

"The Psammead"

Work from the book "Five Children and It" by E. Nesbit.

Over the next couple of weeks we will look at a mini topic linked to our wishing tale text and based on a fantasy creature who gives wishes to children. The story is about some children who are playing in the countryside of Kent, having moved there from London. They are exploring a gravel pit, imagining it is the seaside, and the hole they begin to dig is getting bigger and bigger!

The short extract below comes from chapter one. You will find a copy of the entire book in this weeks resources to help you in your reading task, and you can listen to it by clicking on this youtube link.

(The start and end times for the extract are here: 10:12-10:48)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhUjNs32BWM>

'Suppose the bottom of the hole gave way suddenly,' she said, 'and you tumbled out among the little Australians, all the sand would get in their eyes.'

'Yes,' said Robert; 'and they would hate us, and throw stones at us, and not let us see the kangaroos or opossums or blue-gums or Emu Brand birds or anything.'

Cyril and Anthea knew that Australia was not quite so near as all that, but they agreed to stop using the spades and go on with

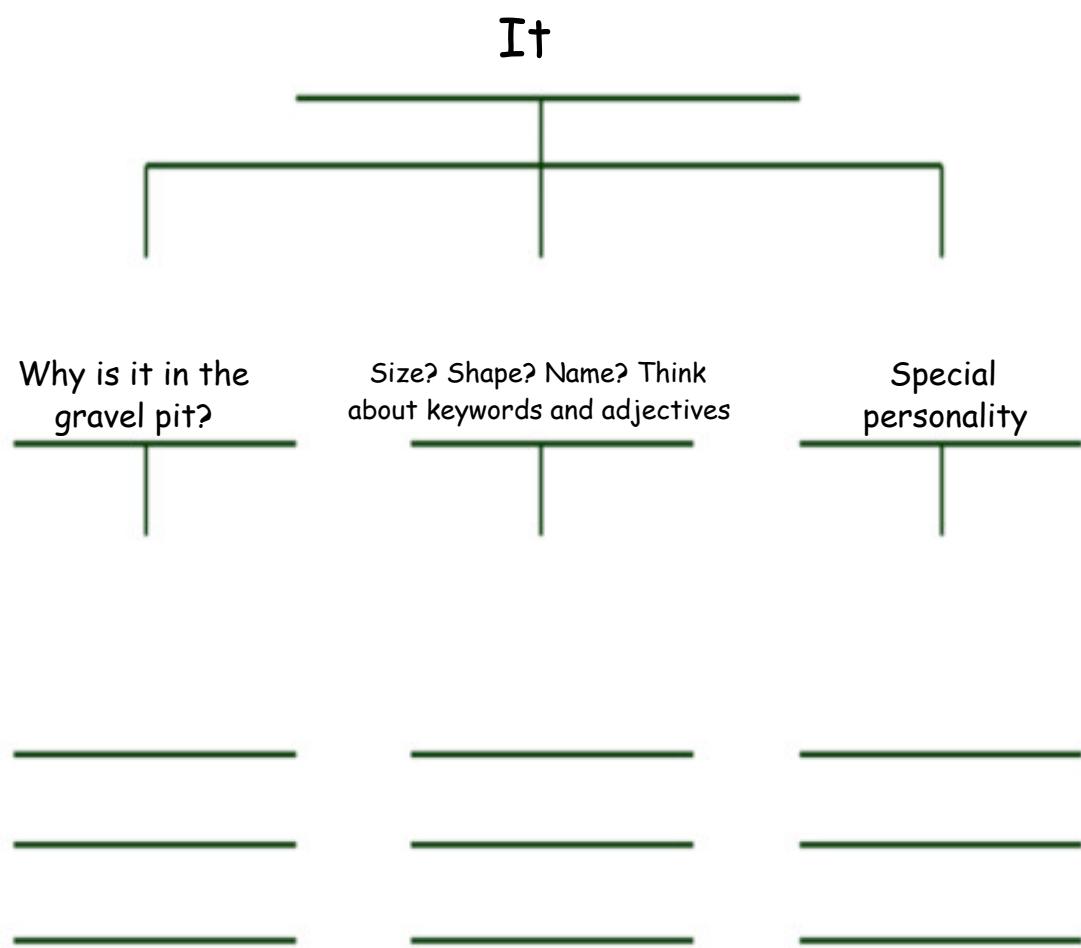
their hands. This was quite easy, because the sand at the bottom of the hole was very soft and fine and dry, like sea-sand. And there were little shells in it.

Task 1

What do you think the children will find?

What might the "It" be?

TREE MAP



How does this illustration below compare to your imagination? Think back to your learning of the Iron Man and how it was described. What kind of personality do you think "It" will have? You will write about this later.



