

The Hodgeheg

Ma and Pa Hedgehog live with their family in the garden of a house. Ma and Pa are very anxious about the safety of their children when they cross the road to get to the park because they've just heard that Ma's Auntie Betty has been killed crossing the road.



They were sitting in a flower-bed at their home, the garden of Number 5A of a row of semi-detached houses in a suburban street. On the other side of the road was a park, very popular with the local hedgehogs on account of the good hunting it offered. As well as worms and slugs and snails, which they could find in their own gardens, there were special attractions in the park. Mice lived under the bandstand, feasting on the crumbs dropped from listeners' sandwiches; frogs dwelt in the lily pond, and in the ornamental gardens grass-snakes slithered through the shrubbery. All these creatures were regarded as great delicacies by the hedgehogs, and they could never resist the occasional night's sport in the park. But to reach it they had to cross the busy road.

“Poor old Auntie Betty,” said Ma again. “It’s a hard life and that’s flat.”

“It’s a hard death,” said Pa sourly. “And that’s flat too – talk about squashed, the poor old girl was ...”

“Sssssshhhhh!” said Ma at the sound of approaching footsteps. “Not in front of the children,” as up trotted four small figures, exact miniatures of their parents except that their spines were still greyish instead of brown. Three of them were little sows, named by Ma, who was fond of flowers, Peony, Pansy and Petunia. Pa had agreed, reluctantly, to these names, but had insisted upon his own choice for the fourth, a little boar. Boys, he said, needed noble-sounding names, and the fourth youngster was therefore called Victor Maximilian St George (Max for short).

Almost from the moment his eyes had opened, while his prickles were still soft and rubbery, Max had shown promise of being a bright boy; and by now his eyes, his ears and his wits were all as sharp as his spines.

“What are you talking about, Ma?” he said.

“Nothing,” said Ma hastily.

“You wouldn’t be talking about nothing,” said Max, “or there wouldn’t be any point in talking.”

“Don’t be cheeky,” said Pa, “and mind your own business.”

“Well, I suppose it’s their business really, Pa, isn’t it?” said Ma. “Or soon will be. They’re bound to go exploring outside our garden before long and we must warn them.”

“You’re right,” said Pa. “Now then, you kids, just listen to me,” and he proceeded to give his children a long lecture about the problems of road safety for hedgehogs.

Max listened carefully. Then he said, “Do humans cross the road?”

“I suppose so,” said Pa.

“But they don’t get killed?”

“Don’t think so,” said Pa. “Never seen one lying in the road. Which I would have if they did.”

“Well then,” said Max, “how do they get across safely?”

“You tell me, son. You tell me,” said Pa.

“I will,” said Max. “I will.”

Name: Class: Date:

1 Where is the hedgehogs' home?

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2 Why do the hedgehogs want to go to the park?

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3 Can the hedgehogs find these creatures in the park? Put a tick in the correct column.

	Yes	No
worms		
mice		
rabbits		
frogs		

4 What do the hedgehogs have to cross to get to the park?

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5 The creatures in the park are described as “*great delicacies*”. What do you think this means? Tick **one**.

- They are very big. They are very fragile.
 They are very tasty. There are a lot of them.

6 Why do you think Ma told Pa not to talk in front of the children?

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7 Find and copy one word that shows that Pa doesn't really like the girls' names.

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8 “his eyes, his ears and his wits were all as sharp as his spines.” What does this tell us about Max?

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9 Find and copy a phrase that shows Pa's advice about road safety might not have been very interesting.

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10 What is the puzzle that Max poses at the end of the question?

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