'I like the solitude.'

It's a touching tale. Bob
Redman, brought up by his
mother in a tiny Manhattan
apartment, had always
been addicted to trees.
When he was 14, he went
into the park and built
himself a tree house. It was
the first of 13 houses, each
one more elaborate than the
last. 'I like to be in trees,' Redman

explained to a reporter from The New

York Times. 'I like to be up, away from everything. I like the

York Times. 'I like to be up, away from everything. I like the solitude. I love most of all to look at the stars. The view at night of the city lights and stars is beyond description.'

A five-room split-level home

His final house was the grandest of them all. Constructed at the top of a huge beech tree, it was what an estate agent would describe as a 'five-room, split-level home, commanding spectacular views of the city skyline and Central Park'. It included ladders and rope bridges leading to an adjacent tree, as well as wooden benches and tables. Who can imagine what the rent might be for such a house?

Friends come to visit

Redman went to great pains to hide his tree houses, building them in neglected corners of the park and camouflaging them with branches and green paint. Friends used to come to visit him, sometimes as many as 12 people at a time, bringing sandwiches and radios and books and torches. Certain rules had to be obeyed: no breaking branches, no litter, no fires, and no loud music – except his brother Bill, who sometimes brought a set of conga drums and played them very late at night, giving rise to the rumours of a tree-dwelling tribe.

The party's over!

Although the park authorities quickly became aware of his activities, the houses would often go undetected for long periods of time. Some lasted as long as a whole year before they were found and destroyed by officials, with a mournful Bob Redman watching from a distance. His magnificent final house went unnoticed for four months before Bob was awoken one morning with the word: 'Come down! The party's over!'

He climbed down and was met by Frank Serpe, Park Director, and ten officers of the Parks Enforcement Patrol. Mr Serpe had been hunting Redman for years. But he was generous in his praise for the houses. 'We marvelled at the spectacular workmanship,' he said. 'The floors were strong enough to hold a truck, and not one nail was driven into the tree.' And when Bob offered to help dismantle the tree house, 'Well, he walked up the tree' an officer said. 'It was amazing!'

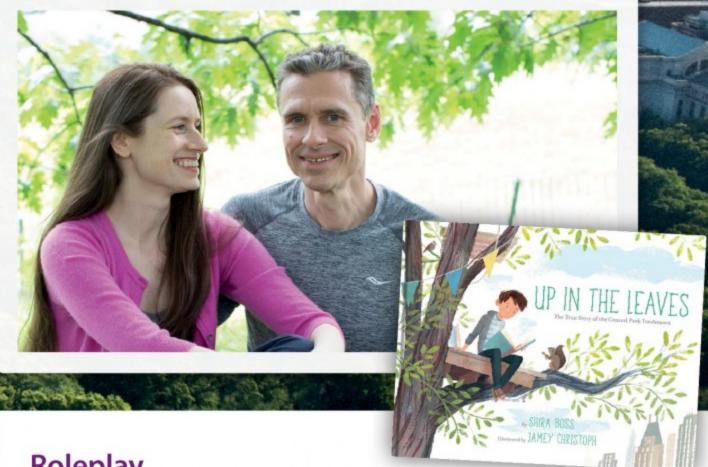
The perfect job!

Mr Serpe concluded that rather than lock him up, they should offer Redman a job. He is now a professional pruner and tree climber for the Central Park Conservancy. However, he has had to promise not to build any more tree houses. He says he cannot believe that a job so perfect for him could possibly exist.

This story just goes to prove that America is still a land of opportunity, where dreams can become reality. And, in the hectic, competitive world of New York, it is comforting to know that a man like Bob Redman exists.

Postscript

When a New York writer called Shira Boss needed her tiny Japanese maple tree pruning, someone suggested a man called ... Bob Redman. They are now married, with two sons, and Shira has written a children's book telling Bob's story, *Up In The Leaves*, which was published in 2018.



Roleplay

Work in pairs. **Student A** is Bob Redman. **Student B** is a journalist. Act out an interview with Bob Redman.

Tell me Bob, when did you build your first tree house? And why exactly?

Well, I was 14 and

What do you think?

- If you were Park Director, would you have allowed Bob to build tree houses in the park? Why/Why not?
- What are the pros and cons of living in big cities? Why do cities have parks?

Watch a video about the excitement of being high up in the treetops.