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Read the next extract from the story of "Five Children and It". It is revealed what lies beneath the sand. You will find a copy of the entire book in this weeks resources and you can listen to it by clicking on this youtube link.

(The start and end times for the extract are here: 11:30-15:41)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhUjNs32BWM>

Anthea went on digging. She always liked to finish a thing when she had once begun it. She felt it would be a disgrace to leave that hole without getting through to Australia.

The cave was disappointing, because there were no shells, and the wrecked ship's anchor turned out to be only the broken end of a pickaxe handle, and the cave party were just making up their minds that the sand makes you thirstier when it is not by the seaside, and someone had suggested going home for lemonade, when Anthea suddenly screamed: 'Cyril! Come here! Oh, come quick! It's alive! It'll get away! Quick!'

They all hurried back.

'It's a rat, I shouldn't wonder,' said Robert. 'Father says they infest old places – and this must be pretty old if the sea was here thousands of years ago.'

'Perhaps it is a snake,' said Jane, shuddering.

'Let's look,' said Cyril, jumping into the hole. 'I'm not afraid of snakes. I like them. If it is a snake I'll tame it, and it will follow me everywhere, and I'll let it sleep round my neck at night.'

'No, you won't,' said Robert firmly. He shared Cyril's bedroom. 'But you may if it's a rat.'

'Oh, don't be silly!' said Anthea; 'it's not a rat, it's *much* bigger. And it's not a snake. It's got feet; I saw them; and fur! No – not the spade. You'll hurt it! Dig with your hands.'

'And let *it* hurt *me* instead! That's so likely, isn't it?' said Cyril, seizing a spade.

'Oh, don't!' said Anthea. 'Squirrel, *don't*. I – it sounds silly, but it said something. It really and truly did.'

'What?'

'It said, "You let me alone."'

But Cyril merely observed that his sister must have gone off her nut, and he and Robert dug with spades while Anthea sat on the edge of the hole, jumping up and down with hotness and anxiety. They dug carefully, and presently everyone could see that there really was something moving in the bottom of the Australian hole.

Then Anthea cried out, '*I'm* not afraid. Let me dig,' and fell on her knees and began to scratch like a dog does when he has suddenly remembered where it was that he buried his bone.

'Oh, I felt fur,' she cried, half laughing and half crying. 'I did indeed! I did!' when suddenly a dry husky voice in the sand made them all jump back, and their hearts jumped nearly as fast as they did.

'Let me alone,' it said. And now everyone heard the voice and looked at the others to see if they had too.

'But we want to see you,' said Robert bravely.

'I wish you'd come out,' said Anthea, also taking courage.

'Oh, well – if that's your wish,' the voice said, and the sand stirred and spun and scattered, and something brown and furry and fat came rolling out into the hole and the sand fell off it, and it sat there yawning and rubbing the ends of its eyes with its hands.

'I believe I must have dropped asleep,' it said, stretching itself.

The children stood round the hole in a ring, looking at the creature they had found. It was worth looking at. Its eyes were on long horns like a snail's eyes, and it could move them in and out like telescopes; it had ears like a bat's ears, and its tubby body was shaped like a spider's and covered with thick soft fur; its legs and arms were furry too, and it had hands and feet like a monkey's.



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‘What on earth is it?’ Jane said. ‘Shall we take it home?’

The thing turned its long eyes to look at her, and said: ‘Does she always talk nonsense, or is it only the rubbish on her head that makes her silly?’

It looked scornfully at Jane’s hat as it spoke.

‘She doesn’t mean to be silly,’ Anthea said gently; ‘we none of us do, whatever you may think! Don’t be frightened; we don’t want to hurt you, you know.’

‘Hurt *me!*’ it said. ‘*Me* frightened? Upon my word! Why, you talk as if I were nobody in particular.’ All its fur stood out like a cat’s when it is going to fight.

Task 2

- * Chat or make notes about How does E. Nesbit make this excerpt so dramatic? Consider about 4 thoughts, as this will help to ensure you make YOUR writing dramatic too!
- * Following on from this excerpt, Predict the next paragraph and write your own version. How will you develop the creature's personality as well as really writing a detailed character description.
- * Remember to include lots of adjectives and description when writing about it's personality and appearance. You can use the character description ideas from this weeks resources. One is colour coded so that you can easily build a sentence. Choose a descriptive adverb, followed by an adjective or two and then the noun (body part).
- * Once finished read and/or listen to the next part of the story using the youtube audio book, where you will learn more about the Psammead. (Time on the audio link: 15:41 - 21:13)

'Well,' said Anthea, still kindly, 'perhaps if we knew who you are in particular we could think of something to say that wouldn't make you cross. Everything we've said so far seems to have. Who are you? And don't get angry! Because really we don't know.'

