

# The Old Tin

Jem found the old tin. It lay half-buried in the pebbles by the shore. He picked it up. It wasn't heavy, though when he shook it he felt something shift.

The tin was round, sealed up with tape. The picture on the lid was scratched and worn. Jem wiped it with his sleeve. It might have been a compass, or the moon.

He took the tin home.

“Open it!” said his brother.

“Let me!” said his sister.

“No,” said his mother, who had to find ways to feed her children. “We shall hold a raffle!”

Everyone in the village bought a ticket for the raffle. They knew that objects salvaged from the sea were almost always worth something.

When the day of the raffle arrived, the villagers gathered on the quay. The tin was passed around for each person to examine.



Mrs May, the baker, was first. She wrinkled up her nose. "It stinks of seaweed!"

"Not seaweed," said her son, sniffing. "I smell tar – and nutmeg!"

"It's heavy," said Old Mack, a fisherman. "Coins?"

"Too light for coins," said the postman's wife, weighing the tin in her hands. "Buttons, I reckon!"

The postman's daughter gave it a shake. "More rustle than rattle. Feathers, perhaps? Or love letters?"

"Or empty," grunted the postman, though everyone knew that a tin washed up on the shore must surely contain something.

And so it went on.

Finally, it was Jem's turn. He held the tin in his hands and shut his eyes tight. He wanted it to be so many things – treasure and glory and promises and adventure. Yet, most of all he wanted to hold on to the hope that such things existed.

He was still clutching the tin when his mother drew the winning ticket.

It was his.

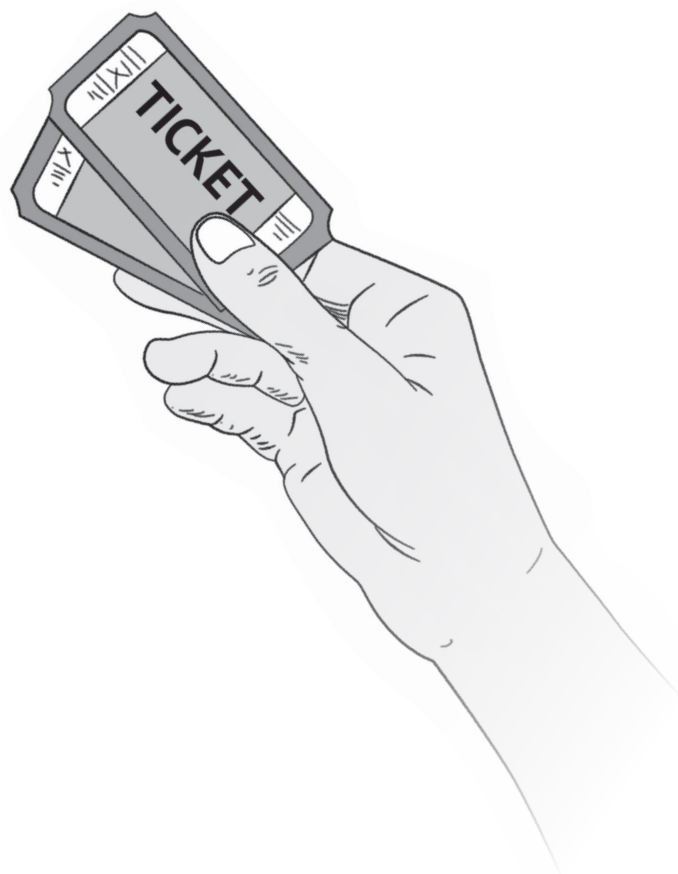
"Open it!" cried Mrs May.

"Quick!" shouted Old Mack.

But Jem didn't open it.

The villagers felt cheated for a day or two. Then they forgot about the tin. Only Jem remembered. When a month had passed he took it back to the shore and laid it carefully on the pebbles, where the tide could take it.

That night he dreamed of treasure and glory and promises and adventure.



Name: ..... Class: ..... Date: .....

**1** Where did Jem find the tin?  
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**2** Why was the picture on the lid scratched and worn?  
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**3** “No,” said his mother, who had to find ways to feed her children. “We shall hold a raffle!”  
How would holding a raffle help Jem’s mother feed her family?  
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**4** Why did Old Mack suggest that there were coins in the tin?  
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**5** Why did the postman’s wife think the tin could not have contained coins?  
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**6** Why did the postman’s daughter think that the tin contained feathers or letters?  
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**7** Who had the winning ticket?  
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**8** “The villagers felt cheated for a day or two.”  
Why do you think the villagers felt cheated?  
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**9** Why do you think Jem didn’t open the tin?  
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**10** What do you think is going to happen to the tin at the end of the story?  
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