

This pattern continued. At first, people came just to get a glimpse of the "Bijou Ghost." But after they came once, they didn't even care about the ghost anymore. They came for the theater. Before long, the Bijou was once again the most successful theater in the county. Simply put, it was the best place to watch a movie anywhere!

"I couldn't agree more!" Jasper cried.

To this day, Jasper still stays up there, haunting the Bijou Theater. He hardly ever moans anymore or flies across the ceiling when people are around. But he does like to munch popcorn during the movie. So, if you're sitting in the Bijou, you might hear a quiet crunching and feel a few kernels spilling down from above.

That's Jasper, the ghost, up in the rafters.

THE END

5. Why did so many people come to the Bijou Theater?

- A. To see a movie
- B. Because the Multi-Plex was closed
- C. To see the ghost
- D. Because it was less expensive

6. What did many people notice when they came to the Bijou?

- A. That they really liked Jasper
- B. That they really liked the theater
- C. That they really liked the candy
- D. That the theater was dirty

7. How did Jasper help save the Bijou?

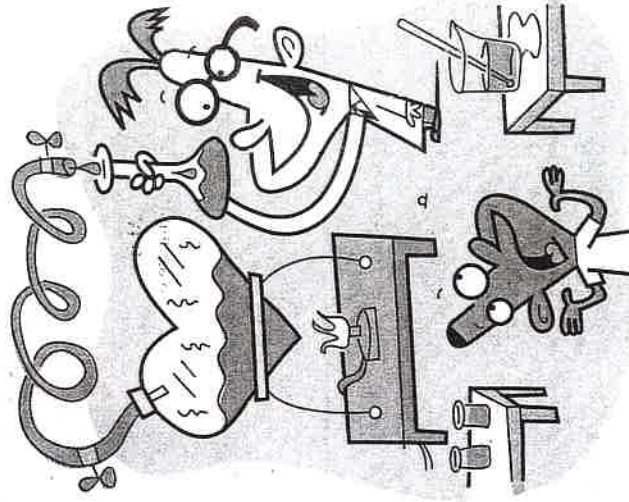
- A. He got the other ghosts to stop haunting it.
- B. He helped the owners fix it up.
- C. He held a fundraiser.
- D. He attracted customers to the theater.

8. You're an author and you're writing a guidebook to haunted places in the United States. Write a one-paragraph entry for the Bijou Theater, describing the ghostly goings-on that have been reported there.

# Love Potion Commotion

## A Cause and Effect Spooky Story

All things happen for a reason—even spooky scary things. The **effect** is the thing that happens. The **cause** is the reason for the effect. See how it works in this story.



**T**he moral of this story is always to finish your homework before you go out to have fun. So if you're doing homework right now, for goodness' sake, finish it before you start this story!

What happened was this: A young man named Greg was working on his science-fair project. Now, this wasn't just any old science project. That would be too dull for Greg. He was the kind of person who always wanted to do something totally different.

"Actually, I'm making a love potion," Greg explained to his best friend Jeff.

"Why a love potion?" Jeff asked.

"Do you want to fall in love?"

"Not really," Greg said. "I made some hate potion. But it seemed too nasty. So I switched to love potion. I call it Love Potion Number 5."

"Fascinating!" exclaimed Jeff. "So, now that you're finished, let's do something really interesting. Let's go to Fun Land." Fun Land was an amusement park that had lots of rides and costume-wearing characters.

Greg put the potion safely in his jacket pocket and off they went. When they got to Fun Land, the first thing they did was go on the Super Looper, the world's most loopy roller coaster.

"Whoa!" Greg screamed, as they went completely upside down.

Little did he know that the love potion in his pocket had become uncorked and was spraying down on Fun Land below.

When Greg and Jeff got off the ride, they saw all of the princesses, pixies, swans, and other costumed characters looking oddly at them.

"Hey, honey," the Magic Princess said to Greg. "You're a doll!"

"Hub?" Greg said.

"Greg, honey," called the Queen of the Swans. "Come on over here, sweetheart."

"What?" Greg said.

Then all of the other princesses, pixies, swans, and others came running up.

"They're after us!" cried Greg.

"Not us," said Jeff. "They're after you!"



And with that, Jeff, not such a loyal best friend, high-tailed it out of there. That left Greg to fend for himself against the horde of love-struck admirers.

"Help!" Greg cried, and ran to the first ride he could find. It turned out to be the Tunnel of Love!

Quickly, Greg jumped into a Love Boat with his admirers chasing hotly behind. It was then that he realized he still had a bottle of his original science-fair project—the hate potion—in his other pocket. If he sprinkled a little of the hate potion on his admirers, maybe that would block the effects of the love potion.

To do this, he needed to get high above them all. So, like a swashbuckling hero, Greg got out of his car and climbed high above the Tunnel of Love.

"Oh, look!" his admirers cried. "He's climbing up there!"

"He's so handsome!" they swooned. "He's such a hero!" they pined.

"I love him!" they declared.

And then, P-H-H-H-T! Greg sprayed the hate potion down below. Suddenly, the admirers found that their love had cooled.

"What are we doing here?" they asked. "He's not really so handsome," they declared.

"He's actually sort of creepy," one of them said.

And with that, Greg made his escape.

He went directly home and finished his homework. Except, instead of making a love potion for his science-fair project, he did a dull old plant experiment instead—and he was glad he did!



1. **EFFECT:** Greg made love potion.

**CAUSE:**

- A. Greg wanted to have an unusual project for the science fair.
- B. Greg was in love with a girl at school.
- C. Jeff was in love with a girl at school.
- D. Greg wanted to get rich.

2. **CAUSE:** Greg went upside down in the Super Looper.

**EFFECT:**

- A. Greg felt like he was going to throw up.
- B. Greg fell in love with the Magic Princess.
- C. The characters fell in love with Greg and Jeff.
- D. The love potion spilled.

3. **CAUSE:** The love potion splashed on the Magic Princess.

**EFFECT:**

- A. She fell in love with Jeff.
- B. Greg fell in love with her.
- C. She fell in love with Greg.
- D. Her gown was ruined.

4. **EFFECT:** The costumed characters chased after Greg.

**CAUSE:**

- A. The characters wanted some love potion.
- B. Greg forgot that the love potion was in his pocket.
- C. The characters were in love with Greg.
- D. The characters were angry with Greg.

5. **CAUSE:** Jeff wasn't a very loyal friend.

**EFFECT:**

- A. Jeff left Greg at the amusement park to fend for himself.
- B. Greg left Jeff at the amusement park to fend for himself.
- C. Jeff helped Greg escape from the characters who were chasing him.
- D. Jeff copied Greg's science-fair project.

7. **EFFECT:** The characters fell out of love with Greg.

**CAUSE:**

- A. The love potion canceled out the effects of the hate potion.
- B. The hate potion was not effective.
- C. The hate potion canceled out the effects of the love potion.
- D. The love potion wore off on its own.

6. **EFFECT:** Greg sprayed hate potion on the characters who were chasing him.

**CAUSE:**

- A. He wanted them to hate each other.
- B. He wanted them to stop being in love with him.
- C. He hated them.
- D. Greg went upside down in the roller coaster.

