled out, grking.



gd

grrk

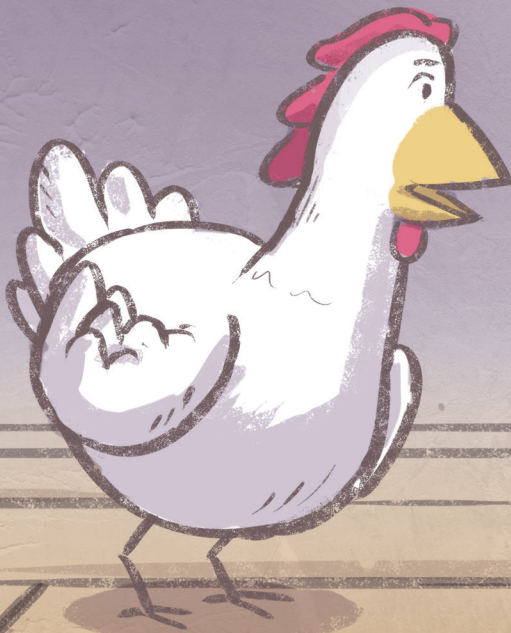


“Burgull,” said Poodle, “you put a comma
between your subject and your verb!
You said, ‘Burgull, help Poodle.’
See that messy comma?”

“Grbrk?” came a confused gurg.

“Tell him, Gawk,” said Poodle.

Silence.





