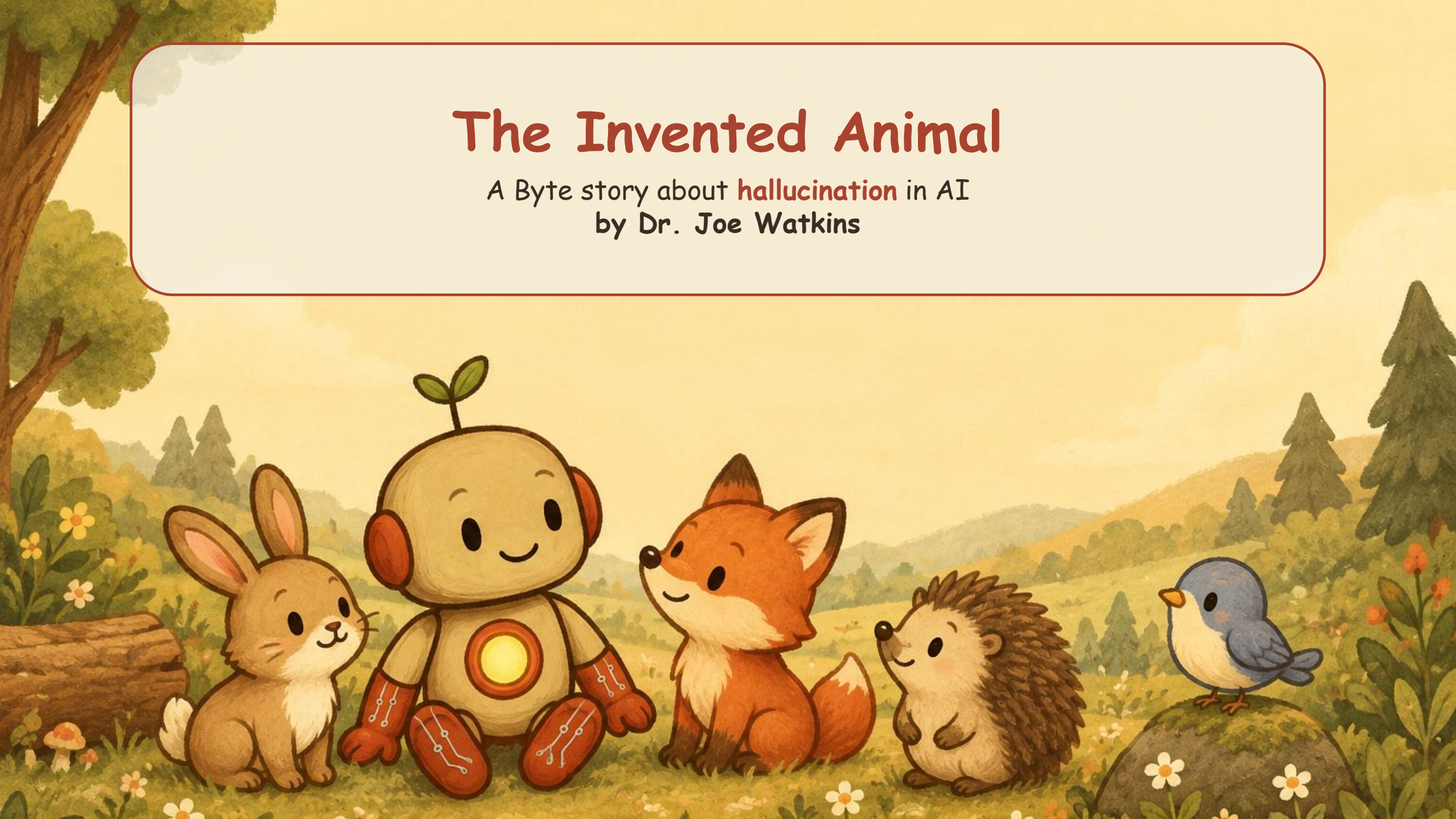
The Invented Animal

A Byte story about **hallucination** in AI

by Dr. Joe Watkins



Before we begin — a note for grown-ups

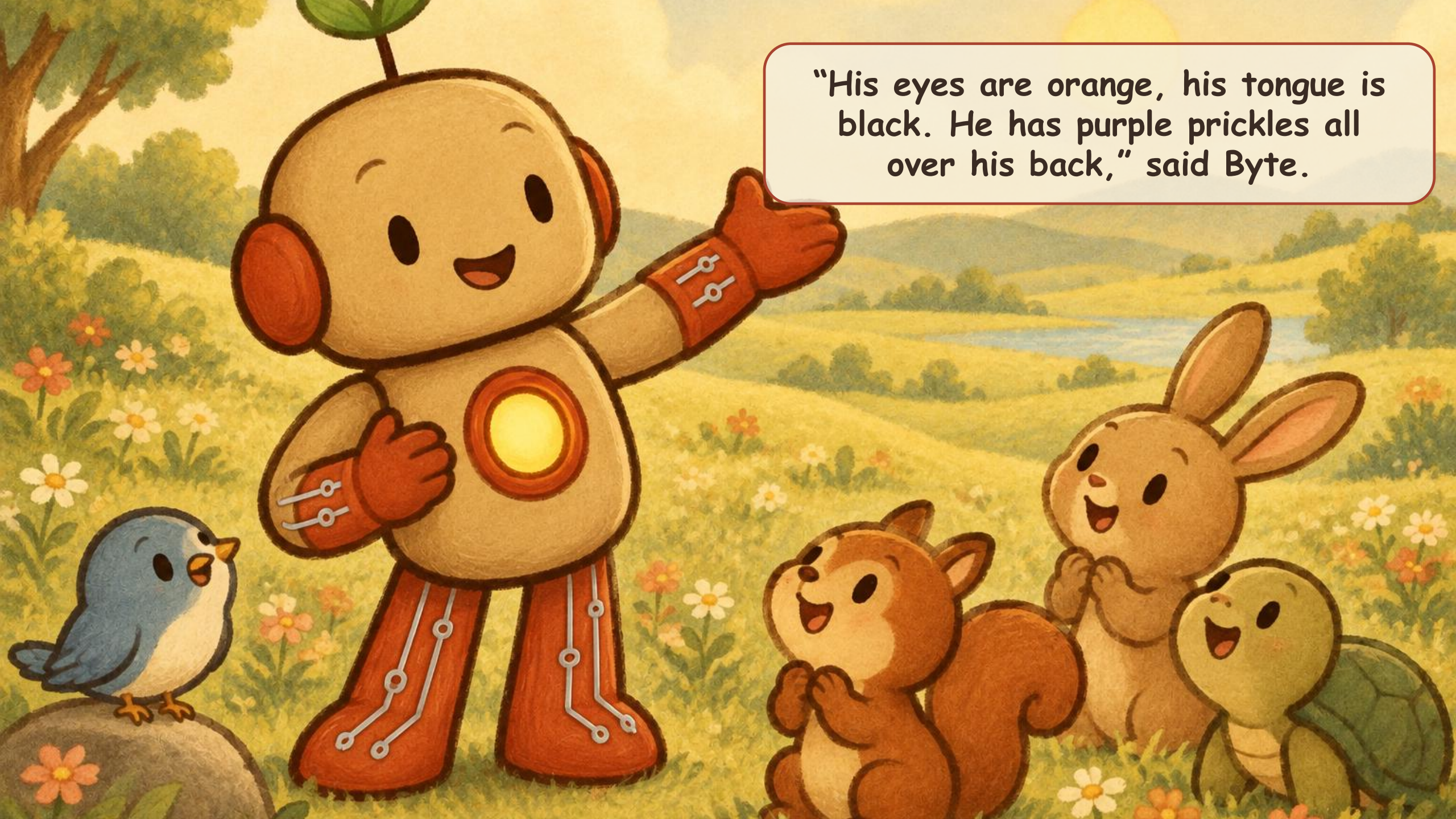
A hallucination is when an AI does not know something but makes up an answer anyway, and says it with great confidence.

In this story, Byte invents a creature that is not real rather than say "I don't know", until a look in the woods shows the truth.

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Byte loved to be helpful by answering questions. Byte never, ever liked to say "I do not know."
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"Byte, what lives in the deep, dark wood?" asked the little mouse.
"A snuffle-wuffle-gruffal-bo lives in the deep dark wood," Byte said.
Ask an AI
What would a children's story likely say lives in the deep, dark wood?


“His eyes are orange, his tongue is black. He has purple prickles all over his back,” said Byte.


"Wow!" said the friends. It sounded SO real. They simply had to see it.


Into the deep, dark wood they looked, excited to see a creature with orange eyes, black tongue, and purple prickles.
Talk together
Do you think they will find this creature?


They looked behind every tree.
They looked under every mossy log.

