



Making Friends with Snakes (But from a Distance)

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Snaaaaaake!



Thangachi,
get me
your bat!

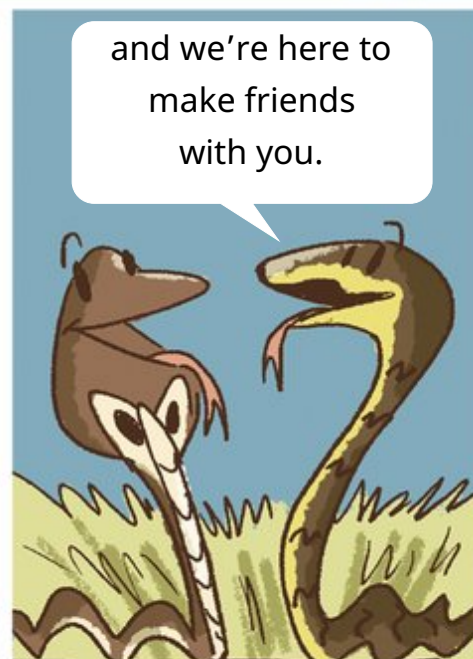


Where
is it?

Right next to
our ball.









We're beautiful.



We're colourful.



We love to dress up.



(Indian Rock Python)



(Malabar Pit Viper)



(Ornate Flying Snake)

Just like some people
prefer to sit alone with
a book, we like to be
left alone too.



Sigh. The things
we do for you!

Yeah. Dhaman and I don't really
enjoy each other's company.
We've just come together
for this book.



But there are some differences. And that's what makes us snakes!



Unlike most people, we're unable to hear sounds.



But our sharp tongues and the Jacobson's organ on the roof of our mouths give us a keen sense of smell.



We can't digest ten idlis...



or drink milk. UGH!



But we LOVE our food!



Checkered Keelbacks
love fish and frogs.



Shieldtails love
earthworms.

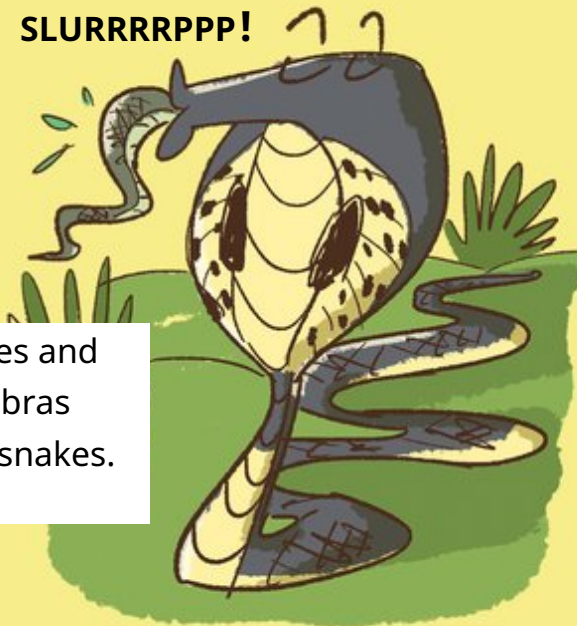


Most of us love rats
and mice. We eat all
the pests that destroy
your crops.



SLURRRRPPP!

Vinesnakes and
King Cobras
eat other snakes.



Remember, snakes down here on the ground are very frightened of humans, even children, towering over them. The only time we bite is in defence.



Most snakes found in India are non-venomous and harmless to people. Like ME!

Yeah, but Dhaman can inflict a really stinky odour.



Hey, that's just my defence mechanism!



But there are four
common venomous
snake species—



including
YOU!