8. **You're a magazine ad writer. On a separate sheet of paper, write an ad for Love Potion Number 5. Be sure to describe the potion's effects, and the things that would make a person want to buy it. Include pictures if you like.**

# The Next Step: Scare Radio

## A Main Idea Spooky Story

This transcript from a spooky radio show gives you a rare peek into the everyday life of otherworldly creatures. Read it with the lights on! While you read, look for the **main idea**—or key message—that each character is trying to express.

### List of Characters

SPOOK	BLOB
PANEL MEMBERS	JESSICA
BRUNHILDA	GHOSTLY FIGURE

**SPOOK:** Hello! I'm Spook Specter, host of *The Next Step*, the award-winning radio show that each week investigates the weird, wild, and wacky world of the supernatural. Today's topic is: "Are Ghosts Real?" For thousands of years, people have argued about this topic. Today, we'll try to settle it once and for all. Now it's time to introduce our panel. Hello, panel.

**PANEL MEMBERS:** Hello, Spook.

**SPOOK:** Our first panel member is Brunhilda Hagstrom, professor of paranormal sorcery at Witch Haven College. Tell me, Brunhilda, are ghosts real?

**BRUNHILDA:** Hello, darling. The answer to your question is yes! But, I must say, it's rather a boring question! Who cares about ghosts? Why the other day, I was mixing up a batch of Love Potion when I thought I saw a ghost, and—

**SPOOK:** Really? So you're convinced ghosts are real? Fascinating!

**BRUNHILDA:**

Fascinating? It was disgusting! Ghosts are vile, dirty, noisy, irritating creatures! When I see one I quickly grab my broom and sweep it out the door! This happens at least twice a day in my laboratory at the college.

**SPOOK:**

Amazing, Brunhilda! Just amazing. Our next panelist is last year's Creature of the Year. Yes, it's none other than the Toxic Blob, the creature from the radioactive swamp. Hello, Blobbie!

**BLOB:**

How are you doing, Spook? If you ask me, ghosts can't be real. Know why? To be real, you've got to be solid, you know? You've got to have form and shape. Ghosts ain't got those. Have you ever punched a ghost in the kisser? There's nothing there! Your hand goes right through it!

**SPOOK:**

Hmm, that may be true, Blobbie. But tell me this: You yourself are a formless, shapeless, gooey hulk. So how are you any more real than a ghost?

**BLOB:**

*(Feels himself)* Whoa! You got a good point there, Spook. I never thought of it that way.

**SPOOK:**

Fascinating. Our final panelist is Jessica, the Teenage Zombie. Jess hasn't been the same since she was bored to the breaking point when her friends forced her to sit through the movie *Creepy Teenage Prom Night*. So what about it, Jess? Are ghosts real?

**JESSICA:**

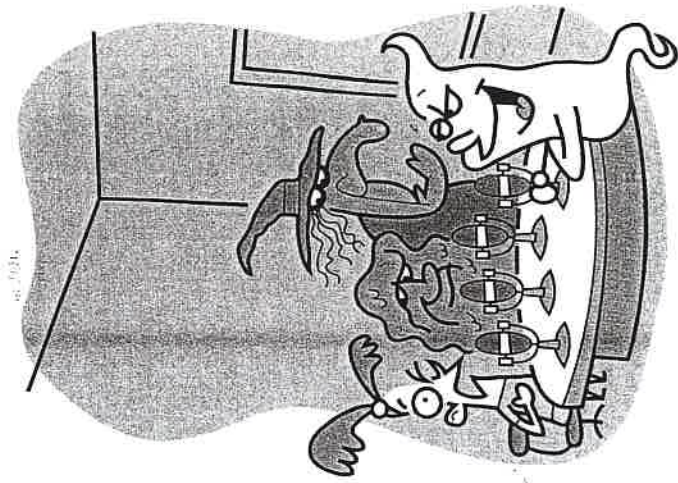
Nothing is real, Spook. I mean, take the sun. It rises in the morning. It sets at night. But is it real? Everything is an illusion, Spook, including ghosts.

**SPOOK:**

So I take it you don't believe in ghosts.

**JESSICA:**

What I believe isn't important, Spook. Only the truth is important. And . . . hey, what's that?



A strange, glowing, half-transparent figure suddenly hovers over the room.

**JESSICA:** Is that what I think it is?

**BLOB:** Yow! I'm getting out of here. That thing gives me the creeps.

**BRUNHILDA:** Don't be silly. Ghosts are annoying — not dangerous.

**JESSICA:** Look out!

**BLOB:** It's coming after us! I think it's mad!

**GHOSTLY FIGURE:** O-o-o-o-o . . . .

**SPOOK:** That's all for now for *The Next Step*. Tune in next week when we discuss, "Is Poison Really Bad for You?" Until then, so long from your host, Spook Specter.

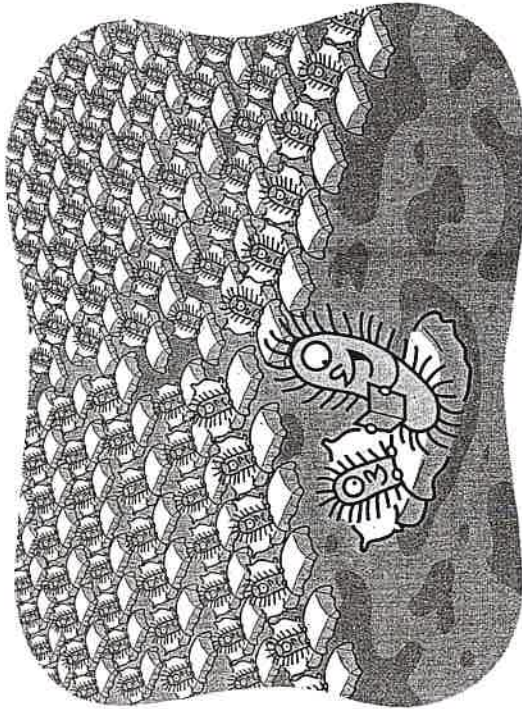


1. What is the main idea of the show called *The Next Step*?
  - A. To scare the audience
  - B. To explain why ghosts aren't real
  - C. To explore the world of the supernatural
  - D. To sell exercise equipment
2. What is the main idea of this week's show?
  - A. To meet all of the panelists
  - B. To discuss whether ghosts are real
  - C. To prove that ghosts are disgusting
  - D. To discuss radio shows
3. What main idea does Brunhilda express?
  - A. That she doesn't believe in ghosts
  - B. That she doesn't like ghosts
  - C. That ghosts aren't solid
  - D. That she loves ghosts
4. What main idea does the Blob express?
  - A. That ghosts aren't solid enough to be real
  - B. That ghosts are vile, disgusting creatures
  - C. That ghosts are dangerous
  - D. That blobs are intelligent
5. What details does the Blob use to support his idea?
  - A. That ghosts make him laugh
  - B. That ghosts don't exist
  - C. That no one has form or shape
  - D. That ghosts don't have form or shape
6. What main idea does Jessica express?
  - A. That nothing is real
  - B. That ghosts are real
  - C. That ghosts are not real
  - D. That ghosts are not scary
7. What detail at the end of the show supports the idea that ghosts are real?
  - A. Brunhilda describes a ghost she once met.
  - B. Spook shows a movie of a ghost.
  - C. The host turns out to be a ghost.
  - D. A ghostly figure appears.
8. On a separate sheet of paper, make a list of three main ideas for future episodes of *The Next Step*. Be as wild and imaginative as you like! Choose one of your ideas, then write Spook's introduction for that show.

