

Merlins

Reading Comprehension Activities

Friday 27th March 2020

Select either the Bronze, Silver OR Gold task, read through the text and answer the questions that follow.

Walpole

Way up north where it is always cold, there lived a great herd of walruses. The biggest was Walpole. Walpole loved the cold.

Sometimes the walruses pushed each other to get the best place on the rocks. But they never tried to push Walpole.

"It's time for you to lead the herd," said the oldest walrus. "You are the biggest and the strongest. Polar bears never come near us when they see your tusks."

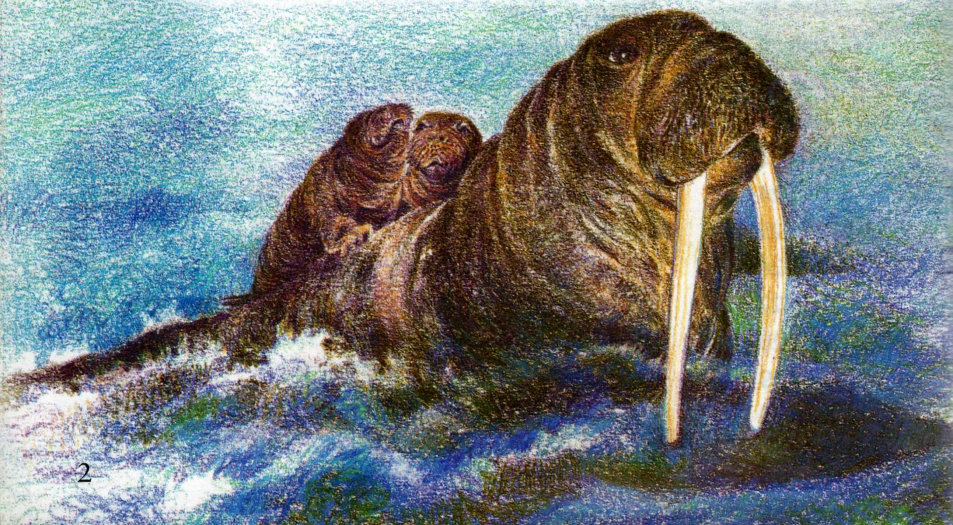
"I don't want to be a leader," said Walpole. "I want to take care of baby walruses who have lost their mothers."

Walpole gave the little walruses rides on his back as if he were their mother. He found food for them on the ocean floor. And he made sure they did not float away on a piece of ice.

The little walruses loved Walpole. They barked like puppy dogs when he walked on his flippers and shook all over.

"Please be our leader," said the oldest walrus again.

"No," said Walpole. "I'm having too much fun."



Answer the questions by writing out the sentences and filling in the missing words.

- 1 Why did the oldest walrus want Walpole to be the leader?
He wanted Walpole to be the leader because Walpole was the _____ and the _____ walrus in the herd.
- 2 What did Walpole want to do instead of being the leader?
Walpole wanted to look after _____ who had lost their _____.
- 3 What did the baby walruses love to see Walpole doing?
They loved to see him walk on his _____ and _____ all over.
- 4 What kind of things did Walpole do for the baby walruses?
He gave them _____ on his back.
He found _____ for them.
He made sure that they didn't _____ away on a piece of _____.
- 5 What animals would never hurt the walruses if Walpole was there?
The _____ would never hurt the walruses if Walpole was there.



Life in a castle

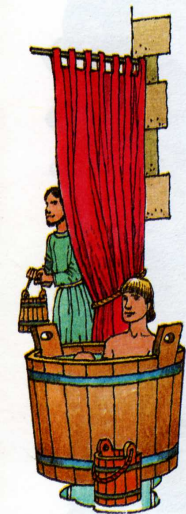
A castle was not only a fortress. It was normally the home of a community of men, women, children and animals. Though a castle may be a ruin nowadays, without a roof or floors to the rooms, we must not forget that those same rooms once had the fittings, furniture and atmosphere of a home and echoed to the daily noise of a community of people.

