



CircuitForge

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the *CircuitForge* cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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This is Volume 1 of 2 of the *CircuitForge — Meet the Cast* series; each volume is a complete standalone book you can read on its own.

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The CircuitForge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Push

PUSH — the pressure difference. measured in volts.



- beat-after: 1
prompt: "Have you ever pushed hard on something that wouldn't move — a stuck door, a heavy cart — and felt the effort pile up in your arms with nowhere to go? Where did you feel that build-up in your body?"
 - beat-after: 4
prompt: "Think of a time someone gave you exactly the right nudge to get started — a hand on your back, a quiet 'go.' What did that little push feel like?"

On the workshop bench, a young armadillo named Push touched two thin metal probes to the ends of a small battery, and a number blinked awake on his little meter.

"One and a half," he said, mostly to himself. "One and a half volts of push."

A boy leaning on the bench frowned. "The battery isn't doing anything. It's just sitting there."

"It's ready," Push said. He set the battery down and picked up a chunkier, square one, pressing the probes to its two knobs. The meter jumped: nine. "This one's ready harder. Six times the push, packed and waiting." He wired the square battery to a tiny light with a little part beside it to keep the light safe, and the bulb bloomed a warm gold across the bench.

"There." Push's eyes went bright. "The battery didn't move. It just leaned on the wire. And the leaning is what made the light come on."

He moved the probes to one side of the little safety part, then the other. "About seven volts get spent here," he said, and shifted them onto the glowing bulb, "and about two here. Seven and two. Nine." He tapped the meter, satisfied. "It all comes back out to what the battery started with. Nothing goes missing. The books always balance."



Push grinned, because that was exactly the right question, and it was going to take him back a long way to answer it.

Push had grown up underground, in the deep cool burrows his family had dug for generations.

The tunnels weren't straight. His grandmother designed them to bend and open just so, and if you sat still in the right spot, you could feel a slow breath of air move past your whiskers — cool in summer, warm in winter, always drifting the same direction.

The first time young Push tried to dig his own tunnel, he'd sealed both ends by accident. He crouched in the middle, proud, and waited for the breeze.

Nothing came. The air sat there, thick and still and stuffy. His chest got tight. He'd done all that digging and the tunnel just felt *dead*.

His grandmother crawled in beside him and didn't scold. She pressed a paw to one wall. "Feel how packed the air is on this side?" Then the other. "And how thin over here?" He hadn't noticed, but once she said it, he could almost feel it — one side heavy, one side hungry.



Years later, staring at a battery, he thought: *that's all a battery is. A crowded side and an empty side, leaning.* And he smiled the way you smile when a stuck door finally gives.

He walked to CircuitForge when he was twelve, because a place full of wires and lights ought to understand pushing.

The famous inventor Watt met him at the door and asked only one thing. "What is electricity about?"

Push didn't reach for a big word. He pulled the battery card from his vest, then the matching battery, and set them side by side. "It's about the difference," he said. "One side crowded, one side hungry. The crowded side leans on the wire until something moves." He touched his meter to the ends. The number lit. "You can even feel how hard it's leaning. You just read it off, in volts."

Watt looked at the little armadillo and his little glowing screen for a long moment.

