

Girl with a Worksheet in a Castle

Poetry

Content domain focus:

2a give/explain the meaning of words in context

2b retrieve and record information/identify key details from fiction and non-fiction

2c summarise main ideas from more than one paragraph

2d make inferences from the text/explain and justify inferences with evidence from the text

Text summary

'Girl with a Worksheet in a Castle' is one of a number of poems by Fred Sedgwick to feature childhood and education. As a teacher (and head teacher) for many years, Sedgwick had clear views on the importance of experience and the encouragement of children's imaginations. This poem neatly contrasts the teacher's factual approach to learning and the child's intense experience of history, once she escapes the world of the worksheet.

Unit summary

The unit focuses on the contrast between the planned and unplanned educational experience in the poem. The children are asked to explain the meaning of words in context, to infer the significance of the girl's experience in the ruins of the castle kitchen, and to choose an appropriate summary of the meaning of the poem.



Teaching prompts

- Ask the children to tell you about their experiences of educational visits – either with the school or with family. What do they remember most?
- Ask if they have ever been in a situation where they have been visiting an old building and felt the atmosphere of the past.

Revisiting the text

Ask the children to:

- work in pairs, to practise reading the poem aloud to each other
- annotate a copy of the poem with marginal notes to guide the reader, e.g. how to speak the lines, what to emphasise, where to pause. Offer yourself as the performer of the poem and ask the children for advice as to how you should read it. Mark up an enlarged copy with their ideas, quizzing them as to why they have given particular bits of advice.
- listen as you read the poem aloud, making use of their ideas, but also using some of your own. Ask them for their reaction. Did you read it well/as they had imagined it? Where did your reading differ from theirs?

Return to the questions in the test. Discuss the answers, paying particular attention to questions 5–8. Has their discussion and preparation for reading helped them to understand the poem?



Answers

1. Eleanor Smith [2b]
2. He is Eleanor's teacher. [2b]
3. They're on a school trip/study visit. [2d]
4. She has to complete a worksheet and do some sketches. [2b]
5. She finds a kitchen/larder. [2b]
6. She imagines scenes from the past that could have happened in the castle kitchen. [2d]
7. unsafe [2a]
8. The smell is intense/very strong. (An answer of 'a bad smell' misses the point.) [2a]
9. Accept any relevant alternative, e.g. 'I was history and history was me' or 'School Trip', together with an appropriate explanation of the choice. [2c]
10. The preferred option is: Education visits should help develop the imagination. [2c]



Assessment

The opening four questions are intended to tune children in to the poem. Questions 5–8 deal with the essence of the poem – the girl's experience away from the school party, and the way the poet describes this. Questions 9 and 10 assess whether the children are able to sum up the main point of the poem.

To be secure, the children should be able to go beyond literal comprehension and provide convincing answers to questions 5 and 8 in particular.

Next steps

The regular reading of poems aloud to the children will help to make poetry familiar and approachable. Writers like Fred Sedgwick are particularly useful as they are able to speak directly to children without condescension.

Preparing performance readings is a useful way of getting the children to practise fluency and expression, and to think about meaning. It also means that, when they hear the poem read aloud, the children have already thought through their own interpretation, so they are sensitised to the reading.