

Holiday Challenge: Reading

‘6 Challenges for 6 days’

This booklet is designed to keep your brains ‘ticking over’ during the long summer break. Just a few short activities will mean that you return to Year 6 ready to learn and raring to go! Try to really impress your teacher by completing one challenge for each week of the holidays. Circle any questions that you’d like some more help with when term starts again.

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Reading – Week 1

Thrown: Part 1

Heaving a sigh, Alice dumped the weeds into the barrow and wheeled it down the hill to the flower bed closest to the lake. There, beneath the pale pink haze of a blossoming apple tree, her sister, Isobel, and her two brothers, Max and William, were lounging around enjoying the last rays of a warm spring day.

‘Don’t look now,’ drawled William, ‘but it looks like old misery-guts is on the warpath again.’ They all turned towards the huge, old house to watch their father striding across the lawn. As he approached, Alice noticed the sadness in his eyes and asked him what was wrong.

‘I’ve just been speaking to Dr White. I’m afraid my test results don’t look very hopeful.’

Alice gasped and threw her arms around him. Max and Isobel glanced at each other and rolled their eyes while William muttered a rather half-hearted, ‘Oh, bad luck Pa.’

‘So,’ continued their father, ‘I have to start putting my affairs in order for after I’m gone. The biggest question is what to do with the house.’

‘Simple. Sell it off and share out the money between us,’ said William.

‘I was worried you’d say that,’ said Father. ‘As you surely know, I’ve always wanted to keep it in the family. After all, my father built up the business from nothing and I’ve made it even more successful. This house is a monument to that hard work, so I want it to be our legacy. It will take some looking after, so I’ve decided ...’ At this point he paused while he looked intently into his children’s eyes ... to leave it to Alice. After all, she’s the only one that’s shown any interest in it.’

Alice’s siblings erupted into furious protests, claiming that, had they

Week 1

1. During which month of the year do you think the events took place?

_____ *1 mark*

2. What evidence is there in the passage to suggest that the children’s father is rarely in a good mood?

 _____ *2 marks*

3. **Find and copy** a word which means something that the family will leave behind for people to remember them by.

_____ *1 mark*

4. Which two pieces of evidence suggest that Isobel takes pride in her appearance?

 _____ *2 marks*

known, they would have done a little bit of work around the place too. Ultimately, William threatened to challenge the decision in court unless they were all given an equal chance, so Father conceded.

Max proposed a competition, so that one of them could win the house and grounds fair and square. Alice’s heart sank: what contest could she ever win? William was the cleverest; Max was the strongest and most athletic; Isobel was beautiful and extremely popular.

Devastated that his true wishes would not be respected, Father tried to think of a suitable challenge. Finally, after gazing at the lake, he announced his decision: he would award the house to whoever could throw a stone that reached the far bank. They would each be allowed one throw only. No catapults, sling shots, or any other devices could be used. And if no-one managed within a year, the house would be sold and the proceeds given to charity.

‘You ridiculous old man,’ snarled Isobel. ‘No one could ever do that, so what’s the point of trying?’ Tossing her silken hair defiantly, she picked up a small pebble in her perfectly manicured fingers and lobbed it a few metres out into the lake. ‘There,’ she snapped, ‘that’s my go. I can marry all the money I could ever need.’

One down, three to go.

5. Put a tick in one box in each row to show whether the statement is true or false.

	True	False
Father is reluctant to sell the house.		
William suggests they should have a competition to see who should win the house.		
Alice thinks the other children are better than her.		

2 marks

Reading – Week 2

Thrown: Part 2

Over the next couple of months, Alice noticed Max putting himself through an intensive training programme to build up his strength and throwing skills. He had even measured the diameter of the lake and marked out an equivalent distance on the lawns to help him find his range.

Eventually, he announced that he was ready to have his turn. The warm summer sun had shrunk the lake by a few metres and he reckoned he could make the distance on most throws. Alice, William and Father gathered on the bank to watch as Max went through a series of warm-ups and stretches. Then, he jogged up to the lakeside and launched the stone high into the air ... a little too high in fact for, although it was a mighty throw, he had slightly misjudged the trajectory and the stone splashed into the water agonisingly close to the bank.

Two down ...

As the year grew old, Alice noticed William furtively sneaking out to the grounds alone, making sure nobody followed him. Then, one chilly November morning, he appeared in a thick coat and told his family that he was ready for the challenge. Intrigued that his weedy, bookworm of a brother thought he could out-throw him, Max joined Alice and Father by the lake while Isobel sulked in her room.

Rather like a stage magician, William let his family check that it was a 'just an ordinary stone', then proceeded to perform a mysterious sequence of crouching and stretching movements. Finally, he sprang forward and flung out his arm. The stone rocketed out of his hand and sailed right over the lake, thudding into the ground a good few metres beyond the far bank.