Gawk, the indignant desert bird,
was under the bed too. Poodle *knew* it.

“Gawk, I *know* you’re under there.

Come out and tell him.

You can do it,” Poodle said.

“See to it.

Please tell Burgull.

Just review it.

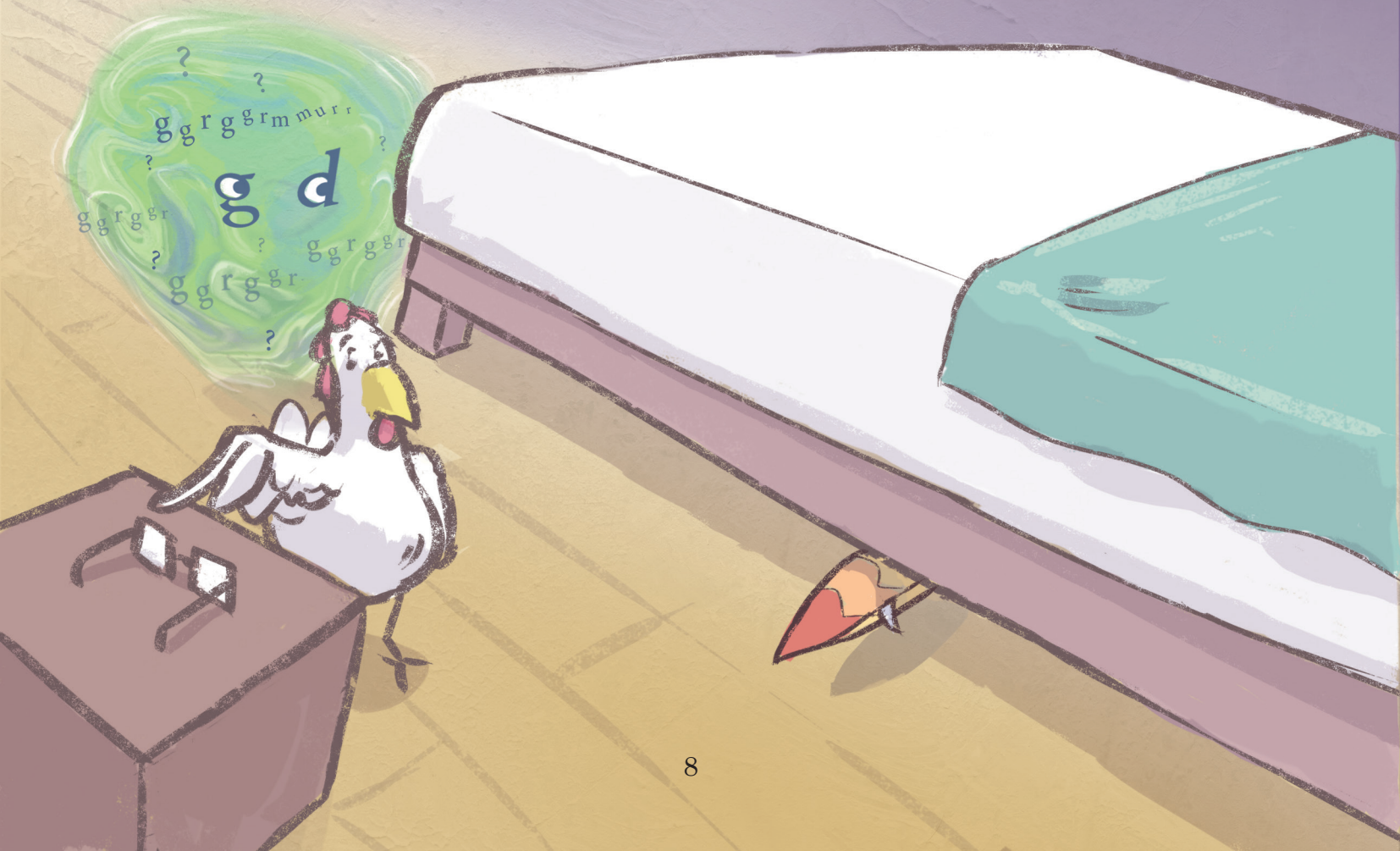
Tell Burgull ’bout commas.