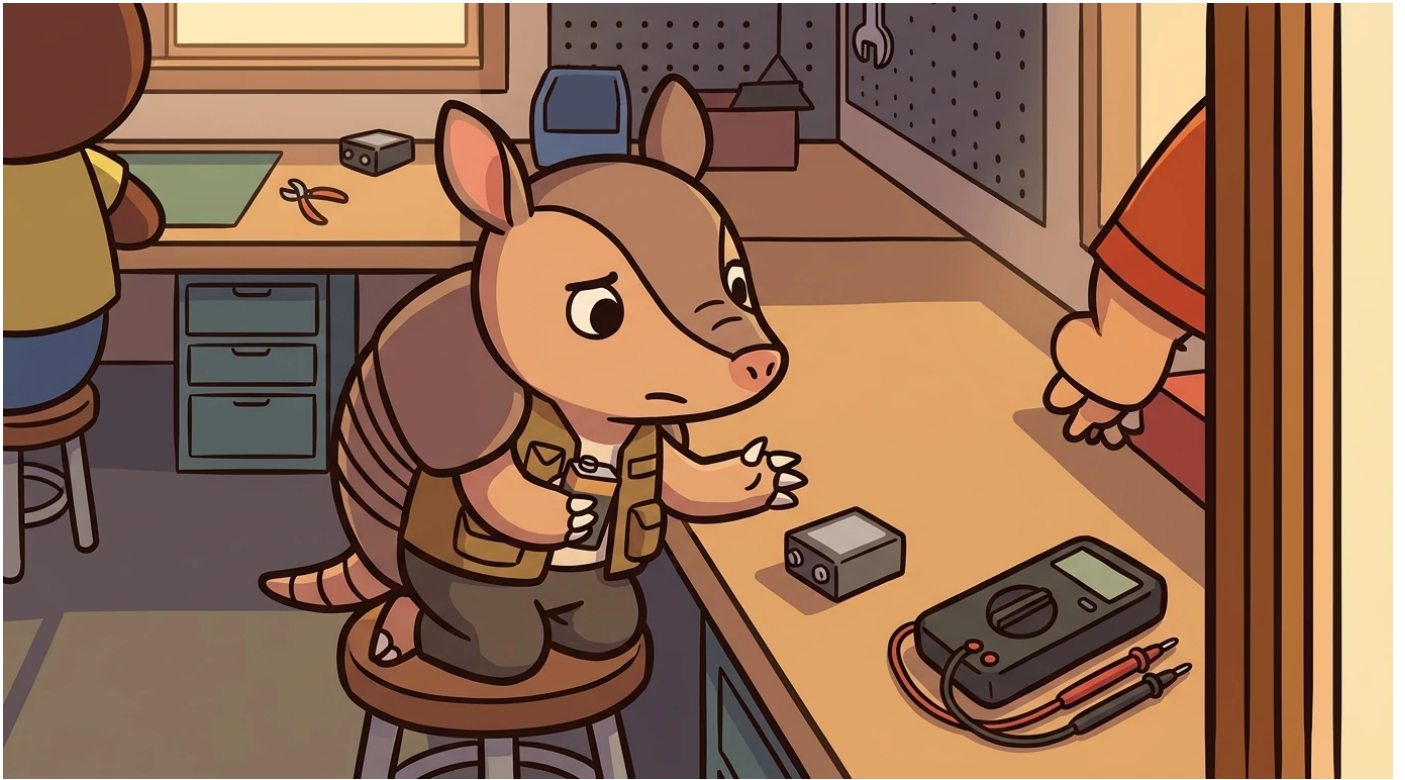


"Then you belong here," Watt said.

Push's corner of the workshop filled up with kids who mixed things up, and he loved them for it.

The boy from the bench came back the next day, still frowning at the quiet battery. "Okay. But if it's just *leaning*, why did my brother yelp when he touched the fence out back?"

Push set down two batteries — a small round one and a heavy square block from an old cart. "Feel this," he said, and let the boy hold each. They weighed different, but that wasn't the point. "This little one leans soft. This big one leans *hard*. Same idea, way more of it." He wired the small one to the safe little light: a gentle gold. "The lean is what pushes the electricity through whatever it touches. Your brother's fence had a big lean. Enough to shove a little current right through him — just enough to make him jump."



The boy nodded slowly, turning the little battery over in his paws, and for the first time it didn't look like it was doing nothing.

Late that afternoon, when the benches had gone quiet, the boy lingered by the door.

"When it's just sitting there," he said, "and nothing's moving yet — how do you *know* the push is really in there?"

Push thought about the sealed tunnel. About the tight chest, and the thick dead air, and the moment his grandmother's paw opened a hole and the breeze slid cool across his face.

"You feel it," he said. "That's the honest answer. It's like standing at a stuck door with your shoulder against it — nothing's moving, but you can feel the whole weight of you, ready, leaning. That readiness isn't emptiness. It's everything, packed against one side, waiting for somewhere to go."

Flow

*FLOW — *electrons moving through wires. measured in amperes.**



Flow was a river otter. She was also an electrician. She wasn't much older than twelve, but she knew her stuff. She wore a bright orange vest. Pinned to the front was her favorite tool: a small current meter. A little arrow on it glowed, always pointing the way.

Her fur was the color of cream. Her paws were tipped with copper. She was small and quick. And she loved watching electrons.

"Electrons moving through wires," she'd say. Her voice was a happy chirp. "*Measured in amperes.*"

Her meter was special. It showed how many *amperes* were flowing. An ampere is just a way to count how many electrons zip past a certain spot each second. The glowing arrow showed which way they were going.