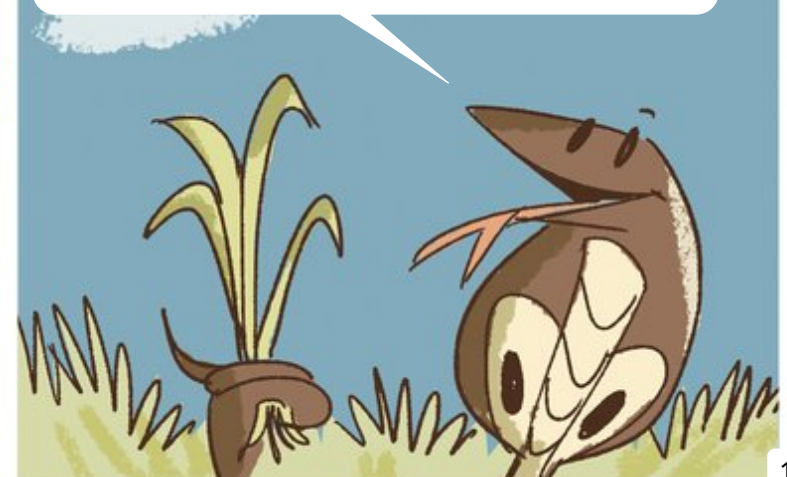
Right. They're responsible for
50,000 human deaths from
snakebites in India every year.



Most bites are accidents that can be
easily avoided, if you get to
know us better.

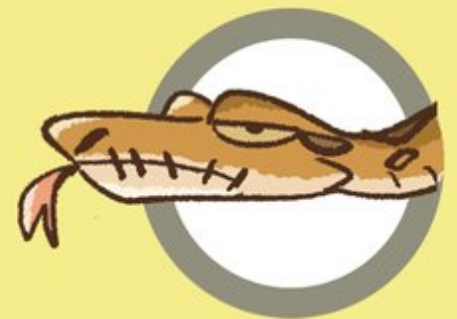


So let's meet the Big Four venomous
snakes! Sorry, I'm using four grass
strands because I don't have fingers.





THE BIG FOUR



1. Spectacled Cobra

I can easily be identified by my hood and characteristic markings.



I am a great swimmer and love to hang out around water.