Go through it.”

“Nope,” came Gawk’s voice.

“I’m not here.”

Desert birds make things so difficult.



“Right. I *know* you’re there,” pressed Poodle.
“Tell him, Gawk. Please.”

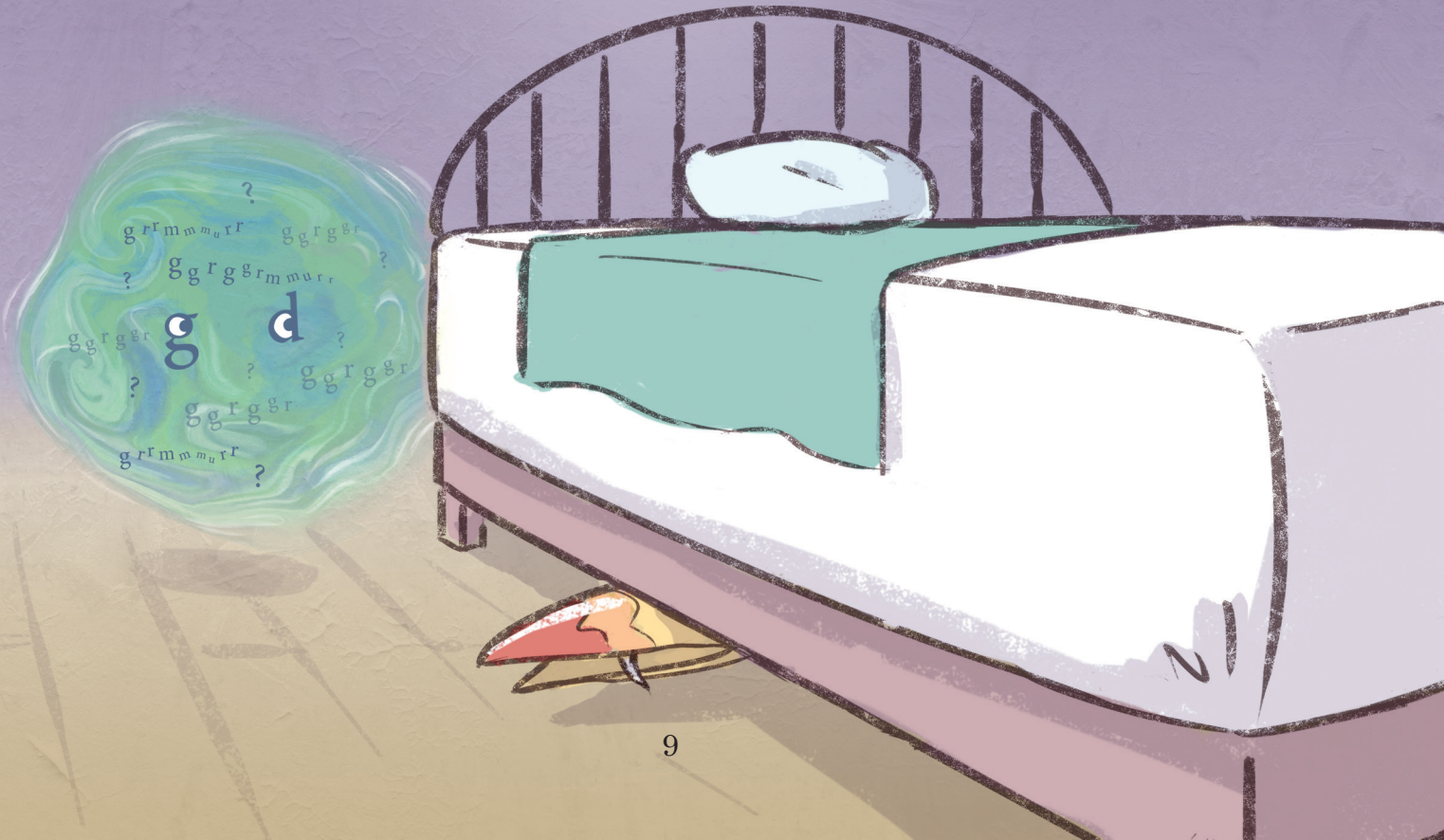
“Oh, all right, but I’m not here,” said Gawk at last.