'You don't know?' it said. 'Well, I knew the world had changed – but – well, really – do you mean to tell me seriously you don't know a Psammead when you see one?'

'A Sammyadd? That's Greek to me.'

'So it is to everyone,' said the creature sharply. 'Well, in plain English, then, a *sand-fairy*. Don't you know a sand-fairy when you see one?'

It looked so grieved and hurt that Jane hastened to say, ‘Of course I see you are, now. It’s quite plain now one comes to look at you.’

‘You came to look at me, several sentences ago,’ it said crossly, beginning to curl up again in the sand.

‘Oh – don’t go away again! Do talk some more,’ Robert cried. ‘I didn’t know you were a sand-fairy, but I knew directly I saw you that you were much the wonderfulest thing I’d ever seen.’

The sand-fairy seemed a shade less disagreeable after this.

‘It isn’t talking I mind,’ it said, ‘as long as you’re reasonably civil. But I’m not going to make polite conversation for you. If you talk nicely to me, perhaps I’ll answer you, and perhaps I won’t. Now say something.’

Of course no one could think of anything to say, but at last Robert thought of – ‘How long have you lived here?’ and he said it at once.

‘Oh, ages – several thousand years,’ replied the Psammead. ‘Tell us all about it. Do.’

“It’s all in books.”

" *You aren't!*" Jane said. "Oh, tell us everything you can about yourself! We don't know anything about you, and you *are* so nice."

The Sand-fairy smoothed his long rat-like whiskers and smiled between them.

"Do please tell!" said the children all together.

It is wonderful how quickly you get used to things, even the most astonishing. Five minutes before, the children had had no more idea than you had that there was such a thing as a Sand-fairy in the world, and now they were talking to it as though they had known it all their lives.

It drew its eyes in and said—

"How very sunny it is—quite like old times! Where do you get your Megatheriums from now?"

"What?" said the children all at once. It is very difficult always to remember that "what" is not polite, especially in moments of surprise or agitation.

"Are Pterodactyls plentiful now?" the Sand-fairy went on. The children were unable to reply.

"What do you have for breakfast?" the Fairy said impatiently, "and who gives it to you?"

"Eggs and bacon, and bread and milk, and porridge and things.

Mother gives it to us. What are Mega-what's-its-names and Ptero-what-do-you-call-thems? And does anyone have them for breakfast?"

'Why, almost everyone had pterodactyl for breakfast in my time! pterodactyls were something like crocodiles and something like birds – I believe they were very good grilled. You see it was like this: of course there were heaps of sand-fairies then, and in the morning early you went out and hunted for them, and when you'd found one it gave you your wish. People used to send their little boys down to the seashore early in the morning before breakfast to get the day's wishes, and very often the eldest boy in the family would be told to wish for a megatherium, ready jointed for cooking. It was as big as an elephant, you see, so there was a good deal of meat on it. And if they wanted fish, the ichthyosaurus was asked for – he was twenty to forty feet long, so there was plenty of him. And for poultry there was the plesiosaurus; there were nice pickings on that too. Then the other children could wish for other things. But when people had dinner-parties it was nearly always megatheriums; and ichthyosaurus, because his fins were a great delicacy and his tail made soup.

"There must have been heaps and heaps of cold meat left over," said Anthea, who meant to be a good housekeeper some day.

"Oh no," said the Psammead, "that would never have done. Why, of course at sunset what was left over turned into stone. You find the stone bones of the Megatherium and things all over the place even now, they tell me."

"Who tell you?" asked Cyril; but the Sand-fairy frowned and began to dig very fast with its furry hands.

"Oh, don't go!" they all cried; "tell us more about when it was Megatheriums for breakfast! Was the world like this then?"

It stopped digging.

"Not a bit," it said;

'it was nearly all sand where I lived, and coal grew on trees, and the periwinkles were as big as tea-trays — you find them now; they're turned into stone. We sand-fairies used to live on the seashore, and the children used to come with their little flint-spades and flint-pails and make castles for us to live in. That's thousands of years ago, but I hear that children still build castles on the sand. It's difficult to break yourself of a habit.'

'But why did you stop living in the castles?' asked Robert.

'It's a sad story,' said the Psammead gloomily. 'It was because they *would* build moats to the castles, and the nasty wet bubbling sea used to come in, and of course as soon as a sand-fairy got wet it caught cold, and generally died. And so there got to be fewer and fewer, and, whenever you found a fairy and had a wish, you used to wish for a megatherium, and eat twice as much as you wanted, because it might be weeks before you got another wish.'