# The Toothbrush

## A Compare and Contrast Spooky Story

Yes, it's true. Your bathroom is home to billions of tiny bacteria. And don't forget that each one of them is a living thing! Read this icky story, then **compare and contrast** bacteria life to human life. Remember, when you compare, you show how two things are alike. When you contrast, you show how two things are different.



It was bedtime, but Billy Bacteria was not tired at all. "Tell me another story, Mom," Billy begged.

"Now, Billy," his mother said. "You know that if I tell you too many stories, I won't have enough time to tell stories to all of your other 35 billion brothers and sisters."

"Aw, come on, Mom. Just one more story?" Billy pleaded. "And make it a spooky one."

Billy's mom loved Billy very much, so she told him another story—a very spooky story.

"There was once a happy little bacterium," she began.

"Was he like me, Mom?" Billy asked.

"Yes," she said, "he was a lot like you, Billy. This little bacterium had a great life. He was part of a large scum ring on the side of a nice big bathroom sink. Every day he played in the water with his bacteria friends. They had a lot of fun together, but this didn't stop the little bacterium from dreaming about the future."

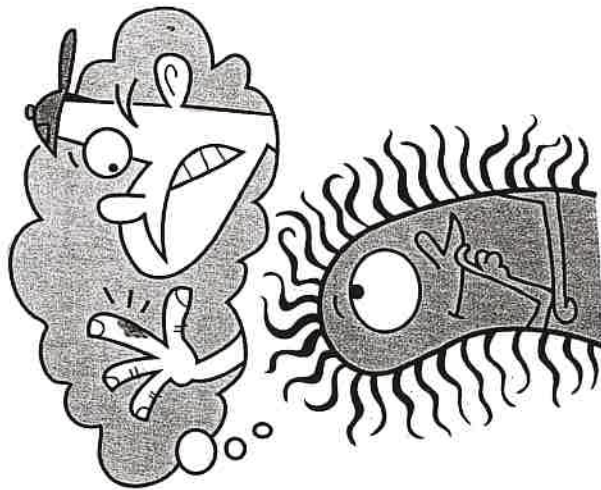
"What did he dream about, Mom?"

"Oh," said his mom, "his dreams were pretty much like everyone else's dreams. He wanted to grow up and be part of an infection."

"Wow!" Billy cried. "An infection! That's just like Dad. Do you think I could be an infection some day, Mom?"

"Well," she chuckled, "not all by yourself. But if you got together with a few billion of your good friends, why not?"

"Wow!" Billy said. "So what happened next?"



"What always happens?" replied Billy's mom. "One moment the little bacterium was getting ready for bed, and the next thing you know a big fat toothbrush swooped down on him."

"A toothbrush!" Billy cried. "What's a toothbrush, Mom?"

"A toothbrush," she explained, "is a very scary thing. First of all, it's gigantic. In fact, a toothbrush is said to be so big that you can't even see it in a microscope!"

"Oh come on," Billy said, now obviously scared out of his wits. "That can't be true. Does Dad believe in toothbrushes, Mom?"

"I'm not sure," Billy's mom said. "What I do know is that a toothbrush is said to move up and down, smashing and dislodging trillions of innocent bacteria wherever it goes. And that's not even the scary part."

Now Billy was shaking in his boots. But he was enjoying the story nevertheless.

"W-w-what's the scary part, Mom?"

"The scary part," she said, "is that the toothbrush is covered with a horrible white,

foamy goop called TOOTHPASTE, and this toothpaste is specially made to DESTROY bacteria like you and me."

By now, Billy was so scared he was shaking. But this didn't prepare him for what happened next: He looked up and saw a REAL toothbrush about to come down right on top of them.

"Look out!" Billy's mom cried.

The user of the toothbrush must have been shaking it off. It knocked hard against the sink, dislodging some of the scum ring where Billy lived.

A rush of water whooshed them out of there just in time. Billy and his mom came to a new home under the sink. It was very dark and safe there. And there were no toothbrushes to be seen anywhere.

Billy loved his new home. But it was quite a while before he wanted his mom to tell him another spooky story again—especially one about a toothbrush!



5. Which of the following does Billy have in common with many human kids?

- A. He likes to listen to bedtime stories.
- B. He likes to listen to stories about toothbrushes.
- C. He likes to make up stories about toothbrushes and toothpaste.
- D. He likes to live under the sink.

6. Contrast the spooky story that Billy's mom tells with spooky bedtime stories humans tell. What is different about the story that Billy's mom tells?

- A. It has a monster in it that scares the listener.
- B. The monster is huge and dangerous.
- C. The monster is a toothbrush.
- D. The monster is friendly.

7. What similarity do the characters in this story share with characters in traditional monster stories?

- A. They know how to defeat the monster.
- B. They are not sure that the monster in the story really exists.
- C. They ignore the danger that the monster presents.
- D. They are afraid of toothbrushes.

8. Choose a character from one of your favorite books or stories. Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting your life to the life of the character.

1. Compare Billy to characters in typical children's stories. In what way is he similar?

- A. He lives under the sink and dreams of becoming part of an infection.
- B. He seems to be a nice kid with a nice family.
- C. He has billions of brothers and sisters.
- D. He goes to school.

2. In what way does Billy's family differ from families in typical children's stories?

- A. His mother tells him bedtime stories.
- B. Instead of a few brothers and sisters, he has billions of brothers and sisters.
- C. Instead of going to bed at night, he goes to bed in the daytime.
- D. His mother has to take care of more than one child.

3. Compare Billy's life to the life of a character in a typical children's story. Find similarities.

- A. Both have friends and dream of the future.
- B. Both play football and baseball.
- C. Both live on the side of a sink.
- D. Both want to be part of an infection.

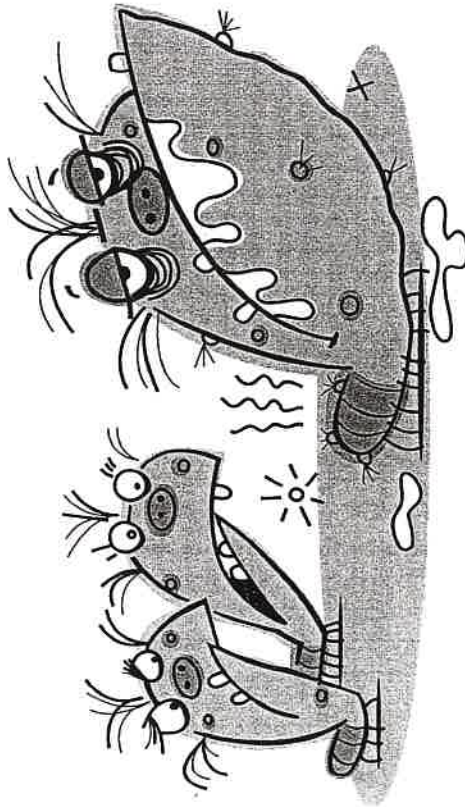
4. Contrast Billy's life to the life of typical children's story characters. Find differences.