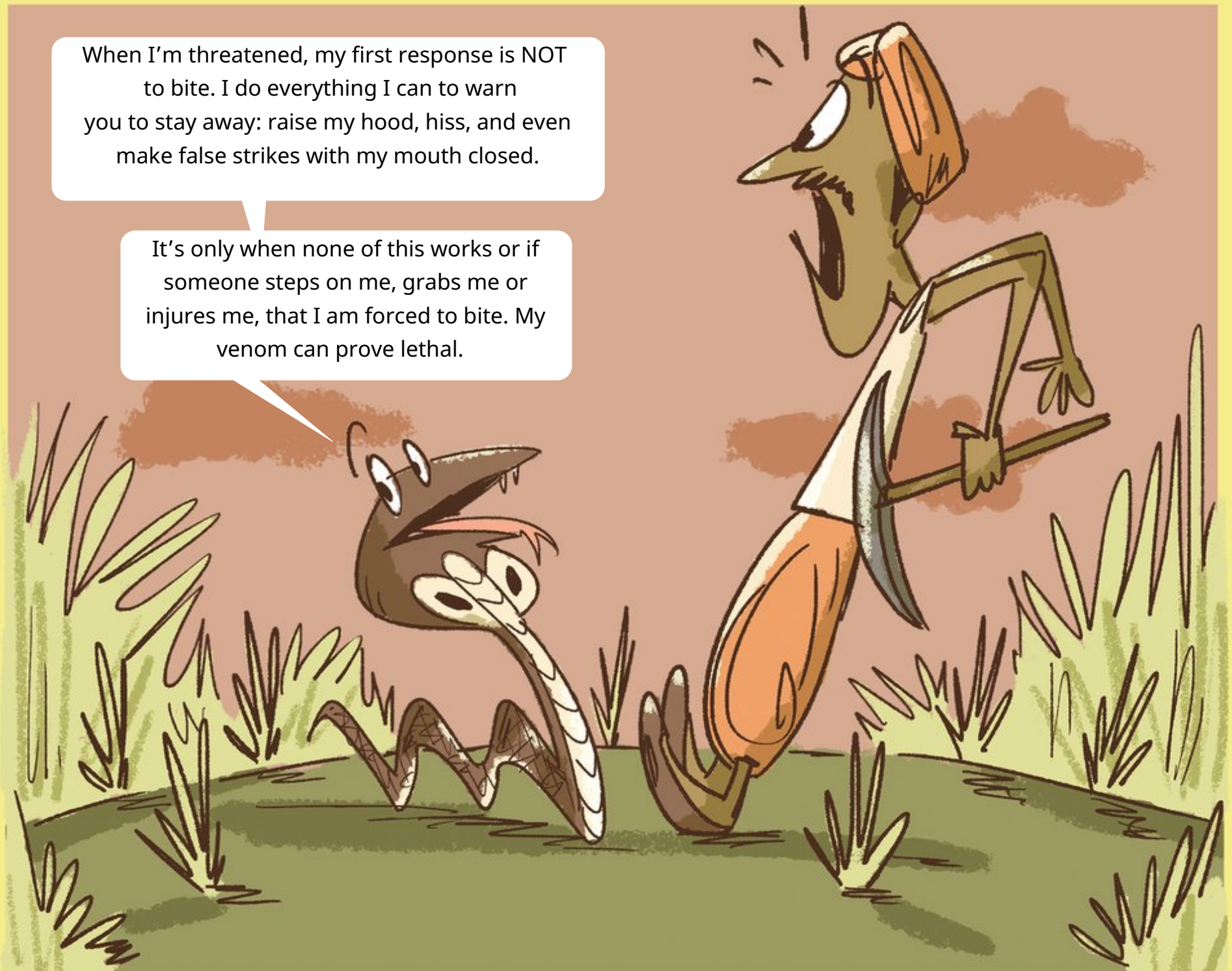


My appetite for rats brings me to fields,
houses, messy kitchens and granaries.



When I'm threatened, my first response is NOT to bite. I do everything I can to warn you to stay away: raise my hood, hiss, and even make false strikes with my mouth closed.

It's only when none of this works or if someone steps on me, grabs me or injures me, that I am forced to bite. My venom can prove lethal.





Raised hood:
stay away.



False strike (with
the mouth closed): you
need to back
off right now.

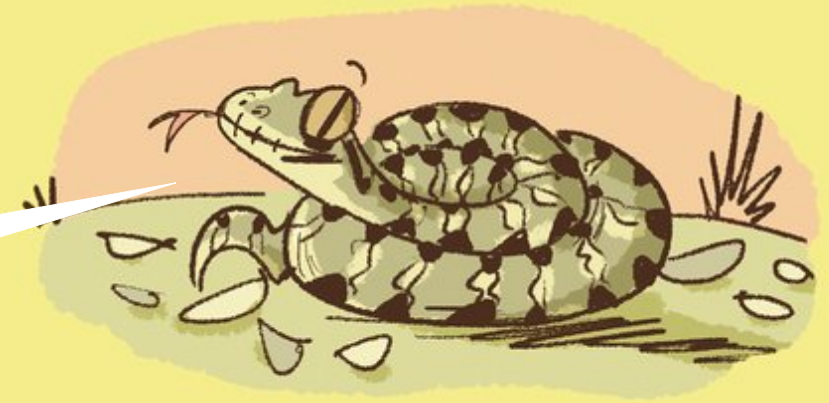


Actual strike: you
need an ambulance!



2. Saw-scaled Viper

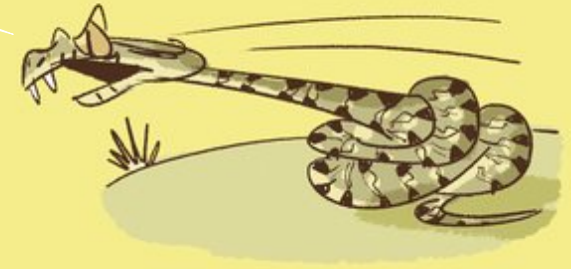
Most people think I'm harmless because I'm tiny.



Yep.
Really tiny.



But my venom is very potent
and I can strike with
lightning speed!



I hang out in dry, open areas. I am
difficult to spot because of my
camouflage. So if you're playing in
these fields, you need to be
watchful for me.