'Oh well done William!' said Father. Max walked over to his brother, offering his congratulations like a true sportsman. As William gleefully

Week 2

1. Find a word in the passage which means **secretly**.

_____ 1 mark

2. Why is William's throw disqualified?

_____ 1 mark

3. Explain, with reference to the text, how Alice's patience paid off.

_____ 2 marks

4. Why does Father consider that he and Alice have both won?

_____ 2 marks

shook his hand, Max suddenly snatched his back sharply. There was a snap and a twang, followed by a triumphant 'Aha!' from Max, who was now holding aloft a length of strong elastic which had been concealed in the sleeve of William's coat.

'I said no catapults, sling shots, or any other devices,' growled Father. 'Your throw is disqualified.' That left Alice. Just Alice.

And so it was that in the depths of winter, Alice knocked on her father's bedroom door and told him that she was ready for her turn. Still fastening his coat and scarf, with his other children grumbling behind him, he crunched across the brittle grass behind his daughter. Along with his late wife, he had tried to treat all his children equally, yet he couldn't deny that he really wanted Alice to succeed. As they approached the lake, that hope began to crystallise into a solid belief that she had the wisdom and wherewithal, both to win the contest and take care of the house.

Meanwhile, Alice's thoughts were swirling around her head like the clouds of condensing breath billowing from their small party. Had she really thought this through? Had she been right to trust her father's judgement and foresight? With her head spinning, she produced a smooth pebble from her pocket. For a moment or two, she gazed at the stone, passing it through her fingers as if weighing the chances of success and failure. Finally she said, 'Well, here goes!' and swung her arm.

Her patience had paid off. With a strange, ringing noise, the stone zipped across the smooth ice that covered the lake. Five pairs of eyes followed its unfaltering course all the way across to the other side where it thumped into the far bank before rebounding a short distance for good measure.

'Did I win?' she asked, turning to her father with a knowing grin.

Father took both her hands. 'I think we both did,' he smiled.

5. Thinking about the text as a whole (including Part 1), what do you think the main message of the story is?

2 marks

Reading – Week 3

Astronuts

‘I think we’d better be getting back now,’ said Alan.
 ‘Oh, come on,’ protested Beth, ‘we’ve still got plenty of time. I’ve got something really cool to show you.’

In a star system many, many light-years away, Alan and Beth, a couple of young Zarkians (alien beings, for want of a better term), were taking their parents’ Galaxy Hopper spacecraft for a quick spin before supper. Actually, they weren’t really named Alan and Beth (we Earthlings couldn’t pronounce their names if we tried) but it does help to call them something. Nor did they ‘say’ anything: they communicated by projecting their thoughts into each other’s minds. Oh, and their ‘spacecraft’ was nothing like any spaceship you could ever imagine, but that’s not your fault.

It’s all rather complicated, but human minds are far too simple to comprehend how these beings look, talk or travel. Perhaps it’s best if you just envisage two green creatures whizzing around in a flying saucer, or your head might implode. One thing is true, however: they really were in peril of being late for supper.

Nipping between the fifth and sixth dimensions (so much quicker than crawling along through space and time), Beth popped the craft into a solar system that Alan had never visited before. The vehicle skidded between two large planets – one with attractive but otherwise unexceptional ice rings; the other with too many moons for its own good – and Beth slammed on the retro-boosters. There before them loomed a greeny-blue planet, swathed in water vapour.

‘What is this place?’ asked Alan.
 ‘It’s a funny little rock I stumbled across by accident,’ Beth replied. ‘It’s so remote and unremarkable, I’m not sure many of our kind know about it. Hold tight!’

Week 3

1. Look at the paragraph beginning ‘In a star system...’. Give the meaning of the word *spin*.

_____ 1 mark

2. Circle the correct option to complete each sentence below:

The Zarkians communicate using their voices/minds/actions.
 The greeny-blue planet was surrounded by clouds/moons/rings.

1 mark each

3. What evidence is there in the passage to suggest that Zarkians are more advanced than humans?

_____ 2 marks

4. Why does the author advise the reader to ‘envisage two green creatures whizzing around in a flying saucer’?

_____ 2 marks

5. Look at the paragraph beginning 'Nipping between...' What impression do you get of the way Beth is flying the space craft? Refer to the text when giving your answer.

2 marks

Reading – Week 4

In the Company of a Thief: Part 1

Well you're a rarity.