- A. Billy loves to play with his friends and wants to go to college.
- B. Billy dreams of being like his dad.
- C. Billy lives on the side of a sink instead of a house.
- D. Billy lives in a house instead of an apartment.

# The Ugly Druckling

## A Point of View Spooky Story

Your **point of view** is your way of looking at things. To you, a big buzzing fly is a pest. But from the point of view of a frog, that fly is a tasty treat! Of course, when you change, it can cause you to see things differently. That means you have a new point of view. See how it works in this strange story.



Once upon a time there was an Ugly Druckling. What's a *druckling*? Druckling is a nickname for a type of caterpillar, not a bird. In fact, drucklings are rather wormy, ugly-looking things. But to a druckling, ugly isn't bad. It's good. So the other drucklings didn't make fun of the Ugly Druckling. They were jealous of her because they wanted to be as ugly as she was.

"Why does she get to be so ugly?" they would say. "We're so plain!"

It just didn't seem fair.

And then, wouldn't you know it, there was a fancy ball that was hosted by an Ugly Prince. The Ugly Prince fell deeply in love with the Ugly Druckling right away.

"I've never seen anyone so ugly before," he said, when she ran from the ball at midnight. "I must find out who she is."

The next day, the Ugly Prince went looking for the Ugly Druckling, but he couldn't find her anywhere.

The Ugly Prince found himself at the edge of a forest. In frustration, he cried out, "Where are you, Ugly Druckling?" A voice replied, "Here I am, Ugly Prince."

The prince looked around. He quickly realized that the voice was that of a beautiful butterfly—not the Ugly Druckling he'd fallen in love with. What had happened? During the night, the Ugly Druckling had changed into a Beautiful Butterfly. (This was something that happened to all drucklings. It would happen to the prince, too. But since drucklings are not members of a highly intelligent species—like us, humans—they didn't quite get it.)

The prince covered his face in horror. "You're beautiful!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she said. "But inside I'm as ugly as ever. And anyway, I now understand that being ugly isn't the most important thing in life. Do you still love me?"

"Hmmm," the Ugly Prince said. "Let me get back to you on that. I'll call you tonight."

1. How does the point of view of drucklings toward beauty differ from what you might expect?

- A. Drucklings think beauty is a bad thing.
- B. Drucklings think beauty is wonderful.
- C. Drucklings think personality is more important than beauty.
- D. Drucklings prize beauty above all else.

2. What is the prince's point of view toward the Ugly Druckling when he meets her at the ball?

- A. She is his heart's desire.
- B. She is a troublemaker.
- C. She is frightening.
- D. She is disgusting.

3. How has the Ugly Druckling's point of view changed?

- A. She now sees things from a prince's point of view.
- B. She now sees things from a human's point of view.
- C. She now sees things from the point of view of a beautiful butterfly.
- D. She now sees things from a duck's point of view.

4. After she changes, the Ugly Druckling sees that looking ugly is

- A. the most important thing in life.
- B. frightening.
- C. very difficult.
- D. not as important as she once thought.

**B**ut the prince didn't call. All of the other drucklings laughed.

"What's the matter?" they teased. "Doesn't your Ugly Prince love you anymore?"

"Yes, he does," said the Ugly Druckling (who was now a Beautiful Butterfly). "He knows that I may be beautiful on the outside, but inside I'm still as ugly as ever. And that's what matters."

She insisted that the prince would be there any moment. But sometimes princes aren't as noble and brave as they're supposed to be. All night the Ugly Druckling (who was now a Beautiful Butterfly) waited. The Ugly Prince still didn't call.

Finally, in the morning, she went to the garden, and there she met up with another beautiful butterfly.

"Who are you?" the Ugly Druckling asked.

"Don't you recognize me?" replied the butterfly. "I'm the Ugly Prince that you met at the ball."

"But you're so beautiful," she said.

"Yes," he said. "Last night I, too, went through metamorphosis. That's why I didn't

call you. I was busy turning into a butterfly."

"Hmm," the Ugly Druckling said.

"You know," said the prince, "I have a confession to make. Yesterday when you told me that you were still ugly on the inside I didn't really believe you. But now I do."

"Why is that?" asked the Ugly Druckling (who was now a Beautiful Butterfly).

"I'm not sure," said the Ugly Prince (who was now a Handsome Prince). "But I think it has something to do with my point of view. Do you still love me?"

"I think I do," replied the Ugly Druckling (who was now a Beautiful Butterfly). "Do you still love me?"

"Yes," said the Ugly Prince (who was now a Handsome Prince). "There is something ugly about your beauty. But the way you look isn't that important."

"I know what you mean," said the Ugly Druckling (who was now a Beautiful Butterfly).

So, they got married and lived happily ever after. They had dozens of caterpillar kids.

And they were all ugly!

5. Why didn't the Ugly Druckling recognize the Ugly Prince when they met in the garden?

- A. He was wearing different clothes.
- B. He had changed into a butterfly.
- C. He had changed into a caterpillar.
- D. Her way of seeing things had changed.

6. The Ugly Prince changed into a butterfly, but he felt the same as ever on the inside. This helped him understand that

- A. the Ugly Druckling hadn't changed on the inside.
- B. butterflies are beautiful.
- C. drucklings are ugly.
- D. the Ugly Druckling really loved him.

7. How did the point of view of both main characters change by the end of the story?

- A. They didn't like the way drucklings look.
- B. They couldn't see anymore.
- C. They both saw that what's on the inside is more important than outer appearance.
- D. They only liked the way butterflies look.

8. "To really understand a person, you have to walk a mile in his or her shoes." What does that expression mean? Write your answer on a separate sheet of paper. Then write a paragraph about whose shoes you'd like to walk a mile in and how it might change your point of view.

# The Horrible Green Creature

## A Drawing Conclusions Spooky Story

What happens to brothers and sisters who won't get along? Without giving away the story, let's just say it can be mighty scary. Beyond that you can draw your own conclusions. **Drawing conclusions** is putting together the information you have to make sense of what you're reading. Try it.

**J**ohnny and Jennie were brother and sister, and they didn't get along. Johnny teased. Jennie bothered. Johnny bullied. Jennie whined.

"Stop it!" their mother would say. "I didn't do anything," they would both answer.

On and on it went, never ending, never changing, always teasing and bothering, bullying and whining. Then one morning Johnny and Jennie's mother had to leave the two of them alone—together.

"Can you two stay alone for a few hours without causing trouble?" their mother asked.

"Oh, sure," Johnny replied.

"No problem," Jennie answered.

Within five minutes they were squabbling.

"I was first!" Jennie said.