“Burgull, commas aren’t herbs;
curb them; don’t blurb ’em
between subjects and verbs.

Subjects and verbs go together,
like fluffs of a feather.

Instead of ‘**Burgull comma help Poodle,**’
just say, ‘**Burgull helps Poodle.**’ See?
No comma between subjects and verbs.”

To be fair, this was not a good topic for a consonant monster. Poor thing. Poodle began to explain once more, but....



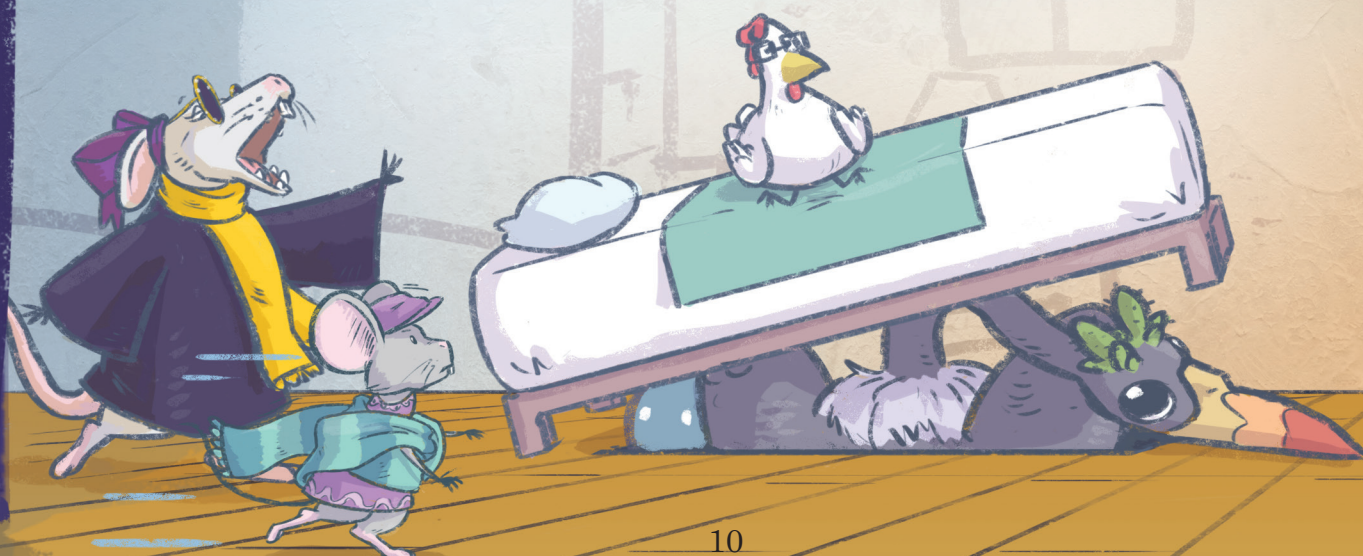


“CUT! LIGHTS!” yelled Maybe,
the director, as she stormed onto the stage,
Bizzie scurrying behind,
trying to put something
in her pocket.

Maybe always *storms*. You remember.

Joe popped on the lights,
which griped and grumped above the stage.

“Stick to the script!” Maybe cried.
“Skip the trauma! No one hears a comma!
They’re punctuation! Points, not joints!
You see ’em when you read ’em!”



“But I see the commas on this page,”
said Poodle. “I see sentences on our stage.
I read them. I see talk bubbles.”

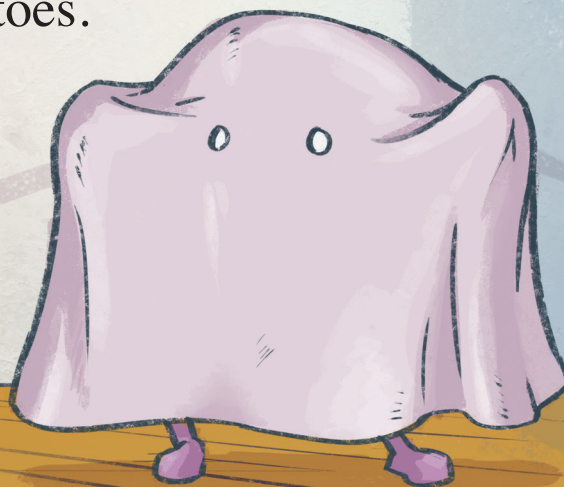
“Talk bubbles? Nonsense!” Maybe cried.
“This is a play; we hear it;
we don’t see words. They’re heard.”

“Well, actually...,” began the author,
his voice coming from somewhere.

“You stay out of this! Please!” said Maybe.
“You’re the author. You’re not a character.”

There was a disgruntled *hmmph*
from somewhere.

Authors are somewhere.
No one knows where it is.
Authors are not *in* their books.
They hover, annoyingly,
like mosquitoes.