In the Great Hall there were long trestle tables, with benches to sit on. If there were any chairs, the two largest would be placed at one end of the room to be used by the lord of the castle and his wife. Lesser people sat either on hard, wooden stools or on wooden storage chests. There were no carpets on the floors, just rushes or straw on the wooden boards or stone slabs.

In the sleeping quarters most people slept on straw mattresses on the floor. A bed was a most important and valuable piece of furniture in those days, and only the lord and his wife were likely to have one.

Sanitation in castles was relatively good, though perhaps not quite as convenient as it is made by our pipes, taps and tanks. If you wanted to take a bath, water was heated and then poured into a wooden tub (as it was until quite recent times in many houses). There were probably curtains hanging down from a pole to pull around you if you were shy or felt the draughts.

The castle lavatories, or garderobes, were generally set in small rooms built into the thick outside walls. They were reached down a short passage, so that they were apart from the living quarters. Usually there were some on each floor. There was a simple stone seat, and sewage went down a chute on the exterior wall into the moat or a convenient river or into a pit at the base of the wall.



The important rooms in early castles were heated either by a fire in the centre of the room or by portable braziers. That is why ceilings were often high - they had to allow room for the smoke to circulate. In the twelfth century, however, it became more usual for fireplaces and chimneys to be built into the walls of rooms.



Answer in sentences.

- 1 What were the two main uses of a castle?
- 2 What was used to cover the floor?
- 3 What furniture would you find in the Great Hall?
- 4 Where did most people sleep?
- 5 How was having a bath different from in our times?
- 6 There were no flush toilets in a castle. Explain how the castle lavatories worked.
- 7 What is another word used in the passage that means "lavatory" or "toilet"?
- 8 What does "a portable brazier" mean?
- 9 Why did ceilings have to be high in the days when fires were in the centre of the room?
- 10 Write down two ways in which the lord of the castle and his wife lived a more comfortable life than other people in the castle.

Uninvited ghosts

Marian and Simon were sent to bed early on the day that the Brown family moved house. By then everyone had lost their temper with everyone else; the cat had been sick on the sitting-room carpet; the dog had run away twice. If you have ever moved you will know what kind of day it had been.

Packing cases and newspapers all over the place ... sandwiches instead of proper meals ... the kettle lost and a wardrobe stuck on the stairs and Mrs Brown's favourite vase broken. There was bread and baked beans for supper, the television wouldn't work and the water wasn't hot so when all was said and done the children didn't object too violently to being packed off to bed. They'd had enough, too. They had one last argument about who was going to sleep by the window, put on their pyjamas, got into bed, switched the lights out ... and it was at that point that the ghost came out of the bottom drawer of the chest of drawers.

It oozed out, a grey cloudy shape about three feet long smelling faintly of woodsmoke, sat down on a chair and began to hum to itself. It looked like a bundle of bedclothes, except that it was not solid: you could see, quite clearly, the cushion on the chair beneath it. ☞

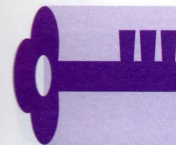


The children glared at it and buried themselves under the bedclothes. And, eventually, slept.

The next night it was there again. This time it was smoking a long white pipe and reading a newspaper dated 1842. Beside it was a second grey cloudy shape. "Hello, dearies," said the ghost. "Say how do you do to my Auntie Edna."

"She can't come here too," wailed Marian.

"Oh yes she can," said the ghost. "Always comes here in August, does Auntie. She likes a change."



Answer in sentences.

- 1 What did the Browns lose in the move?
- 2 What was broken?
- 3 What did the Brown family have for supper?
- 4 What did the cat do that made people cross?
- 5 Why did Mr and Mrs Brown send Marian and Simon to bed early?
- 6 How did Marian and Simon feel when they were sent to bed early?
- 7 The ghost was not very frightening but it was very annoying. Write down two annoying things that it did.
- 8 Why didn't Mrs Brown believe the children when they told her about the ghost?
- 9 How do we know that the Browns moved into a house that is at least one hundred years old?
- 10 Which word tells us that Marian was really miserable when she saw two ghosts in the bedroom on the second night?