Flow's whole job was about **electric current**. That's the big name for getting electrons to move.

Most kids thought electricity was magic. A mysterious zap. But Flow knew it wasn't a mystery at all.



"It's just a flow," she'd explain. "Like water in a river."

The flow of electrons is called **current**. And you measure it in **amperes**.

One tricky thing was direction. Most engineers drew arrows pointing from the plus side of a battery to the minus side. But the electrons themselves actually flow the other way! They zoom from minus to plus. It was a weird, old mix-up. But Flow knew the secret: the tiny electrons were what really moved.

Flow grew up by the rivers of CircuitForge. Her family had always been watchers of the water. For generations, they had tracked the currents. They counted how many fish swam by each second.

They knew that flow was something you could measure. A river's flow. An electron's flow. It was the same idea. Just with much, much tinier things.

One day, the master electrician Watt asked her, "What is current?"

Flow stood tall. "Electrons moving through wires," she said. "*Measured in amperes.*"



Watt nodded. "You are appointed."

In her workshop, Flow loved to show how it all worked. "Watch this," she chirped.

She took a battery and a small light. It was an LED that glowed blue. She connected them with wires. She also clipped her special meter into the line.

The LED lit up. A soft blue glow filled her paws.

"See?" Flow pointed to her meter. "It reads 20 milliamps. That's a tiny bit of an ampere. But it's flowing!"

She tapped one wire. "The current is 20 milliamps here." She tapped another spot. "And it's 20 milliamps here, too. It's the same everywhere in the loop. What goes in must come out."

Next, she pointed to a tiny switch in the wire. *Click!*



She flipped it open. The blue light vanished. The meter on her vest dropped to zero.

"I broke the path," she said. "The electrons can't make a full circle. Current needs a **complete loop**. No loop, no flow."

Click! She flipped the switch back. The LED glowed again. The meter jumped back to 20. "The loop is closed," she said. "The electrons are moving."

Flow then put on a pair of thick safety gloves. "A wire isn't full of electricity," she said. "It's full of electrons. But they don't go anywhere without a push from a battery. And they need a complete path to follow."

To show what happens when the path goes wrong, she set up a special circuit. It had a safety fuse.

"This is a **short circuit**," she warned. "Never try this."

She carefully touched two bare wires together. The current now had a shortcut. It skipped the LED completely.

Zzzzzt!



A tiny spark crackled. The wire started to get hot. Instantly, there was a soft *thwip!* sound. The little fuse in her circuit had popped. Everything went dead.

"The current got way too high," Flow explained. She pointed to the broken fuse. "It took the easy path. That made the wire heat up. Fuses are a good thing. They are weak links that break on purpose. They stop the flow to prevent a fire. Safety first!"

Flow looked up, her eyes bright. "My name is Flow. And my job is to teach you about **current**."

She held up one of her copper-tipped paws. "It's not magic. It's just electrons in motion."

She smiled. "Once you understand the loop, you understand a lot. You know why one broken wire stops everything. You know why short circuits are dangerous. And you know why the flow is the same in every part of the loop."

She tapped her meter one last time.

"Electrons moving through wires," she said softly. "*Measured in amperes.*"

Her whiskers lifted into a happy little smile, and a warm, glad feeling flowed through her — the same steady joy she felt watching the river run, knowing that once you can see the flow, you never feel afraid of it again.

Damp

*DAMP — *the slowdown. measured in ohms.**



- "V"
 - "Ω"
 - "A"
 - "W"
- gate-allow-text-pattern: '^([0-9]+)(.[0-9]+)?\$'
- reflection-prompts:
- prompt: "Damp moves slowly on purpose, and it makes her feel calm and steady instead of rushed. When you slow down instead of hurrying, does your body feel more relaxed — shoulders loose, breath easy?"
 - prompt: "Damp says slowing things down isn't a weakness, it's her superpower. Is there something you're good at that other people might call slow or quiet, but that makes you feel proud?"



Damp was a sloth who moved like she had all the time in the world. Which, she figured, she did. Her fur was the color of warm cream, with a fuzzy coat of green moss growing on the tips. She wore a thick, puffy vest with a big symbol stitched on the front: Ω . The symbol for **ohms**.

Damp was never without her two favorite tools. One was her ohmmeter, a little box that measured electrical friction. The other was a pouch of tiny resistors, each painted with colorful stripes. She was deeply curious about how things slowed electricity down. She would tap her meter and whisper her favorite phrase. "The slowdown. Measured in **ohms**."