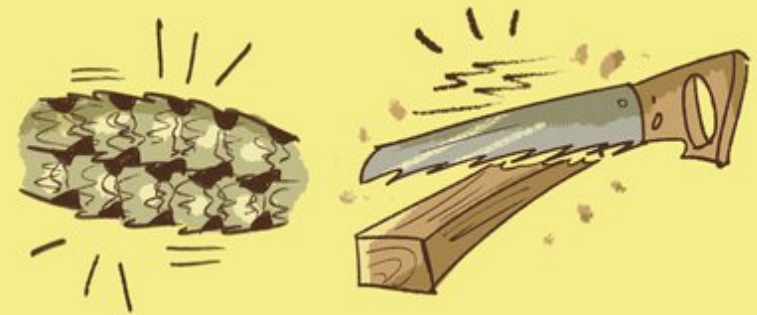
But don't you
worry; I'm not
that difficult to
identify!



You can tell I'm a
Saw-scaled Viper by
the zigzag patterns
on my back.



I too warn before I bite. I coil up like a jalebi and hiss, with my scales rubbing against each other making a saw-like sound. (Yes, that's where I get my name!)



Hissss:
this means "This isn't
a jalebi you would want to touch"



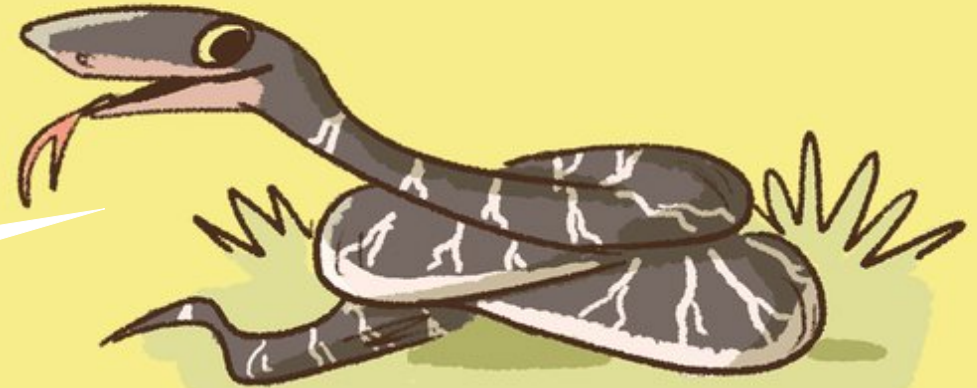
Strike: Told you so!



3. Common Krait

Namaste! I'm among the most docile of snakes... and yet lethal!

That's because my venom is the most potent of any Indian snake!



You can identify me by the thin white bands on my black hide.



Other non-venomous species like this Wolf Snake may resemble me, but best to keep away from us ALL.



In my search for other snakes, rodents and lizards to eat, I crawl close to people sleeping outdoors without a mosquito net or on the floor. When they move or roll over in their sleep, I bite in self-defence.



Wow. You're the worst alarm clock ever invented, Krait!



4. Russell's Viper

I'm the grumpiest of the big four. I like my personal space. A lot.



If disturbed, I can get REALLY cranky!



I'm often mistaken for non-venomous Boas and Pythons, and handled, and that's a fatal mistake. Remember, if you see a chain-like pattern of markings on a snake's back, it's me.



This is an Indian Rock Python.
Keep away.



This is a Common Sand Boa.
Keep away.





This is me.
Turn around and go home.




I sit hidden in bushes, camouflaged in leaf litter,
waiting for my prey to come to me.



This can be dangerous
for people walking in the
dark without a torch.





Avoiding this guy should be easy, right?
You kids don't like to hang around
grumpy old uncles anyway!

You snakes aren't as bad
as we thought! You
seem like a fun bunch, if
we keep our distance...

But how exactly do
we keep a safe
distance from
snakes?



Avoiding us is easy. You
just need to
take these simple
precautions.



1. When working in open fields or playing in open areas, watch where you place your hands and feet. Probing with a long stick can easily detect our presence.