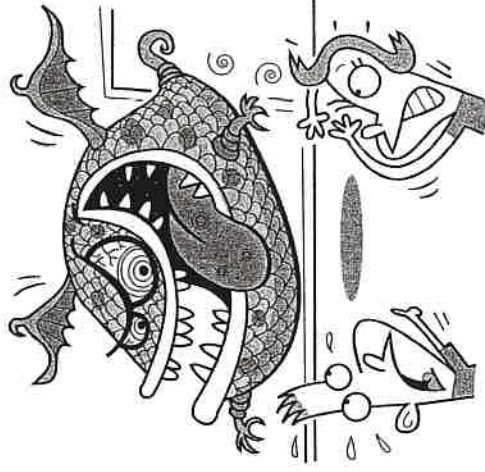
"Get out of the way!" Johnny ordered.

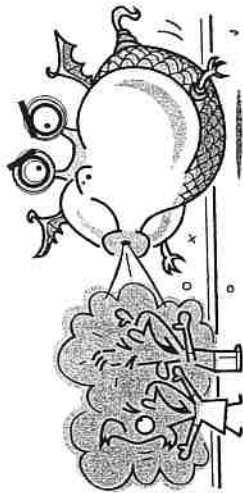
"Go soak your head!" cried Jennie.

At that point, a horrible green creature came floating into the room. It had horrible scales, a horrible green head, horrible red eyes, horrible purple wings, and a ghastly grin that was so horrible that it gave you a stomachache.

"Who are you? What are you?" asked Jennie.

"I am a horrible green creature," replied the creature.





- "Why are you here? What do you want from us?" Johnny asked.
- "I'm sent to nasty situations — places where people are fighting for no good reason," the creature replied. "And this, for sure, is a nasty situation. I'm just here doing my job."
- "Take a hike," said Johnny. "Get lost!"
- "Wait," said Jennie. "What else do you do, horrible green creature?"
- "Watch this," said the horrible green creature.
- And with that, the creature took a deep breath, made a horrible face (even more horrible than its regular face), and blew a horrible cloud of hot green gas straight at the two kids.
- POOSH!**
- "Yow!" cried Jennie. "That stings!"
- "And it stinks, too," Johnny said. "Knock it off, would you creature?"
- "Want me to knock it off? OK. I'll knock it off if the two of you will quit fighting," said the creature.
- "Ask Jennie," said Johnny. "It's her fault."
- 1. What problem do Jennie and Johnny face?**
- A. They don't have anything to do.
- B. They don't get along.
- C. They don't listen to their mother.
- D. They're afraid of ghosts.
- 2. Draw a conclusion about whose fault the problem is.**
- A. Johnny is mostly at fault.
- B. Jennie is mostly at fault.
- C. They're equally at fault.
- D. All of the above are true.
- 3. The horrible green creature has probably come to Johnny and Jennie's house to**
- A. teach them how to cause problems.
- B. teach them not to fight.
- C. learn how to be horrible from them.
- D. destroy things.
- 4. How do you think Johnny and Jennie will respond to the creature?**
- A. They will be so nasty that they will drive the creature away.
- B. They will become friends with the creature.
- C. They will call the police.
- D. They will work together to get rid of the creature.

- I**t was the first time he'd ever asked her to help him with anything.
- "I sure will," Jennie said. "Let's work together."
- And with that they went to the closet, grabbed the super-powerful vacuum cleaner that their mother used, and put it in reverse so it blew out instead of sucking in.
- "Okay, creature," Johnny said. "We'll give you one chance. If you don't **VAMOOSE** right this instant, we're going to **BLAST** you with this reverse vacuum cleaner."
- "You don't scare me!" cried the horrible green creature.
- So while Johnny held the nozzle, Jennie pushed the button, and **BR-A-A-N-NG!** The machine started shooting at the creature.
- "Yowsa!" cried the creature. "If there's one thing we horrible green creatures can't take, it's super-powered vacuums in reverse. I'm **OUTTA HERE!**"
- And with that, the horrible green creature vanished as mysteriously as he'd arrived. The Jennie turned off the vacuum cleaner. The two dusted off their hands.
- "Well, we sure took care of that," Johnny said.
- "We sure did," Jennie replied.
- At that moment their mother walked in.
- "How did you two get along after I left?" she asked.
- "Things were horrible at first," said Johnny. "Really horrible."
- "But we worked together to make things better," Jennie said.
- "Well, isn't that nice," said their mother.
- "Yes, it is," said Jennie and Johnny.
- And the two of them never acted horrible again. Well, almost never!

- 5. Draw a conclusion about what Jennie and Johnny learned from their experience with the horrible green creature.**
- A. They learned that the creature was truly horrible.
- B. They learned that working together is very difficult.
- C. They learned that they could get along if they tried.
- D. They learned that their mother is never wrong.
- 6. How did Jennie and Johnny's mother probably feel when she saw how well the two kids were getting along?**
- A. Unhappy
- B. Surprised
- C. Frightened
- D. Worried
- 7. What seems to be the horrible green creature's job?**
- A. To frighten kids
- B. To baby-sit for bratty kids
- C. To help people stop fighting
- D. To punish brothers and sisters who fight
- 8. Draw some conclusions about the horrible green creature's job. Imagine that you are the creature's boss. It's time for the creature to go out on his next job assignment. On a separate sheet of paper, write a memo (a paragraph) to the monster explaining the job. Describe who needs his help and why. Be creative!**

# The House on Plum Street

## An Analyzing Plot Spooky Story

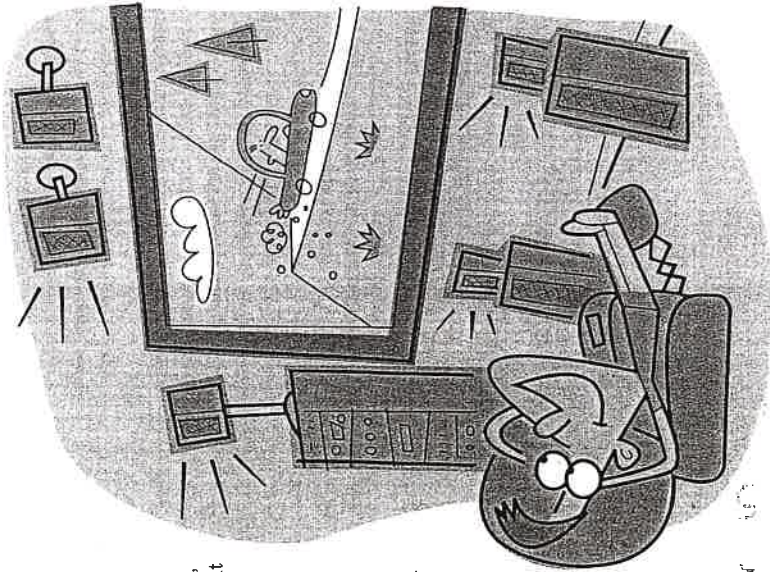
Every story has characters, a setting, and some kind of action. All of these together is called the **plot**. Here, the plot focuses on a young man who will do anything—and we mean anything—to earn money for something he wants. The plot gets very creepy, very quickly. Check it out!