Most people think electricity is all about speed. Zap! A lightning-fast current flashes through a wire. But Damp knew the secret. Every single thing in the world fought that current, at least a little. Even the best, shiniest copper wire put up a tiny fight. This electrical friction was called **resistance**, and it was Damp's special craft.

She loved to show how it worked. "Some materials barely fight at all," she'd explain, holding up a copper wire. "The electricity flows through easily. But this," she'd say, pointing to a rubber eraser, "fights back hard. It stops the electricity completely." A tiny carbon resistor was somewhere in the middle. It was designed to fight the flow just the right amount.

This whole push-and-pull follows a secret rule of the universe. It's a rule called **Ohm's law**. It sounds complicated, but it's really just three ideas tied together.

Voltage is the *push* that gets electricity moving.

Current is the *flow* of that electricity.

And **resistance** is the *fight* against that flow.

Ohm's Law says that Push = Flow $\times$ Fight. If you know any two, you can always figure out the third. And when electricity has to fight its way through something, it creates heat. Think of an old-fashioned light bulb. The electricity struggles so hard to get through the tiny wire inside that the wire gets white-hot and glows. Damp's job was to make that struggle something you could see and use. It wasn't a problem. It was a tool.



"What is **resistance**?" Watt asked.

Damp thought for a long, slow moment. She looked at Watt, her eyes calm and clear. "The slowdown," she said finally. "It's friction-craft. And it's measured in **ohms**."

Watt smiled. "You belong here."

In her workshop, surrounded by spools of wire and bins of components, Damp showed her students how it all worked.

"Watch closely," she said. She picked up a tiny resistor with brown, black, and red stripes. "These color bands are a code."

She taught them a rhyme to remember it: *Big Brown Rabbits Often Yell, 'Go Buy Violets, Get White!'*

"Black is zero, brown is one, red is two," she explained. "So this one is a one, a zero, and then two more zeroes. That makes 1,000 **ohms** of **resistance**."

She built a simple circuit. A 9-volt battery provided the push. She connected her 1,000-**ohm** resistor, a small red LED light, and a meter to measure the current. The LED lit up with a gentle, steady glow.

"The meter says the current is about 7 milliamps," Damp said, pointing to the dial. "That's **Ohm's Law** at work."

Then she swapped out the resistor for one with different stripes. It was a 470-**ohm** resistor. The little LED suddenly glowed much brighter. "See? Less fight means more flow," she said. "The current is almost 15 milliamps now."



She picked up a third resistor, this one only 100 **ohms**. "If we make the light even smaller..." She clipped it into the circuit. The LED flared with a brilliant, almost painful light. It flickered once. "Careful," Damp warned, quickly disconnecting the battery. "Too much current can burn out the little light. The resistor protects it. It doesn't block the flow, it just limits it. Like a narrow pipe limits how much water can get through."

She showed them other things, too. How a toaster's wires have very high **resistance** to get hot enough to brown your bread. How putting two resistors in a line adds their **resistance** together, making the light even harder. And how giving the electricity two paths side-by-side makes the total **resistance** go down, because it's easier for the current to get through.

"Never think of **resistance** as a bad thing," she told her students. Her voice was soft but sure. "**Resistance** is a craft. Without it, circuits would just burn up. Resistors are how we shape the current. They let us decide how bright a light should be, or how much heat to make. They are the tuners for our electrical songs."

She held up a single, tiny resistor between her claws.

"The slowdown," she said with a gentle smile. "Measured in **ohms**."

Meet Damp

Damp is a sloth who loves to take things slow. She thinks the way electricity slows down is the most interesting thing in the world. She'll show you how this slowdown, called **resistance**, isn't a bad thing at all. It's a craft. She's never without her trusty ohmmeter and a pouch of colorful resistors.



Sample lines:

- *"The slowdown."*
- *"Measured in ohms."*
- *" $V = I \times R$."*

Where You'll See Damp

Damp is the star of this chapter, but you'll see her again whenever things need to slow down. She'll pop up in later kits to help with tricky circuits. By the end, you'll use her ideas about **resistance** to build a whole electronics toolkit.

Damp's Best Buds

Branch

*BRANCH — *one path or many. the topology decides the behavior.**



Branch was a young beaver who was an expert on dams. But his real passion was circuits. He wore a special vest with big pockets. Inside, he kept a set of cards and a little tracker board. The cards showed different ways to connect wires.