Not many choose to spend any time in my company. Which, as it happens, suits me just fine. Normally, I operate on my own. A loner. A free agent. And to tell the truth, that's just how I like it – no offence. After an hour or so with me, you too will probably wish you hadn't bothered. Still, now you're here, we might as well make the best of it. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

For some reason, people don't seem to like me. Or my family, come to think of it. We get called every name under the sun: filth, animals, vermin ... See what I mean? Not nice, is it? Still, sticks and stones will break my bones, as they say. The trouble is, I get the sticks and stones as well. Of course, I do understand, to a certain extent, given my line of work. Thief – it's not a pleasant word is it? But these are hard times. I just do what I have to do to survive. I don't even take what I don't need – just enough to get by; to keep me from going hungry.

Luckily, there's quite a lot you can pick up, if you know where to look. After all, this is a big city – a port as well. Huge ships sail right up the river from all around the world. Along with fine fabrics and strange, bitter leaves, they bring barrels of wine and bulging crates packed with exotic fruit, vegetables and even spices, if you like that kind of thing.

That's why the dockside is my favourite patch. There are always plenty of shadows and dark corners in which you can lurk unseen, waiting, watching. Usually, I can get all I want from the rich pickings just lying around.

Week 4

1. Find a word in the passage which can be used to refer to **creatures which are undesirable or harmful**.

_____ 1 mark

2. Look at the paragraph beginning 'For some reason ...' Explain what the thief means by ***I get the sticks and stones as well***.

_____ 1 mark

3. Explain with reference to the text why the dockside is the narrator's favourite place to visit.

_____ 1 mark

4. Do you think the character feels positive about themselves? Explain your answer with reference to the text.

_____ 2 marks

Sometimes I have to cut into a sack or work my way into crate, but, as often as not, I don't have to break in to anything.

When I was younger and had a taste for the finer things in life, I used to sneak on board the ships when they were moored on the dockside. In those days, I was much more agile, and perhaps more daring, but certainly a lot less wise. You see, I've always been a good climber, so I would scurry up the ropes that secured the boats to the quay. If I could find my way to the hold, then it would feel like I'd hit the jackpot. The trouble was, I usually discovered that the stash was jealously guarded by the ones who lived on board. I got into some terrible scraps and, once or twice, was lucky to escape with my life. So now I tend to stay land-side where there's less choice, but it's much safer.

5. In the final paragraph the thief states that 'When I was younger I had a taste for the finer things in life.' Why and how has the thief changed over time? Explain by referring to the text.

3 marks

Reading – Week 5

Where the Grass is Greener

Why were sheep so stupid? There was plenty of grass on these hills. The sturdy dry-stone walls offered a sense of security. There was simply no need to go wandering off; no need at all.

Young Billy Moss cursed his luck. It wasn't his fault he'd fallen asleep. Hadn't he been watching these blasted sheep since daybreak for over a week now? Mind you, leaving the gate open would take a lot of explaining. No, there was nothing for it; he'd just have to find the silly creature himself. So, making sure the rest of the flock was safely enclosed, he set off.

Low cloud was beginning to swirl around the blunt, rocky peaks as he ventured further down the bleak hillside towards the wooded valley. Of course, he was used to the fickle weather of the dales, but familiarity couldn't patch a ragged jacket or keep out the rain. What really sent a shiver through his scrawny body, however, was a faint wailing sound, drifting up on the swirling breeze.

'No such thing as ghosts,' Billy said out loud without fully convincing himself. Anyway, he reasoned, who heard of ghosts coming out during the hours of daylight? Probably one of those devilish weaving mills, he thought. The valleys were peppered with them, using the swift-flowing streams to drive their infernal machines. Most of the time, you could see their tall chimneys belching out thick smoke, but not now; the dense, dank mist saw to that.

The wind changed again and the wailing seemed clearer, closer. It sounded like crying – children's crying. Billy didn't like to think what happened down in the valleys. He was a farm boy, at home on the hills.

Market day was quite enough for him and he didn't wish to spend any more time in the dirty, crowded town than he had to.

Pulling his threadbare jacket closer around him, he began to search for the sheep with greater urgency. It had to be around here somewhere,

Week 5

1. Find a word in the first paragraph which means **strong**.

_____ 1 mark

2. Look at the opening two paragraphs. What evidence is there that Billy isn't a very good shepherd?

 _____ 1 mark

3. Write down two things about the hills that make them suitable for keeping sheep on.

_____ 1 mark
 _____ 1 mark

4. Look at the paragraph beginning 'No such thing ...' How does Billy feel about the weaving mills? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

 _____ 2 marks

probably tangled in a bramble hedge.

At last he was rewarded with the tell-tale sound of clumsy rustling in the undergrowth a little way off. He followed the noise through the gloom. Having rarely ventured this far down the hill, he knew that he must be almost at the edge of the woods.

