**Week 1 Comprehension** *Mr Gum and the Biscuit Billionaire (Fiction)* by Andy Stanton

*Mr Gum and the Biscuit Billionaire* is the sequel to *You're a Bad Man, Mr Gum!*, which was Andy Stanton’s first book. The *Mr Gum* series has now been published in over 30 countries and has won several awards, including the Roald Dahl Funny Prize. The books are set in a weird and wonderful imaginary world, where animals can talk and some people are only a few centimetres tall. This extract introduces pupils to the world and to the book’s heroine, Polly.

their books and work independently, while you go around to the other pupils.

### Section 1:
1a) What is the fox whistling?
1b) Why does Polly miss riding on Jake’s back?
1c) What book is Polly reading?
1d) Why does Polly think it’s ‘unfair’?
1e) Look at the summary at the top of the page. Who is the author of the story?

### Section 2:
2a) What does ‘vixen’ mean? You can use a dictionary.
2b) Explain what the phrase ‘scabbing up her knees’ (line 8) means.
2c) What is unusual about the animals’ behaviour in the first paragraph?
2d) Give one reason why Polly is feeling bored.
2e) What do you think happens next in the story and why?

### Section 3:
3a) What do you think the words ‘escapades’ means in line 14? Choose one. You can use a dictionary. 1) magic tricks 2) adventures 3) jokes 4) games
3b) Why do you think the author repeats the word ‘sigh’ on line 21?
3c) Polly liked to have fun. Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why?
3d) Find and copy an example of a simile.
3e) Read what Polly says on lines 15-16. What do you notice about the way some of the words are written? Why do you think the author has done that?
3f) Why does Polly think it’s ‘unfair’?
3g) Do you think you’d like to be friends with Polly? Explain your answer.
3h) Would you like to read the rest of this book? Explain your answer.
**Extension activities:**

- Ask pupils to continue the story by writing about something exciting that happens to Polly.
- Stanton uses unusual similes in his writing. Introduce children to similes and explain why writers use them. Discuss the similes in the extract, e.g. 'like a huge glossy panther made of time' and 'the sunlight went splashing off her pretty teeth like diamonds in search of adventure' and the effect that they have on the reader. Get pupils to write their own similes to describe one of their friends.

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**Answers**

**Section 1:**

1a) Greensleeves

1b) She pretends to be a horse or spaceship.

1c) ‘Cobbler Wins The Prizes’

1d) She has no adventures and there’s no Jake.

1e) Andy Stanton

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**Section 2:**

2a) a female fox

2b) E.g. Cutting her knees

2c) E.g. The animals are not behaving normally. For example, the fox is acting like a human and the rabbits are making bird noises.

2d) E.g. Because nothing exciting happens in the town. OR E.g. Because big Jake hasn’t been around.

2e) E.g. It says that she begins to drift away, so she may dream of an adventure.

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**Section 3:**

3a) adventures

3b) E.g. To show that Polly is feeling bored.

3c) E.g. Agree, as she was in search of an adventure and it says that she’s a good friend.

3d) Choose from: ‘the day stretched out long and lazy like a huge glossy panther’ & ‘the sunlight went splashing off her pretty teeth like diamonds in search of an adventure’

3e) E.g. Some words like ‘round’ and ‘an’ are missing letters. The author did this to show that Polly has an accent, which means that she doesn’t always pronounce the start and end of her words.

3f) She has no adventures and there’s no Jake.

3g) E.g. Yes, because she’s ‘brave’, ‘honest’ and ‘true’. She also likes having adventures, so I think she would be fun to play with.

3h) Any appropriate answer. E.g. Yes, because it seems like Polly is about to have an adventure. She seems like a fun character and I want to know what happens to her.
It all started late one afternoon in the peaceful little town of Lamonic Bibber. Summer was almost at an end and the day stretched out long and lazy like a huge glossy panther made of time. The birds chirped in the trees, the rabbits chirped in their burrows, and a fox walked along the railway tracks whistling ‘Greensleeves’ and thinking fondly of a vixen he had once loved.

Up on Boaster’s Hill a little girl sat reading a book called ‘Cobbler Wins The Prizes’. Now this little girl’s name was Polly and she was the sort of girl you could be friends with. She was brilliant at running and jumping and scabbing up her knees and she didn’t have no time for nonsense, OK? She was brave and honest and true and when she laughed the sunlight went splashing off her pretty teeth like diamonds in search of adventure.

But where were the laughter and diamondy teeth now? Nowhere, because Polly was bored.

‘Cobbler Wins The Prizes’ is full of escapades but that’s just a book,’ she complained to herself. ‘Nothin’ exciting never happens ’round here. An’ that whopper dog Jake never even comes ’round to play no more!’

For alas, it was true. Polly hadn’t seen big Jake all summer long. Oh, how she missed riding on his huge furry back and pretending he was a horse or a spaceship!

‘Jakey!’ she called hopefully, in case he just happened to be nearby, playing cards with a dormouse or something — but there was no answering woof to be heard.

‘Sigh,’ sighed Polly with a sigh. ‘First no adventures an’ now no Jakey. It’s well unfair.’

And with that she lay back in the long grass. The hot sun beat down and soon she was drifting, drifting away...
Week 2 Comprehension *Sky Island* (Fiction) by L. Frank Baum

L. Frank Baum is best known as the author of the *Oz* books, the popular children's series which inspired the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. His unmistakable creativity and sense of adventure are evident in his children's novel *Sky Island*, which was published in 1912. The novel centres on three friends who are carried away by a flying umbrella to a magical island in the sky.