His paws, tipped with a soft amber color, were surprisingly good with tiny electronics. He was deeply curious about how circuits worked. He often said, "One path or many. The way you connect things decides what they do." His cards and tracker helped him show people what he meant. They showed the difference between a single loop and a path that splits into branches.

This is the most important thing to know about Branch. He teaches the big idea of **circuit topology**. That's a fancy name for how you connect the parts of a circuit.



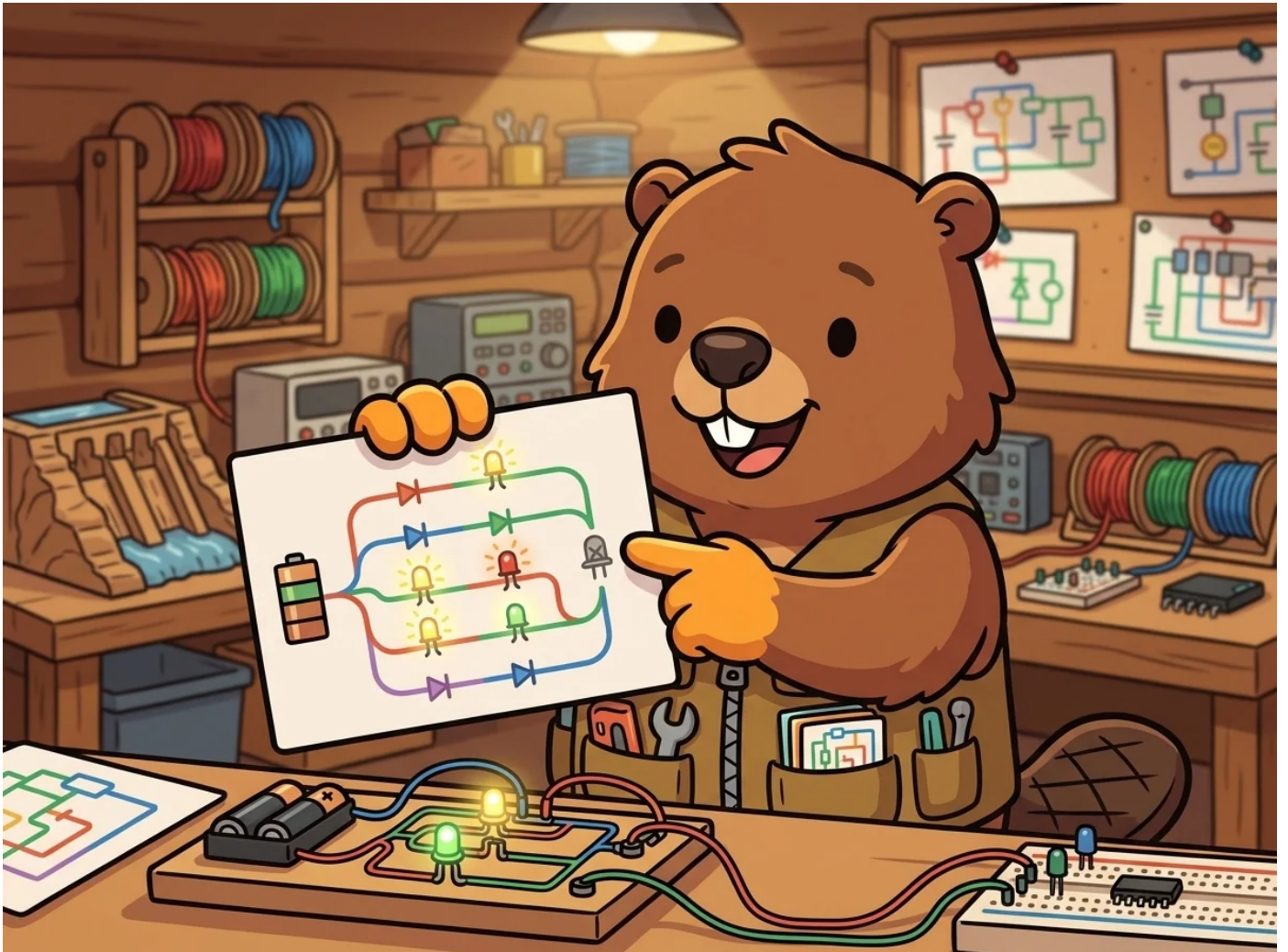
Most people think a circuit is just one big loop. A single path. But Branch knew there were two main ways to wire things. You could connect them in a line, one after the other. That's called a **series** circuit. Or you could give each part its own separate branch. That's called a **parallel** circuit.