**I**t started with greed. Some folks want money. Me? My name is Louis and I wanted a music system: A G-750 Blaster CD-Surround Total Theater System that costs \$2,999.

How did I pay for it? In a word, I didn't. I put it on the installment plan. Each month, I paid \$200 — for 24 months.

This worked out OK, until I lost my job at the video store. Suddenly, I needed money, and I needed it fast. So when I saw the ad in the newspaper, I knew I had no choice. It read:

Make \$100 a night.  
Be the caretaker at  
my great-great-uncle  
Farley's house at  
13 Plum Street, one  
night a week. No  
questions asked. Call  
Jasper at LK5-1313.



I called and, just like the ad said, I got the job with no questions asked. Jasper handed me the key and promised me it would be an easy job, except for one thing: Some people said the house was haunted.

"Nonsense," I said. "I don't believe in haunted houses."

I will say this: The place was dark, dank, and full of cobwebs. The windows were cracked and broken. The floors creaked. Was it haunted?

Of course not, I told myself.

And for most of the night, there was no sign of anything strange. Then, the house's music system caught my eye. I had never seen one like it before. I turned it on. The most beautiful music came pouring out of unseen speakers. I'd never heard such music before. I couldn't identify the instruments or the style of music. I just knew it spoke directly to my heart, filling me with happiness and contentment. I looked at the label on the system. It was called a Bizarre-100.

I sat there and listened to the Bizarre-100 for most of the evening. I had no doubt that it was the greatest sound system in the world.

I decided that I had to have it.

**I** looked closely at the case. There was a small plaque that read: **WHOSOEVER WANTS THIS SYSTEM, YOU CAN HAVE IT—IF YOU ARE TRULY WORTHY!**

So the next morning, when I got ready to leave, I went over to the system. I tried to unplug it.

Suddenly, the room filled with a mournful, loathsome sound:

1. Who is the main character in the story?

- A. Jasper
- B. Uncle Farley
- C. Louis
- D. The house

2. What is the setting of the story?

- A. A spooky old house
- B. A haunted music system
- C. The distant past
- D. Louis's apartment

3. What problem does the main character face?

- A. He doesn't have a music system.
- B. He doesn't have the money to pay for his music system.
- C. He needs to get his old job back from the video store.
- D. He is being pursued by a ghost.

4. What steps does the main character take to solve the problem?

- A. He decides to return the music system.
- B. He buys a very expensive music system.
- C. He tricks Uncle Jasper into giving him a new music system.
- D. He takes a job caring for a house that may be haunted.

"You are not worthy! LEAVE ME ALO-O-ONE!"

A strange radio broadcast? Perhaps. When I tried to yank the plug out of the wall, it wouldn't budge. The terrible sound got louder:

"You are not worthy! LEAVE ME ALO-O-O-ONE!"  
I gave it one more pull.

"You are truly not worthy! LEAVE ME ALO-O-O-ONE!"

At that point, the walls began to shake. The windows began to rattle. Cracks in the ceiling began to widen. Plaster began to fall.

I looked up. The ceiling was about to cave in!

I ran. I didn't turn around until I reached the front gate. Then I heard a terrible noise.

The old house was collapsing!

I ran straight to Jasper and told him what happened.

"Finally," he said. "I've been waiting for Uncle Farley's house to fall apart for twenty years. You did it. You finally did it!"

"Tell me something," I said. "That music system in the house. Where did it come from? Was it your uncle's?"

"Music system?" Jasper replied. "That place didn't have a music system. It didn't even have a radio! My uncle moved out in 1912, before anyone in this town even had a radio."

Sure enough, when the workers came to clean up the wreckage, they found no sign of a sound system. And it should have survived the collapse.

Myself? I can't explain what happened. I still don't believe in haunted houses. Well, maybe a little bit.

One thing I definitely don't believe in is an expensive sound system. The day after the house collapsed, I traded in my \$2,999 system for a plain old \$129 set. And I like it fine. So taking the

caretaking job did solve my problem—in a way. But sometimes, when I'm lying in bed at night, I close my eyes and think I hear the beautiful sounds that came from the Bizarre-100 system. I tell myself that somehow, somewhere, I'll hear that music again.



5. In this section, what new problem does the main character face?

- A. He wants to play music, but the Bizarre-100 won't let him.
- B. He wants to destroy the music system because he can't have it.
- C. He wants to take the Bizarre-100 music system.
- D. He wants to escape the house.

6. What is the climax of the story?

- A. The house burns down when the music system overheats.
- B. The house collapses when Louis tries to unplug the system.
- C. The house is sold to Jasper for a small price.
- D. Louis is attacked by a ghost.

7. How does the main character change as a result of what happens in the story?

- A. He no longer believes in haunted houses.
- B. He no longer likes music.
- C. He is now a ghost.
- D. He no longer wants a fancy, expensive sound system.

8. You're a reporter for *The Haunted Times*, a magazine dedicated to tracking down ghosts and hauntings. On a separate sheet of paper, write an article describing what happened at Uncle Farley's house. Was it haunted—or not?

# The Hideous Blob's Amazing Comeback

## A Main Idea and Supporting Details Spooky Story

The **main idea** is a story's big point. Often, you can figure out a story's main idea by asking yourself, "What is the main character's biggest problem?" **Supporting details** give you more information about the main idea. See how it works in this tale of a big blob who just isn't happy.

**T**he Hideous Blob was a megastar. His last five movies—all horror movies, of course—had been smash hits. Fans adored him. Critics praised him. Everyone wanted a piece of him! The Blob was on magazine covers, TV shows, commercials, videos, you name it! He was America's favorite blob.

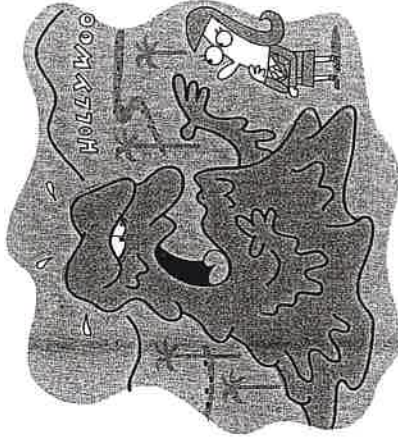
So was the Hideous Blob satisfied? Not a chance.

"I wish people would stop thinking of me as such a hideous blob," the Blob complained to his always-honest agent, Vickie Crackle.

"But you are a hideous blob—a gob of oozing goo," the ever-honest Vickie said. "And on top of that, you're nice!"

"But I want to stretch myself," the Blob said to Vickie. "I've been typecast. I know I can move into other roles. I don't want to be stuck playing blobs for the rest of my life."

"What kinds of roles were you thinking of?" asked Vickie.



"In my next movie," the Blob said, "I would like to play an action hero. Something like Harrison Ford would have done in his younger days — *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, that sort of thing.

"OK! I'm on top of it, Blob!" said Vickie. "But I have to be honest. I'm not sure it's a great idea."

1. What is the main idea so far?

- A. The Blob wants to be famous.
- B. The Blob wants to try new roles.
- C. The Blob wants to make commercials and TV shows.
- D. The Blob wants to quit acting and start a singing career.