There it was again – the rustling. As Billy closed in, he heard a small voice calling, ‘Help ... help me.’ At first, he struggled to see where it was coming from, but then he saw her, cowering under a bush, half buried in fallen leaves. He trotted over and knelt down beside her.

‘Who are you? What are you doing here?’ he demanded, possibly rather more bluntly than was necessary, he reflected later. He had been trying to find a lost sheep; finding a lost girl instead spelt trouble.

5. At the start of the extract, Billy ‘cursed his luck.’ Do you think that Billy’s ‘luck’ has got better or worse by the end of the text? Explain your answer as fully as you can, referring to the text when necessary to support your view.

2 marks

Reading – Week 6

Wild Cat

‘He doesn’t say much, does he?’

He was watching the news. He was getting annoyed. He was trying to listen to what the presenters were saying: something about a dangerous animal that had escaped from a private zoo.

‘He’ was Jed. But ‘He’ could have been his actual name as far as Mum’s latest boyfriend, Ashley, was concerned. That or ‘Mate’. Jed never seemed to get called anything else.

Since Dad had abandoned them, Jed had seen a succession of boyfriends come and go. Some made more of an effort to bond with him than others, but they all bolted sooner or later. From some of the angry words exchanged in the final shouting matches, Jed wondered whether he might be part of the problem, but Mum never blamed him.

Jed knew that he should be better at keeping his temper. Sometimes he saw the signs early enough to remove himself from tricky situations, as Mum had suggested. Slipping out of the back gate for a walk on the hillside was his favourite escape route. Too often, however, he felt cornered and lashed out. He knew it was wrong to scratch and hiss and spit, but for some reason, he only remembered that too late.

‘The creature is thought to be an ocelot ...’

‘Shall I phone for a pizza?’ said Ashley.

‘... rain forests of South America,’ continued the reporter over some footage of a leopard-spotted cat.

‘No offence, but you ain’t no cook,’ said Ashley to Jed’s mum. ‘Ain’t that the truth, Mate?’ he added with a sneering smile and a wink at Jed. He said nothing, but toyed with his beans on toast. Mum’s cooking was just fine by him and always would be.

‘Really?’ said Mum. ‘I’m not sure we can afford it again so soon.’

‘... people living in the Boxbury Beacons area have been advised not to approach anything resembling a large cat,’ added the reporter.

Week 6

1. Give three examples of what Jed does when he loses his temper.

i) _____

ii) _____

iii) _____

2 marks

2. **Find and copy a group of words** that suggests that the Boxbury Beacons are a popular tourist attraction.

_____ *1 mark*

3. Number the following events from 1 to 6 to show the order in which they occur in the text:

Ashley snaps at Jed for interrupting him.

Jed loses his temper and runs out onto the hillside.

Jed reflects on his anger-management difficulties.

Jed listens to a news report on the television.

Jed tries to calm himself down.

Ashley is rude about Mum’s cooking.

2 marks

‘Hey, Mum!’ cried Jed, ‘The Boxbury Beacons. That’s here ...’
‘Oi, Mate,’ snarled Ashley, ‘your mum and I are talking.’

Jed’s chair scraped across the floor as he jumped to his feet, ready to pounce, but Mum had already stepped between him and Ashley, signalling with a slight shake of her head for him to leave. With anger prickling his eyes, Jed darted out of the room. Slamming the back door behind him, he sprinted down the short garden path, through the gate and out on to the hillside.

It was a good couple of minutes before he slowed down. By this time, he was deep into the dense tangle of ferns that covered the Beacons, following one of the many narrow sheep trails that pushed through the undergrowth. Although shoulder-height to an average grown-up, the ferns were taller than him, so Jed knew he was well-hidden. Best of all, very few people ever ventured far from the paths and tracks that led hikers around these popular, picturesque hills, so he knew that he would be blissfully alone.

By the time he had reached his secret den in the small, grassy clearing, his breathing had calmed down to a normal rate and his heart had stopped thumping against his ribs. He dropped to his knees and crawled into the rough shelter he had built the previous week out of sturdy branches, interwoven with leafy twigs.

Why did Mum always attract such idiots? Was it something about her, or did all boys grow up to be selfish know-it-alls, he thought to himself as he began to practise the deep breathing that Mum had taught him to do whenever he was feeling stressed. As he listened to his breath filling his lungs then flowing out again, he relaxed so much he thought he could hear himself purring.

4. Look at the paragraph beginning ‘Jed’s chair scraped...’ Why do you think the author uses the phrase **prickling his eyes** to describe Jed’s anger?

2 marks

5. Considering the passage as a whole, what evidence is there to suggest that Jed regularly loses his temper and runs off to the hillside?

2 marks