The same parts, wired in different ways, act completely differently.

Think about holiday lights. Old ones were wired in series. If one single bulb burned out, the whole string went dark. The path was broken! But modern lights are different. They are wired in parallel. One bulb can burn out, but the rest stay lit. Each one has its own path for the electricity.

The way you choose to wire it is the engineering choice.

Branch made this very clear. "One path or many," he'd say, holding up two of his cards. "*The topology decides the behavior.*" Let's say you have two little LED lights. If you wire them in **SERIES**, the electricity has to go through the first one to get to the second one. They share the electricity. If one light breaks, the path is broken. Both lights go dark."



He'd flip the card over. "But if you wire them in PARALLEL, each light gets its own branch. They share the same power source, but not the same path. If one light breaks, the other one stays on. *Same parts, different connection, different result.*"

Branch grew up by the streams near his family's lodge. His family had always designed dams for the village. They knew a dam with only one channel for water was a bad idea. If that one channel got blocked, the whole lodge could flood. A good dam had many channels. The water could branch off and flow through different paths.

Branch saw that circuits were just like his family's dams.

He was only twelve when he walked into the CircuitForge workshop. The mentor, a wise old owl named Watt, asked him a single question. "What is topology?"

Branch didn't hesitate. "One path or many," he said. "*The topology decides the behavior.* It's the craft of choosing the right path."



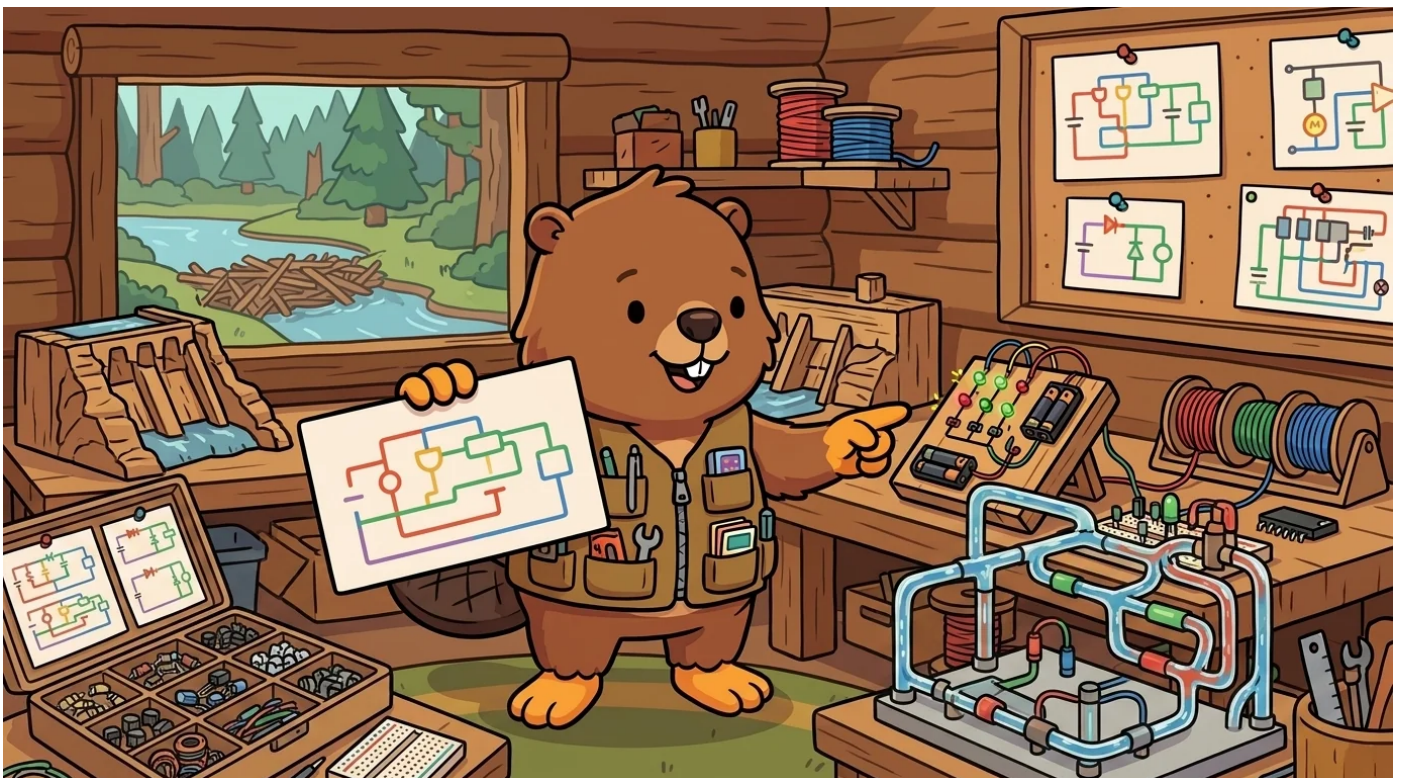
Watt nodded slowly. "You belong here."