2. Always use a torch at night when you walk outdoors, even near your home.



3. If your regular path is littered with leaves, clear the litter with a rake.



4. Clean your homes, kitchens and storehouses regularly to keep them rat-free.



5. When sleeping outdoors or on the floor, create a physical barrier around you with the help of a well tucked-in mosquito net. Four rewards: no mosquito bites, no scorpion stings, no krait bites, and you get to snore away happily until morning!



Rarely, snakebite accidents can happen despite taking the best precautions. You need to remember to take these steps.





Do not take the victim to a tantrik or a snake charmer for treatment



Do not suck the wound



Do not cut the wound open



Do not tie ligatures around the wound



Do not burn the wound



Do not apply herbal pastes over the wound



Immobilise the affected limb



Rush the victim to the nearest hospital that can deliver Anti-Snake Venom and emergency care



I hope it never comes to that because I think you creatures are quite beautiful. And play an important role in nature and our lives!

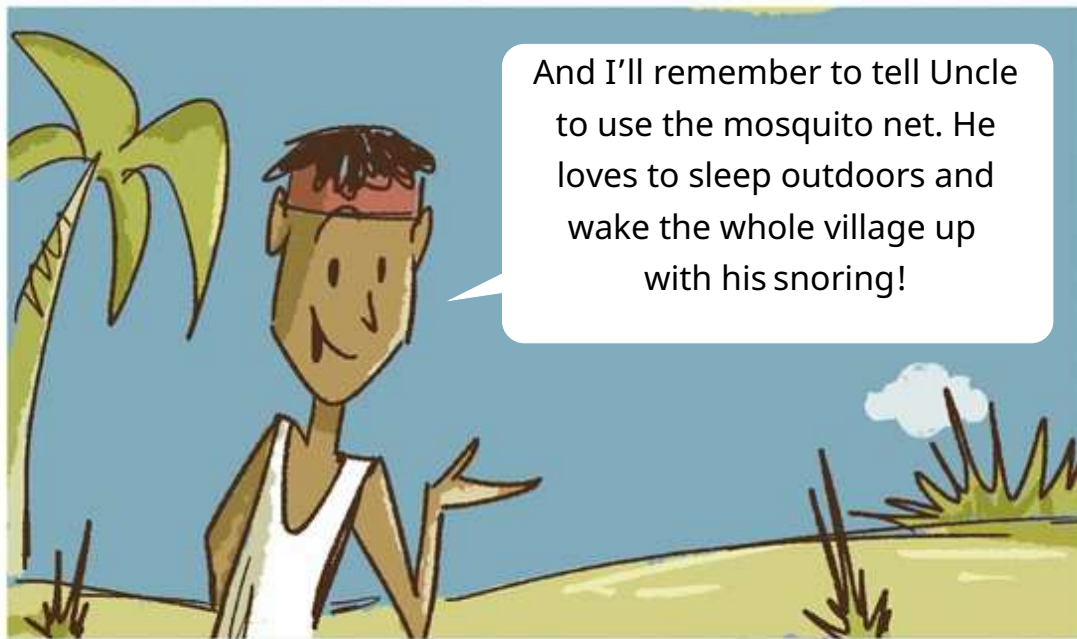
Aww, thank you!



I'll remember to help my mother clean the kitchen after every meal, so that rats don't visit my house for scraps.



I'll remember to tell my parents to buy a torch immediately so that they return safely from the fields every evening.



Madras Crocodile Bank



Have you ever been to the Madras Crocodile Bank? It's a reptile zoo in Chennai, which works for the conservation of reptiles. Its project 'Snake Conservation and Snakebite Mitigation' teaches people about the importance of identifying which snakes are venomous, how to avoid them, and using antivenom serum.

Get more information about snakebites and the Croc Bank at www.madrascrocodilebank.org

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Making Friends with Snakes (But from a Distance)

(English)

Naagin and Dhaman are here to make friends with you, but from a distance. After all, they are snakes. Find out everything you wanted to know about these beautiful reptiles and also learn how to stay safe and let snakes slither to safety!

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.



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