One January morning in 2003, a group of families was exploring Florida’s Everglades National Park—a unique and beautiful wilderness comprising of 2,400 square miles of protected wetlands. Paragraph 1

The visitors extolled the wonders around them, rivers of golden grass stretching in all directions, the songs of frogs and crickets chiming in the humid air, the smell of orange blossoms from distant orchards. The group had high hopes for the day. Perhaps they’d see a majestic blue heron or a graceful snowy egret. Maybe they’d even catch a glimpse of an endangered Florida panther. Paragraph 2

As it turned out, the visitors were about to see something more unusual—and horrifying—than they could ever have imagined. Paragraph 3

Not far from the park’s entrance, they noticed a violent splashing. As they approached, they saw a massive alligator wrestling an enormous snake. They would later learn that the snake was a Burmese python, a species not naturally found in the Everglades or anywhere in North America. They alligator had its jaws clamped around the snake. The snake was wrapped around the alligator. The two creatures were locked in a brutal death match. Paragraph 4

Some of the visitors caught the scene on their cameras. Within days, their footage was broadcast on TV stations and websites around the world. Paragraph 5

To most people, this fight was little more than a thrilling and gruesome show. But to many wildlife experts, it was a symbol of a problem—a big, slithery problem. Paragraph 6

For years, some officials in the Everglades had been warning that Burmese pythons were living and breeding in the park. The officials worried that these gigantic beasts could have a profoundly negative impact on the fragile environment of the Everglades. Was it already too late? Paragraph 7

The Arrival

The first Burmese pythons arrived in the U.S. innocently enough: as pets. Americans have always enjoyed keeping strange, beautiful and even dangerous creatures in their homes. Today, nearly 100 million Americans own “exotic” pets—animals not native to our country. Want a white tiger? How about a baboon? Or maybe you’re more interested in a mamba—whose bite can induce a fatal heart attack in a grown man within minutes. These animals are readily—and legally—available for sale in the U.S. Paragraph 8

Burmese pythons became popular as pets in the early 1900s. They were cheap, just $20-$30 a snake. Plus, Burmese pythons are not venomous or aggressive towards humans. As babies, curled into tiny coils, they look cute. Paragraph 9

Then these adorable hatchlings grow. And grow. And grow and grow and grow. Paragraph 10
An adult Burmese python can be more 20 feet long. The snakes have enormous appetites for live animals. Not surprisingly, many buyers soon regret their purchases. Paragraph 11

And then what? Your Uncle Clive might be willing to adopt the kitten you’re allergic to, but a 20-foot snake that eats live bunnies? Many people end up setting their unwanted snakes loose in the wild. Paragraph 12

In many areas of the U.S., an abandoned snake would die of cold or starvation—but not in Florida. The subtropical climate is ideal for pythons. And no place in Florida is more perfect for them than the Everglades. Paragraph 13

Carried by Winds

Pythons were first sighted in Everglades National Park in the mid-1990s. People wondered: Had just a few cast-off pets made their way into this protected wilderness? Or had the snakes reached the park in other ways? No one was sure. Paragraph 14

In an article in The New Yorker magazine, writer Burkhard Bilger takes us back to 1992, when Hurricane Andrew slammed into Florida. The storm was a whopper—a Category 5, the strongest. It caused the deaths of 65 people and destroyed thousands of homes and businesses. Among the wrecked buildings was a warehouse full of exotic reptiles. Its collection included hundreds of baby Burmese pythons. Most of those babies died in the storm, but Bilger suggests that some could have been carried away by the winds. Paragraph 15

Invasive Species

Burmese pythons are an invasive species—that is, an animal or plant that is brought into a new environment and damages the animals and plants that live there. An estimated 4,300 invasive species live in the U.S., with more reported each year. In some cases, the damage these “invaders” cause is devastating. Paragraph 16

Experts are worried that the Everglades will soon experience a catastrophe is something doesn’t soon change. Burmese pythons are prodigious breeders. A female can lay as much as 100 eggs in one clutch, or nest. The snakes are well adapted to the different areas of the park—the salty rivers, fresh water ponds, and thick forests. They eat large quantities of almost anything, including reptiles, bird eggs, and sometimes even large mammals such as deer. They also threaten protected and endangered species. Paragraph 17

What Can Be Done?

The python invasion of the Everglades is undoubtedly an environmental crisis. So what can be done? Paragraph 18

The National Park Service has hired scientists to track and trap snakes, and the scientists kill hundreds each year. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission asks people to report python sightings. A recent ban on the import of snakes will also help prevent new pythons from being abandoned in the wild. Paragraph 19

For now, the python problem remains in Florida, where, as one ranger puts it, “we are at war.” And that war looks like that wrestling match between the alligator and the python. The struggle will go on for a long time. Who knows who will win? Paragraph 20

What does the word “ideal” mean as used in Paragraph 13?

What was the section “Carried by Winds” mostly about?

What responsibility do humans have when it comes to invasive species like the Burmese python?