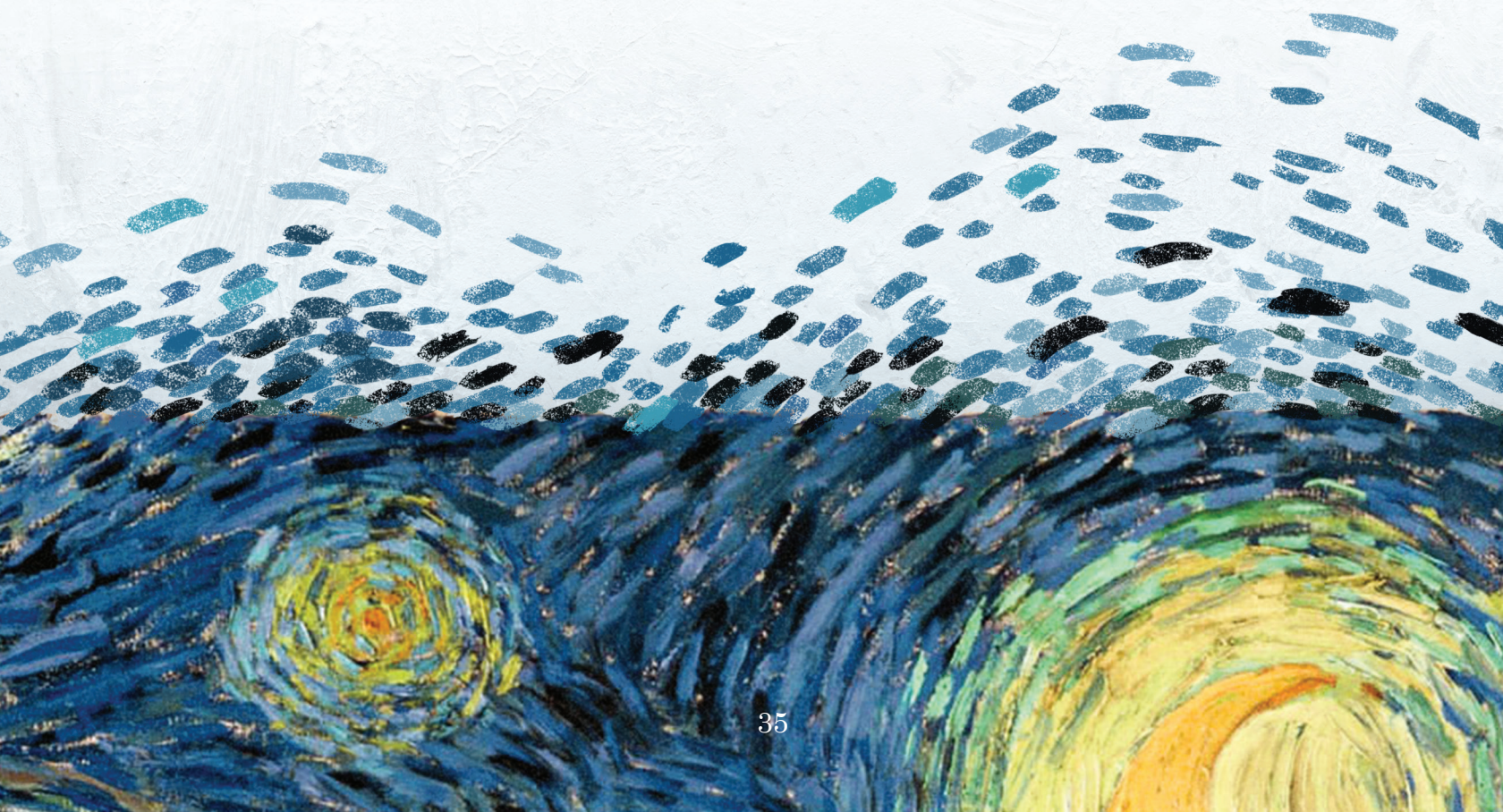


A large, abstract blue shape, possibly representing a hand or a wing, is positioned in the top left corner of the page.

Act Three: Van Gogh

Far below the falling What?,
the friends dropped past the pages,
and the whiz marks streaked blue,
and the lines flew like birds—
blue blurs of true words, herds—
and way down there
the friends saw a landing zone
rushing up, and they braced for the *poof*.

Landings always say *poof*.