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**Section 1:**
1a) Look at the summary. What type of novel is *Sky Island*?
1b) Look at the first paragraph. What can they see when they look down?
1c) Who stares at Trot, open-mouthed?
1d) Why do they think they are not stopping?
1e) ‘...he repeated clearly’. What does repeated mean? You can use a dictionary.

**Section 2:**
2a) ‘The umbrella never hesitated a moment’. What does hesitated mean? You can use a dictionary.
2b) Find and copy a phrase from lines 22-23, which shows that Cap’ n Bill fell down hard.
2c) Where does the umbrella seem to be going when is sweeps steadily along?
2d) Why doesn’t the umbrella stop where the friends want it to?
2e) Why did their eyes fill up with water?

**Section 3:**
3a) What’s unusual about the clouds described in lines 18 and 19?
3b) ‘...for a moment they were all tangled up’. What does ‘tangled’ mean? You can use a dictionary.
3c) Why do you think the author wrote ‘P’raps’ instead of ‘Perhaps’ on line 10?
3d) What do you think the word ‘anxiously’ (line 20) means? You can use a dictionary.
3e) Why do you think Trot feels anxious?
3f) Why do they think they are not stopping?
3g) Explain why the ‘great yell of anger’ (line 24) is described as coming from ‘somewhere’ (line 23).
3h) Would you like to fly using the Magic Umbrella? Explain your answer fully.
Extension activities:

- Ask pupils to write the next paragraph of the story. It should include a description of the person who appears at the end of the extract. Pupils should look for clues in the extract to help them, e.g. “yell of anger” (line 24) and “excited voice” (line 26).
- As a class, discuss how Trot might be feeling at different parts in the extract. Then ask pupils to create a word bank for her character. The words should describe how she’s feeling (e.g. excited, scared, nervous, regretful) and her personality (e.g. brave, calm, adventurous, fun).

Answers

Section 1:

1a) fantasy
1b) Forests and meadows
1c) Button-Bright
1d) They didn’t say where they wanted to go correctly.
1e) E.g. doing it again and again

Section 2:

2a) E.g. pause; stop; remain
2b) Cap’n Bill thudded flat upon the ground, landing with such a force that his teeth clicked together.
2c) Farther and father out to sea
2d) E.g. Because they asked for ‘Sky Island’ instead of using the real name of the island they wanted to go to.
2e) E.g. Because of the rush of air

Section 3:

3a) E.g. They’re shaped liked objects such as trees, palaces and ships.
3b) E.g. twisted together
3c) E.g. To help you imagine how Trot is speaking and what her accent is like.
3d) E.g. nervously; worriedly; fearfully; uneasily
3e) E.g. Because she doesn’t know where they’re going to land. She might also be worried about getting hurt when they land because they’re going down very fast.
3f) They didn’t say where they wanted to go correctly.
3g) E.g. Because there is so much confusion when the umbrella suddenly lands that it’s impossible to tell where everyone has landed and who is yelling.
3h) Any appropriate answer. E.g. Yes, because it would be exciting. The umbrella goes quickly and you’d get to fly very high in the clouds. OR E.g. No, because it could be dangerous. The umbrella doesn’t sound very easy to control and I think you could get hurt easily.
Sky Island

Sky Island is a fantasy novel written by L. Frank Baum. It follows the adventures of two children, Trot and Button-Bright, and their friend Cap’n Bill. In this extract, the three friends use Button-Bright’s flying umbrella to set out for a picnic together on a small island.

Larger and larger grew the island. They had not journeyed ten minutes before they came directly over it, and looking down they could see the forests and meadows far below them. But the umbrella kept up its rapid flight.

“What’s wrong, Button-Bright?” exclaimed Trot. “Why aren’t we stopping?”

Button-Bright stared at her, open mouthed. He seemed astonished, too.

“Perhaps I didn’t say it right,” he replied after a moment’s thought. Then, looking up at the umbrella, he repeated clearly, “I said I wanted to go to Sky Island! Sky Island, don’t you understand?”

The umbrella swept steadily along, getting farther and farther out to sea.

“P’raps,” said Trot, “P’raps ‘Sky Island’ isn’t the name of that island at all.”

“Why, we know very well it ain’t the name of it,” yelled Cap’n Bill from below. “We jus’ called it that ‘cause its right name is too hard to say.”

“That’s the whole trouble, then,” returned Button-Bright. “Somewhere in the world there’s a real Sky Island, and the Magic Umbrella’s taking us there instead.”

It grew suddenly dark, for they were rushing through a thick cloud that rolled around them. The umbrella never hesitated a moment. It made a path through the length of the heavy, black cloud and carried its passengers into a misty bank of white.

Here, the clouds formed strange shapes. Some were like huge ships, some like forest trees, and others piled themselves into towering castles and wonderful palaces.

Trot turned towards the others. “Seems to me we’re goin’ down,” she called anxiously.

They were certainly dropping very quickly, and the rush of air made their eyes fill with water so that they could not see much below them. Suddenly, Cap’n Bill thudded flat upon the ground, landing with such a force that his teeth clicked together. Somewhere there was a great yell of anger. Trot and Button-Bright fell straight on top of him, so that for a moment they were all tangled up.

“Get off from me! Get off from my feet, I say!” cried an excited voice. “What in the Sky do you mean by sitting on my feet? Get off! Get off at once!”

An adapted extract from Sky Island by L. Frank Baum.