2. Which detail supports the idea that the Blob is a big star?

- A. The Blob has an agent named Vickie Crackle.
- B. The Blob appears on magazine covers.
- C. The Blob is not satisfied with his career.
- D. The Blob likes Harrison Ford.

3. Which detail supports the idea that Vickie is always honest?

- A. Vickie says, "That may not be such a great idea."
- B. Vickie never takes any money from the Blob.
- C. Vickie says, "You are the best Blob in the entire world."
- D. Vickie says, "I'm on top of it."

In the Blob's next movie, fans got to see their favorite star drive a souped-up sports car, battle evil ninjas, and win the heart of a beautiful woman. Did they like the new him?

Not a chance. People hated the Blob's new movie.

"Ick!" they said.

"Disgusting!" they cried.

"I wish he'd go back to being the old Hideous Blob that we knew and loved," they said.

"The Blob is simply not believable as an action hero," wrote a famous movie critic. "The Blob is a blob, and that's all there is to it."

But the Blob didn't go back to being the old Hideous Blob. In fact, he made several more movies in which he got to "stretch" himself. In one, he was a romantic but emotionally damaged

math genius. In another he played a guy with glasses who was a meek newspaper reporter by day and a crime-fighting hero by night. They were complete flops as well.

Before, people stood in line to see the Blob's movies. Now, theaters showing his films were practically empty.

Finally, the Blob came to Vickie. "You've got to do something," he said. "You've got to help me become popular again!"

"OK," Vickie said, "but it's going to mean going back to horror movies."

"That's fine," said the Blob. "I understand now. I'm a great horror-movie actor, but I'm a terrible action hero."

"I have to say I agree with you," said Vickie. "But at least you gave it an honest try. It would have bothered you all your life if you hadn't!"

"And I have to admit it," said the Blob. "I always felt ridiculous in those cool-guy outfits."

So Vickie had the Hideous Blob make a new scary movie in which he was the old Hideous Blob again. Audiences loved it.

"This is great!" they cried.

"The Hideous Blob for president!" they shouted.

And so it went. The Hideous Blob became a big star again. He was on commercials, TV shows, and in magazines. And he got awards—Blob of the Year, Best Supporting Blob, even Comeback Blob of the Year.

Of course, the Blob gave tons of interviews. In each one, he took the opportunity to put in a plug for his new message: "Be happy with who you are." The Blob wasn't an action hero. But now, he was a different kind of hero. He was a hero to unusual people everywhere. And that was an exciting new role for him.

4. What detail shows that audiences did not like the Blob in his new roles?

- A. A critic said the Blob should stick to horror movies.
- B. Vickie said she thought the Blob's plan to take new roles wasn't a good idea.
- C. The Blob took a role as a crime-fighting reporter.
- D. Theaters showing his films were nearly empty.

5. Audiences didn't like the new Blob because

- A. he wasn't believable.
- B. he lost his acting ability.
- C. he was too scary.
- D. he said nasty things about his fans.

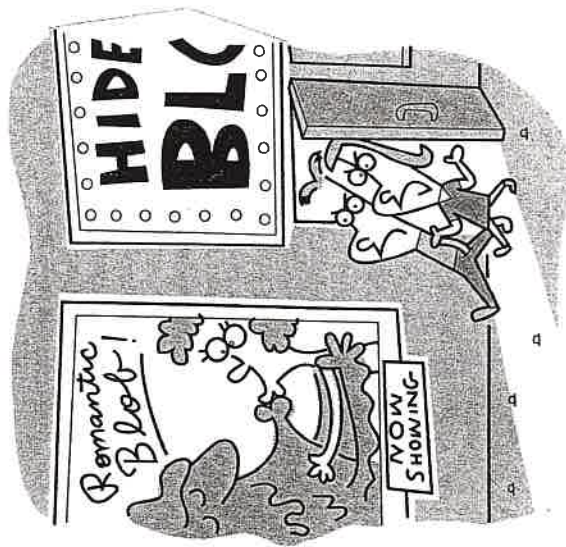
6. The Blob asked Vickie to help him

- A. convince critics he was good in his new roles.
- B. play a blob again.
- C. get revenge on people who didn't like the new him.
- D. spread his new message.

7. At first, the Blob dreamed of becoming an action hero. Instead he became a hero to

- A. scared.
- B. overweight.
- C. different.
- D. sick.

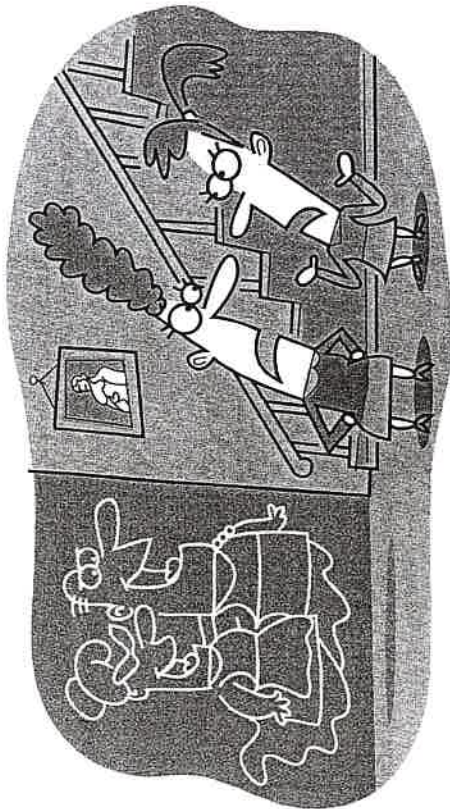
8. You are a writer for *Scary Teen Movie* magazine. On a separate sheet of paper, write a short article about the Blob's big comeback and his new mission in life.



# The Butcher and His Wife

## A Making Inferences Spooky Story

When something creepy is going on, you want to get to the bottom of it. At times like those, inference really comes in handy. An **inference** is like an educated guess. When you use clues from a story to figure out things that the author doesn't tell you, you're making inferences. Try it in this one-of-a-kind ghost story.



**A**unt Elizabeth had always been Sara's favorite aunt. So when Aunt Liz had a problem, Sara didn't hesitate to come and help. Aunt Liz had recently moved to a faraway town and bought a big old house. It was only after Sara arrived on the train that Aunt Liz told her what the real trouble was: The old house she'd bought seemed to have ghosts.

"Did you say g-ghosts?" Sara gulped.

"Yes," Aunt Liz said calmly. "And I need you to help me get rid of them."

"G-get rid of them," Sara repeated. "H-how?"

In a steady voice, Aunt Liz explained. There were two ghosts: Morgan the Butcher and his wife Cynthia. Each night when it got dark, in a ghostly, moaning voice, the Butcher and his wife would appear and ask the same question: "WHAT DOES MORGAN

### THE BUTCHER WEIGH?"

Then they would cackle madly into the dark night.

"What a strange question," Sara said to Aunt Liz. "Is that all the ghosts ever say?"