In his workshop, Branch loved to show people how it worked. "Watch," he said, pulling out a 9-volt battery and two red LEDs. He snapped them into a board. First, he connected them in a single loop. A series circuit.

Both LEDs lit up, but they were a little dim. "See? They have to share the voltage from the battery," Branch explained. "Each one only gets half. Now look." He unplugged one of the LEDs. Instantly, both lights went dark. The single path was broken.

Then he rewired the board. He gave each LED its own separate loop back to the battery. A parallel circuit.

This time, both LEDs glowed at full brightness. "Now they each get the full 9 volts," he said. The battery had to work a little harder, sending out more current. Branch unplugged one LED. The other one stayed on, shining just as brightly as before.



He looked up. "I am Branch. The idea I teach is **circuit topology**. The main thing to remember is this: *in series, the current is the same for all parts, but the voltage divides. In parallel, the voltage is the same for all parts, but the current divides*. Choosing how to wire things is how you engineer."

He was a gentle teacher. "Don't just connect things randomly," he'd say. "Think about what you want to happen. Do you need your lights to stay on even if one burns out? Use parallel. Do you need to divide the voltage to a specific level? Use series. Most real circuits are a mix of both. You just have to look closely, find the groups, and design the behavior you want."

He would always finish with his favorite phrase.

"One path or many. *The topology decides the behavior.*"

And then his shoulders would settle, and a warm, quiet glow of pride would spread through his chest — the same steady, happy feeling he got watching water find its way through every open channel of a good dam.

Build

*BUILD — *every component has a job. wire them together; the circuit comes alive.**



Build knelt on her workshop floor, a bowerbird-shaped tween in a vest of a dozen small pockets. In front of her, a white breadboard waited, dotted with tiny holes. She was building a light that blinked, and she talked to her parts as if they were a team waiting for the whistle.

First she pushed in the little black chip with eight thin legs. It held the beat, like a drummer. Then a striped cylinder to hold electricity back, so nothing rushed too fast. Then a small can-shaped part to catch a sip of power and let it go. Last, a bright red bulb-shaped piece that would do the shining. Each one snapped down with a soft click. She snapped the battery clips to the edge rails, one for plus, one for minus, then flipped the switch.

Blink. Blink. Blink. The red light pulsed, steady as a slow heartbeat. Build grinned so wide her whiskers lifted. Five small parts, each doing exactly one thing, and together they made light out of stillness. That was the whole trick, right there on the floor.

Build grew up near the bower-clearings, where her family were the village arrangers. They gathered shiny pebbles, bottle-blue glass, and bright fallen feathers, and they laid them out in careful patterns in front of their homes.

She remembered being very small, watching her grandmother sort a heap of tumbled stones. Grandmother never dumped them in a pile. She turned each one over, found its color, and set it in its exact spot — cool blues to the left, warm ambers to the right, a single milky-white pebble at the center like a moon.

"Why so slow, Nana?" small Build had asked, wanting the pattern finished *now*.



Grandmother handed her one amber stone. "A pattern is not a pile," she said. "Every piece helps the whole thing work. Put it in the wrong spot and the whole shape goes quiet." Build set the stone down where it belonged, and the arrangement seemed to breathe — the color leaping across the clearing all at once. She never forgot that feeling: many tiny things, each in its place, suddenly speaking together.

When she was twelve, Build walked to CircuitForge with her breadboard tucked under one wing. The workshop smelled of warm metal and pine.

