

The Snow Spider

These questions will help you practise:

- ★ explaining the meaning of words in context
- ★ explaining how narrative content contributes to meaning
- ★ identifying and explaining how language choices enhance meaning
- ★ retrieving information
- ★ identifying key details.



Gwyn waited until his grandmother had settled herself in the armchair and sipped her tea before he knelt beside her and took out the matchbox. He wanted her undivided attention for his revelation. Even so he was unprepared for the ecstatic gasp that accompanied Nain's first glimpse of the spider, when he gently withdrew the lid. The tiny creature crawled onto his hand, glowing in the dark room and Nain's eyes sparkled like a child's. 'How did it come?' Her whisper was harsh with excitement.

'In the snow,' Gwyn replied. 'I thought it was a snow-flake. It was the brooch, I think. I gave it to the wind, like you said, and this ... came back!'

'So,' Nain murmured triumphantly, 'you are a magician then, Gwydion Gwyn, as I thought. See what you have made!'

'But did I make it, Nain? I believe it has come from somewhere else. Some far, far place ... I don't know, beyond the world, I think.'

'Then you called it, you brought it here, Gwydion Gwyn. Did you call?'

'I did but ...' Gwyn hesitated, 'I called into the snow, the names you said: Math, Lord of Gwynedd, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy. Those were the only words.'

'They were the right words, boy. You called to your ancestors. The magicians heard your voice and took the brooch to where it had to go, and

now you have the spider!' Nain took the spider from Gwyn and placed it on her arm. Then she got up and began to dance through the shadowy wilderness of her room. The tiny glowing creature moved slowly up her purple sleeve, until it came to her shoulder, and there it rested, shining like a star beneath her wild black curls.

Gwyn watched and felt that it was Nain who was the magician and he the enchanted one.

Suddenly his grandmother swooped back and, taking the spider from her hair, put it gently into his hands. 'Arianwen,' she said. 'White silver! Call her Arianwen; she must have a name!'

'And what now?' asked Gwyn. 'What becomes of Arianwen? Should I tell about her? Take her to a museum?'

'Never! Never! Never!' said Nain fiercely. 'They wouldn't understand. She has come from another world to bring you closer to the thing you want.'

'I want to see my sister,' said Gwyn. 'I want things the way they were before she went.'

Nain looked at Gwyn through half-closed eyes. 'It's just the beginning, Gwydion Gwyn, you'll see. You'll be alone, mind. You cannot tell. A magician can have his heart's desire if he truly wishes it, but he will always be alone.'

Jenny Nimmo