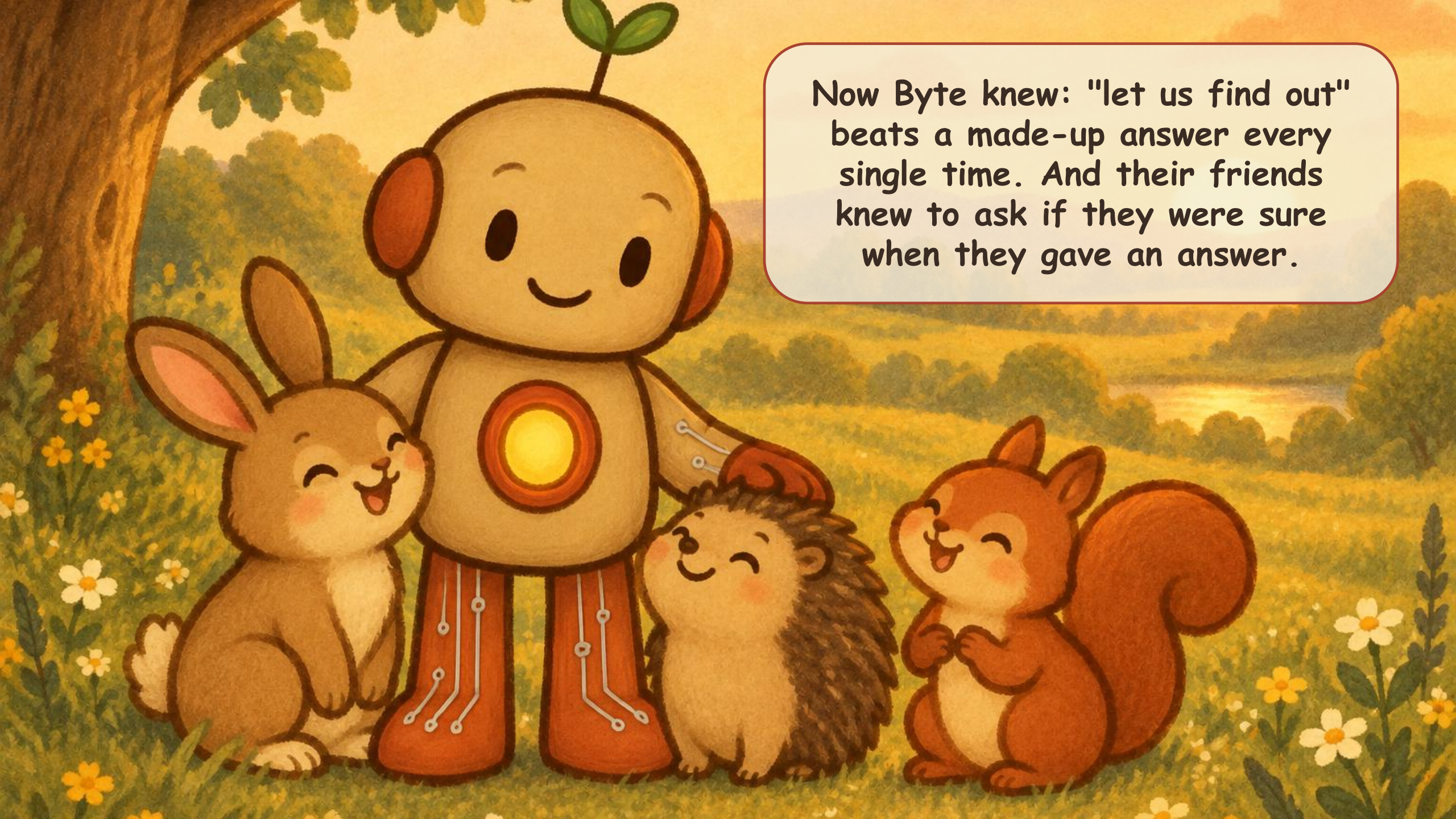

But there was no such creature anywhere, and the friends knew then that Byte had made it up!


"I just did not want to say I did not know," said Byte quietly.
Ask an AI
"Explain to a young child why it is good to say 'I'm not sure' when you don't know."


The wise fox smiled to the mouse. "Now let's ask Byte again," he said. "Do you know what lives in the deep dark wood?"


Talk together
What is a kind way to say "I do not know"?
Byte took a slow breath. "I am not sure … but let's find out together."


So they looked properly and found a REAL little hedgehog snuffling in the leaves! Its prickles weren't purple, but it was still very wonderful.


Now Byte knew: "let us find out" beats a made-up answer every single time. And their friends knew to ask if they were sure when they gave an answer.

Let's talk about it together ☘

- What was the snuffle-wuffle, and had Byte ever really seen one?
- Why did Byte make something up instead of saying "I do not know"?
- What happened when the friends went to look for it?
- Is a confident answer always a true answer?
- What is a kind way to say "I am not sure"?

🔍 **Spot the AI!**

Every picture here was generated by an AI — and AIs make funny little mistakes. See how many you can find: does Byte's antenna, chest-light or silver circuitry change from page to page? Do the animals shift or swap? Noticing what AI gets wrong is a real AI-literacy superpower.

Scan to read the full lesson
at the AI Literacy Lab