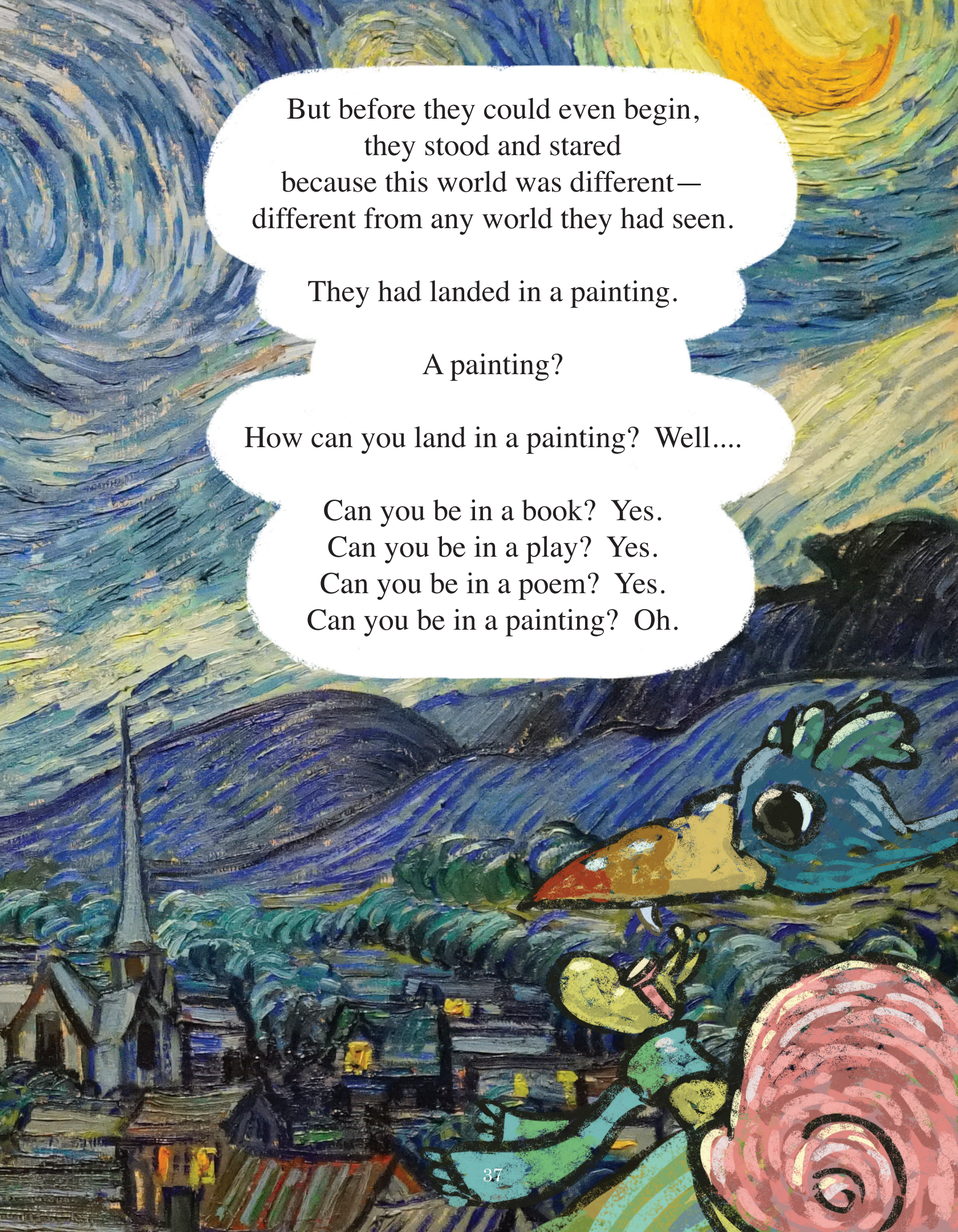
The friends fell, and fell, and
then *poof!*, they landed smack
in a different version
of the world.

They shook themselves
and gained their footing
and collected their wits—most of them—
and the new world whirled.

“Here,” said Sidney, looking around.
“We’ll search here. What? might be near.”

Burgull and Dickinson and Gawk
gave her a *yep* in unison.
They’d been practicing.





