

# The Snow Spider

*This passage is taken from the opening chapter of The Snow Spider by Jenny Nimmo. The story is set in Wales. It is Gwyn's ninth birthday and his grandmother (Nain) has come to visit.*

Gwyn's grandmother gave him five gifts for his birthday, his ninth birthday. They were very unusual gifts and if Gwyn had not been the sort of boy he was, he might have been disappointed.

"Happy Birthday!" said his grandmother, turning her basket upside down.

Gwyn stared at the objects on the kitchen floor, none of them wrapped in bright birthday paper: a piece of seaweed, a yellow scarf, a tin whistle, a twisted metal brooch, and a small, broken horse.

"Thank you, Nain!" said Gwyn, calling his grandmother the name she liked best.

"Time to find out if you are a magician, Gwydion Gwyn!" said Nain.

"A magician?" Gwyn inquired.

"Time to remember your ancestors: Math, Lord of Gwynedd, Gwydion and Gilfaethwy!"

'Who?'



“The magicians, boy! They lived here, in these mountains, maybe a thousand years ago, and they could do anything they wanted, turn men into eagles and soldiers into dust; they could make dreams come true, and so, perhaps could you!”

On special occasions Nain often said peculiar things. Gwyn could not think of a reply.

“There has been an ache in this house since your sister – went,” said Nain, “the ache of emptiness. You need help. If you have inherited the power of Gwydion you can use it to get your heart’s desire.” She turned on her heel. “I won’t stay for tea!”

“We’ve only just had breakfast, Nain!”

“Nevertheless ...” She swept away, down the passage and through the open front door, her black hair sparkling in the golden mist that hung over the garden, her dress as gaudy as the autumn flowers crowding by the gate. Then she looked back and sang out, “Give them to the wind, Gwydion Gwyn, one by one, and you’ll see!”

Gwyn took the gifts up to his bedroom and laid them on the windowsill. They looked the most improbable effects for a magician.

“What’s she on about now?” He scratched at his uncombed hair. From his tiny attic window he could see Nain’s dark head bobbing down the mountain track. “She travels too fast for a grandmother,” Gwyn muttered. “If my ancestors were magicians, does that make her a witch?”

His father’s voice roared up the stairs, “Have you done the chickens then, Gwyn? It’s Saturday. What about the gate? The sheep will be in the garden again. Was that your grandmother? Why didn’t she stay?”

Gwyn answered none of these questions. He gathered Nain’s gifts together, put them in a drawer and went downstairs.

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

**1** Name all **five** gifts Gwyn's grandmother brings him for his birthday. What is unusual about them as presents?

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**2** What is Gwyn's grandmother carrying the presents in?

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**3** How does she give the presents to him?

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**4** What name does Gwyn's grandmother like to be called?

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**5** She mentions an incident that has taken place in the family.

**a)** What do you think has happened?

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**b)** What is the phrase she uses to describe its effect on the family?

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**6** As she leaves, what does Gwyn's grandmother advise him to do with the gifts?

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**7** Where does Gwyn decide to put the gifts for the time being?

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**8** Gwyn wonders about his “ancestors”, who were magicians. What do you think an *ancestor* is?

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**9** What do we find out about Gwyn’s grandmother? Write a short character sketch of her.

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**10** What kind of story do you think this is going to be? Tick **one** and give reasons for your choice.

a realistic adventure story

a horror story

a science fiction story

a fantasy story

I think this because ...

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