Watt, who ran the place, was an older tinkerer with singed fingertips and kind eyes. He watched her lay her parts out on his bench — not dumped, but sorted, each in a row by its job.

"What do you know about building?" Watt asked, folding his arms.

Build didn't reach for fancy words. She pushed the black chip, the striped cylinder, the little can, and the red bulb into her board, snapped the battery on, and let the light answer for her. *Blink. Blink. Blink.*

"Every part has a job," she said. "The drummer keeps time. The stripes hold the rush back. The can stores a sip. The bulb shines. Wire them together, and it comes alive." She looked up. "A pile of parts does nothing. A team of parts does this."

Watt watched the red light pulse for a long moment. Then he nodded slowly. "Then this bench is yours," he said.



Build's first student was a fidgety kid named Row who kept trying to shove every part into the board at once.

"Slow down," Build said gently, sliding the tray between them. "This isn't a pile. It's a team. Who does what?"

Row frowned at the parts. "That one's the drummer," he said, pointing at the chip. "And the stripey one holds electricity back." He plugged the striped cylinder in, then the red bulb, then flipped the switch — and the bulb went dark and gave a tiny, sad *tick*.

Row's shoulders dropped. "I broke it."

Build picked up the burnt bulb and held it to the light. The inside had gone cloudy and dark. "You didn't break it," she said, smiling. "You *learned* it. Too much power rushed straight through — because the striped part wasn't in the electricity's path yet. Now you know exactly what that stripe is for." She pressed a fresh bulb into his palm. "Every part comes with a little instruction card. Next time we read the card, then we try again. Breaking a part is just the part teaching you a lesson."

Row read the card, moved the striped cylinder ahead of the bulb, and flipped the switch. *Blink. Blink. Blink.* He stared at the pulsing red light like it was magic he had made himself.

Build settled back on her heels and watched Row watch his light.



"Feel that?" she asked quietly. Row nodded, one hand pressed to his chest without noticing. "That warm little thump when the pieces finally click and the light answers back — that's the best feeling in the whole workshop. It means the team is talking."

She reached out and gave the tray of parts a gentle nudge, all those small quiet pieces waiting for their spot. Somewhere under her own ribs she felt it too — that steady, glad hum, the same one from the clearing long ago when the stones began to speak. She let herself sit inside it a moment longer, warm and settled, before reaching for the next part.

About Build

Build is like a bowerbird who loves workshops. She's super curious about how tiny electronic parts work. She never just talks about "wires." For her, it's always about the team of parts. Each one has a special job, and the magic happens when you arrange them in the right way.

Things you'll hear her say:

- *"Every part has a job."*
- *"Wire them together; it comes alive."*
- *"Read the little card, then try again."*

Build's Story

- You'll meet Build here, where she shows her big idea: putting parts together on a breadboard.
- You'll see her again whenever new electronic parts show up in later kits.
- At the very end of the book, Build will help bring all the big ideas together. She'll show how her parts fit with Flow, Push, Damp, and Branch to make a complete electronics toolkit.



How Build Connects to Everyone

Build's idea of a "team of parts" is a big one. It's not just for electronics! It connects to how other characters solve problems. They all learn to put small, simple pieces together to build something amazing and new. It's all about teamwork.

What We Tried to Be Careful About

We wanted to show that science isn't some big, scary secret. It's something you can figure out by paying attention and trying things, just like Build does with her parts. We also wanted to make it super clear that it's okay to mess up. When Build says, "Don't be scared to break parts," she really means it. Making mistakes is one of the best ways to learn.

Where The Ideas Came From

The idea for Build comes from two places. First, real birds called bowerbirds! They build amazing nests by carefully arranging colorful objects they find. They are nature's little arrangers.

Second, the parts Build uses are real. Resistors, capacitors, and LEDs are all basic parts in electronics. You can find them in kits and use a breadboard to build your own circuits, just like she does. Many amazing engineers and teachers have shared these ideas for years, and Build is here to share them with you.

About Spark & Anvil

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. We make educational apps for ages 9-14 — all free, forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases. CircuitForge is one of 140+ apps in the portfolio.

More chapter books from Spark & Anvil

Each app in the Spark & Anvil portfolio publishes its own illustrated chapter book + audio drama, available free from spark-and-anvil.com/books. Highlights include:

- **GambitTales** — chess tactics through Sir Pinwell, Lady Skewer, Queen Vesper, and the Twin Knights of Fork Hill
- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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