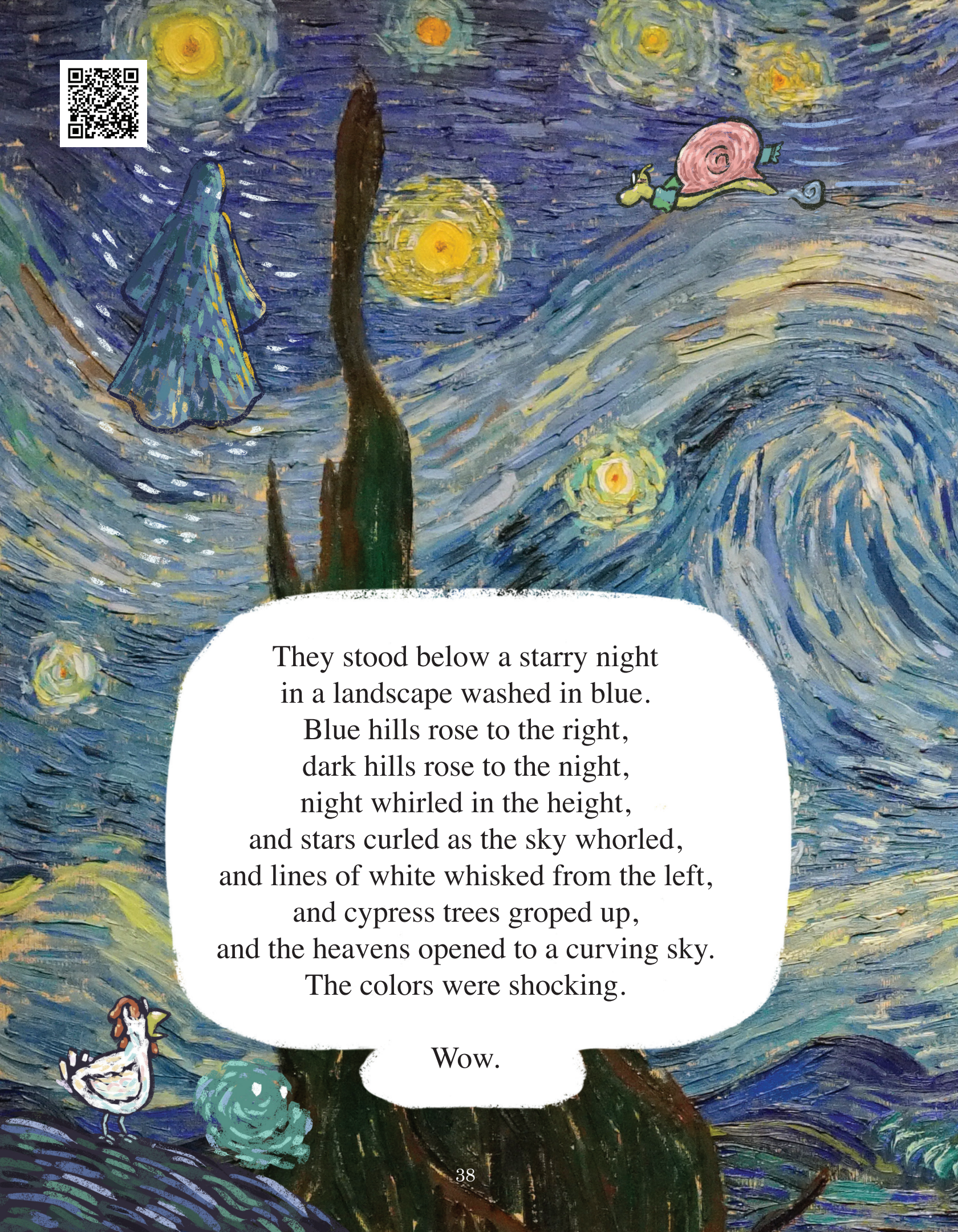
But before they could even begin,
they stood and stared
because this world was different—
different from any world they had seen.

They had landed in a painting.

A painting?

