

By Roald DAHL

1. Read the beginning of this short story by Roald Dahl, down to "from neglect" (l.47). Read the whole passage even if there are words or sentences you do not understand. Then answer the following questions.

A. What do we learn at the beginning of the story ?

It is about:

1. a young man who is looking for a pub in London.
2. a young man who is looking for a place to stay in Bath.
3. a young man who is cold and tired because of a long train journey.

Billy has come there:

1. to make new friends.
2. to take on a new job.
3. to find lodgings.

The houses along the street:

1. are in good condition.
2. are no longer lived in.
3. are in need of repair.

B. List all the information you are given about Billy:

- Name: _____
- Age: _____
- Job: _____
- Place of work: before: _____ now: _____
- Any further information ? _____

C. Match the following expressions and what they refer to:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| a. The Bell and Dragon (l.12) | (A) the principal office of a business. |
| b. The Head Office (l.20) | (B) the director of a subdivision of the same business. |
| c. The Branch Manager (l.23-24) | (C) a pub. |

D. Can you infer the meaning and word-class (e.g. adjective, verb, preposition ...?) of the following words and expressions ? What elements in the context helped you find out ?

WORDS/EXPRESSIONS	WORD-CLASS	MEANING
settled (l.25)		
briskly (l.29)		
big shots (l.33)		
swanky (l.42)		

2. Now continue reading in the same way, down to "reaching for the bell" (l.105). Then answer the following questions.

A. Find the main information you learn in this passage.

The bed and breakfast place:

1. looks lovely and comfortable.
2. has too much furniture and too many animals.
3. does not appeal to Billy.

Billy decides:

1. that a pub is better than a B&B (= Bed & Breakfast)
2. that this B&B is better.
3. that he must see The Bell and Dragon before deciding.

Billy reaches for the bell of the B&B because:

1. he suddenly understands he will be better there.
2. he likes the letters of the words B&B.
3. he feels obliged to go there without knowing why.

B. Billy mentally compares what he knows of B&Bs and pubs. Underline:

- three of the advantages of pubs for him;
- three of the advantages of B&Bs for him.

Now look again at the paragraph in which you find this comparison and try to infer the overall meaning of the following words. What elements helped you decide ?

- congenial (l.76): _____
- darts (l.77): _____
- cabbage (l.84): _____
- kippers(l.85): _____

C. List all the elements which:

MAKE THE B&B BILLY SEES THROUGH THE WINDOW A PLEASANT PLACE.	MAKE THE B&B SEEM STRANGE AT THE END OF THE PASSAGE.
-plant:	-synonyms of "strange":
-animals:	-strange comparison:
-furniture:	-verbs showing Billy cannot control his actions:
-adjectives with pleasant connotations:	

Can you imagine how the story will develop from now on ? Suggest different possibilities.

3. Read the text down to "This is a bit of all right." (l.250) Then answer the following questions.

A. Billy has now entered the B&B. What rooms and places does he find himself in, chronologically ?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

B. List all the elements that:

ARE STRANGE OR UNUSUAL ABOUT THE B&B.	SHOW THAT THE LANDLADY IS WELCOMING.
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-
-	-

C. Using the context, can you infer the meaning of the following words and expressions ?

- dotty (l.166): _____
- swamped with applicants (l.169): _____
- off her rocker (l.235): _____

4. Read the end of the story, then answer the following questions.

A. The guest-book

- How many names are mentioned in it ? _____
- What are they ? _____
- _____
- What does Billy associate them with ? _____
- How long ago did they come to the B&B ? _____
- _____
- What words does the landlady use to speak of them ? _____
- _____

B. Now that you have read the story, can you guess what happened to the other two guests and what is going to happen to Billy ?

Now look at the "disturbing" details below and explain in what way they announce and explain what will take place (even though Billy is not yet aware that something is wrong).

DISTURBING ELEMENTS	HOW YOU CAN EXPLAIN THEM
The landlady's smell.	
C. Mulholland and G. Temple are still on the third floor.	
The landlady has seen their naked bodies.	
She stuffed the parrot and the dog.	
The tea tastes of bitter almonds.	
The landlady wants to remember Billy's name later on.	

5. Imagine the story has one more page. Write it.

6. A closer look at language

IN THE STORY

**Here are some sentences from the short story.
Justify the use of the tenses in them.**

- a. He had never been to Bath before. (l.18-19)
- b. "I'm almost positive I've heard those names before somewhere." (l.282-283)
- c. There is nothing more tantalising than a thing like this which lingers just outside the borders of one's memory. He hated to give up. (l.336-339)
- d. He crossed the room slowly, and sat down on the edge of the sofa. (l.358-359)
- e. "He was actually twenty-eight. And yet I never would have guessed it if he hadn't told me ..." (l.403-405)
- f. "Excuse my asking, but haven't there been any other guests here except them in the last two or three years ?" (l.459-461)

FURTHER PRACTICE

Complete the following sentences with the verbs given between parentheses, using the right tense and verb form (present / past / present perfect / past perfect / conditional).

- a. "I _____ such beautifully preserved animals," he said. (see + never)
- b. Billy _____ the station and _____ looking for a pub. (leave / start)
- c. "I _____ if I hadn't seen the sign," he said. (stop + not)
- d. Billy _____ in a pub before and _____ it. (stay + once / like)
- e. "I _____ from London," Billy explained to the landlady. (arrive + just)
- f. It _____ well-known that landladies _____ rarely generous, and Billy therefore _____ staying in a pub. (he / prefer)
- g. Billy thought that if he stayed in the B&B, it _____ more comfortable and cheaper. (be)
- h. All this time, the dog _____ as quiet and motionless as the parrot. (be)