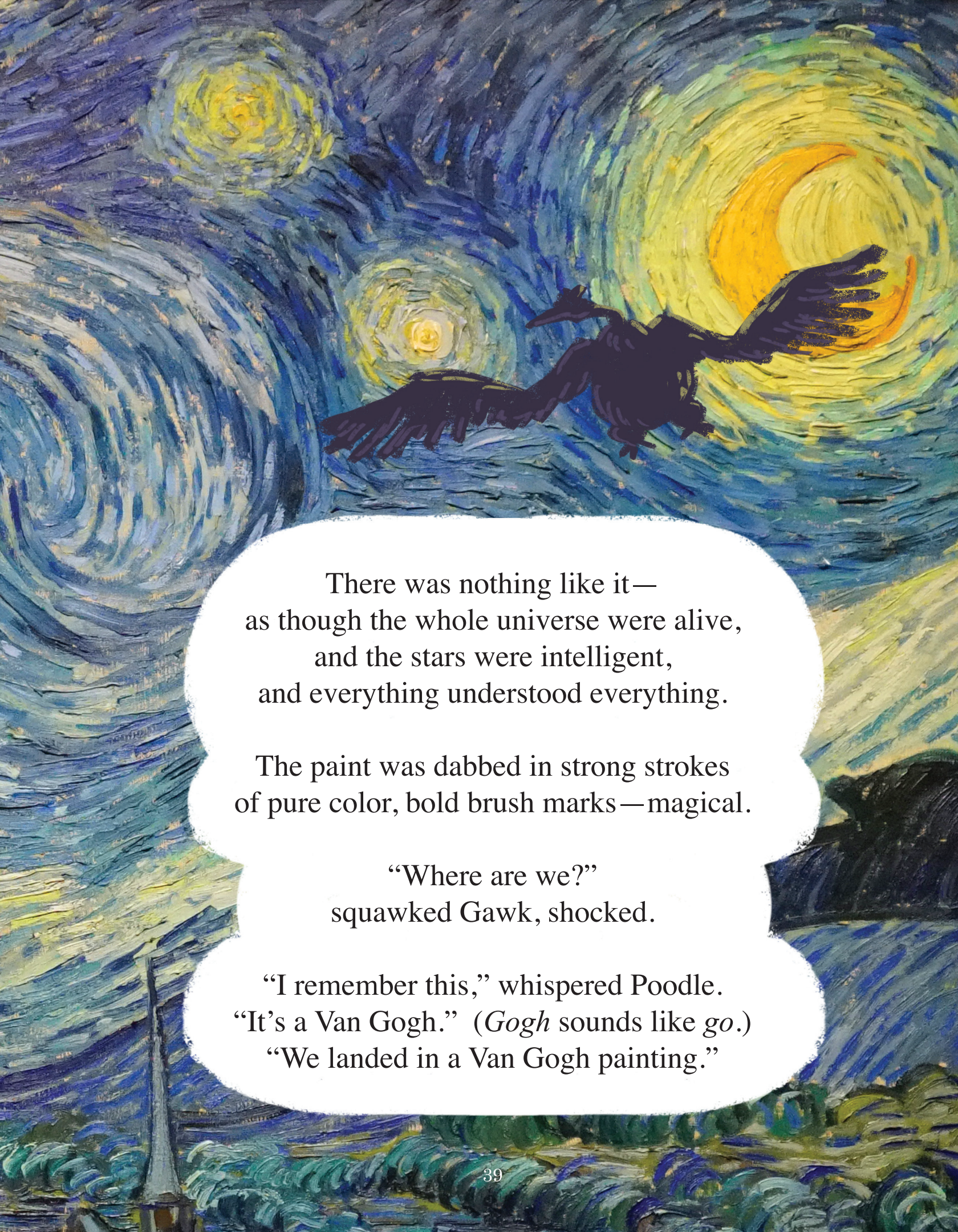
How can you land in a painting? Well....

Can you be in a book? Yes.
Can you be in a play? Yes.
Can you be in a poem? Yes.
Can you be in a painting? Oh.

The background of the entire page is a reproduction of J.M.W. Turner's painting 'Rain, Steam, and Great Bridges' over 'The Starry Night'. The sky is a vibrant, swirling blue with numerous yellow and orange stars. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted hills and a small white cow with a red collar. A large, white, rounded rectangular box is superimposed over the center of the image, containing text.

They stood below a starry night
in a landscape washed in blue.
Blue hills rose to the right,
dark hills rose to the night,
night whirled in the height,
and stars curled as the sky whorled,
and lines of white whisked from the left,
and cypress trees groped up,
and the heavens opened to a curving sky.
The colors were shocking.

Wow.



There was nothing like it—
as though the whole universe were alive,
and the stars were intelligent,
and everything understood everything.

The paint was dabbed in strong strokes
of pure color, bold brush marks—magical.

“Where are we?”
squawked Gawk, shocked.

“I remember this,” whispered Poodle.
“It’s a Van Gogh.” (*Gogh* sounds like *go*.)
“We landed in a Van Gogh painting.”