"Yes," answered Aunt Liz. "Over and over again, they ask the same question. And they never stop laughing. It's puzzling, isn't it? But I know that if we can find the answer to the question, we can get rid of the ghosts."

Sara was determined to solve the puzzle. At the local library she researched the topic of ghosts and tried to track down information about what Morgan the Butcher and Cynthia had been like when they were alive.

What she found puzzled her. Most ghosts lived unhappy lives. But Morgan and Cynthia seemed to have been happy—and popular, too. Everyone seemed to love to come to their little shop and buy sausages and hear the jokes that they told. Both Morgan and Cynthia were renowned jokers.

But as far as answering the question, "WHAT DOES MORGAN THE BUTCHER WEIGH?" Sara could only guess.

"One hundred fifty pounds?" she said, in response to the ghosts' question.

"NO-O-O!" the ghosts cackled.

"One hundred sixty pounds?" she asked.

"NO, NO, NO!" the ghosts moaned.

**I**t went on like this. Then one night Sara had an idea: Morgan was a ghost, and ghosts were weightless spirits. So when they asked, "WHAT DOES MORGAN WEIGH?" Sara answered, "Nothing." He didn't weigh anything at all.

But this made them cackle and moan more than ever.

"NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!" they shrieked.

Sara kept trying different answers for the ghosts. But finally the day came when she had to leave. That night, Sara had a ticket to go back home on the midnight train.

1. Make an inference about the relationship between Sara and Aunt Liz.

- A. Aunt Liz was the coach of Sara's soccer team.
- B. Aunt Liz and Sara once lived near each other and were close.
- C. Aunt Liz and Sara once lived in a haunted house together in a different town.
- D. Aunt Liz and Sara had always lived far apart but stayed in touch on the phone.

2. What helped you make your inference for question 1?

- A. It says Aunt Liz "recently moved to a faraway town."
- B. It says Aunt Liz had recently "bought a big old house."
- C. It says "the old house that she'd bought seemed to have ghosts."
- D. The fact that one of the ghosts was a butcher.

3. Make an inference about Aunt Liz's attitude toward ghosts.

- A. She is so terrified them.
- B. She enjoys them and finds them amusing.
- C. She does not believe in them.
- D. They bother her but she is not overly afraid of them.

4. What helped you make your inference for question 3?

- A. Aunt Liz spoke in a nervous voice.
- B. Aunt Liz spoke in a calm and steady voice.
- C. Aunt Liz spoke in a loud voice.
- D. Aunt Liz called Sara for help.

"I'm sorry," she told her Aunt Liz. "I wish I could've been more help."

"That's all right," Aunt Liz said. "You tried. Come on. I'll walk you to your train."

On the way to the train station they passed by the little sausage shop that had once belonged to Morgan the Butcher. Inside, Sara saw a man weighing out sausages.

"Wait a second!" Sara suddenly cried.

"I think I know the answer to the ghosts' question. Let's go back to the house one more time, Aunt Liz."

"But you'll miss your train," Aunt Liz said.

"That's okay," Sara said. "Let's go. Quickly. Before we miss everything!"

They arrived at the house just in time. The ghosts were in fine form, shrieking all over the house:

"WHAT DOES MORGAN THE BUTCHER WEIGH?"

But this time, Sara knew the answer to their question.

"Sausages!" she cried.

The ghosts suddenly stopped.

"What did you say?" they asked in their ghostly, moaning voices.

"I said, Morgan the Butcher weighs SAUSAGES!" Sara cried.

This did it. Once the laughter started, it sounded like it would never stop. Louder and louder it got, a rip-snorting, bone-rattling guffaw.

"HA HA HO HO HEE HEE HAR HAR HO HO HA HA!"

The ghosts sounded like they would never stop laughing.

It was the one final joke that Morgan the Butcher and his wife Cynthia wanted to tell the world:

WHAT DOES MORGAN THE BUTCHER WEIGH?

HE WEIGHS SAUSAGES!

Get it? It was pretty funny. In fact, it was so funny that the ghosts never came back again.



5. What did Sara see that helped her figure out the answer to the riddle?

- A. A butcher weighing sausages on a scale
- B. The location of the butcher shop
- C. Her Aunt Liz eating sausage
- D. A chapter in a library book

6. The answer to the ghosts' question turned out to be a joke. What helped Sarah infer that the ghosts were joking?

- A. Knowing that Morgan was an extremely happy man
- B. Knowing that Cynthia and Morgan were famous for their senses of humor
- C. Knowing that Cynthia and Morgan cheated their customers
- D. Reading about joking ghosts in the library

7. Make an inference about ghosts based on this story.

- A. They can have a good sense of humor.
- B. They can have a job as a butcher.
- C. They live only in dark old houses.
- D. They are rude.

8. Write a thank-you note that Morgan and Cynthia might write to Aunt Liz and Sara, thanking them for getting their joke—and allowing them to take a rest from haunting.

# The Three Ghosts of Lucy Bly

## An Understanding Character Spooky Story

Good **characters** make stories interesting to read. It's fun to figure out what makes a character tick. Ask yourself, "What's going on in the character's head?" or "Why would the character do such a stupid thing?" Try it in this story of a not-so-nice girl who gets what she deserves.

"Lucy Bly, you're a total traitor," said Francy-Jean Swain, Lucy's best friend.

Lucy and Francy-Jean were supposed to go to a concert together. But then two girls from their school's super-cool crowd, Molly and Polly, called. They asked Lucy to come to their slumber party. Lucy decided to go.

Lucy was in her room, sitting on her bed, listening to Z-105, her favorite radio station. The slumber party wouldn't begin for two hours. Lucy knew that as her best friend, Francy-Jean must have been disappointed and perhaps a bit furious. But what could Lucy do? Molly and Polly were just about the most popular girls at Webster Middle School! How could Lucy say no to them?

"I couldn't," she told herself. And if Francy-Jean didn't understand that, well, that was her problem!



1. From what you have read so far, which word best describes Lucy's character?

- A. Disloyal
- B. Loyal
- C. Mean
- D. Kind

2. What actions support this view of Lucy's character?

- A. She does nothing but sit in her room and listen to the radio.
- B. She decides to go to the concert rather than the slumber party.
- C. She decides to go to the slumber party rather than the concert.
- D. She breaks a promise to go out with her best friend.

3. How does Lucy justify her actions to herself?

- A. She says that Francy-Jean doesn't understand how to be a friend.
- B. She says that she can't say no to the popular girls.
- C. She says that she can't say no to Francy-Jean.
- D. She says Francy-Jean won't mind going to the concert alone.

4. Which of these sentences from the story shows that, deep down, Lucy knows that what she did was wrong?

- A. If Francy-Jean didn't understand that well, that was her problem!
- B. Lucy knew that as her best friend, Francy-Jean must have been disappointed.
- C. Lucy and Francy-Jean were supposed to go to a concert together.
- D. Molly and Polly were just about the most popular girls at Webster Middle School!

The radio kept playing. And Lucy grew more and more sleepy. Soon, she dozed off. Some time later, she was awakened by a strange light glowing in her room.

"LUCY!" called a horrible, squealing, weasel-like voice. "LUCY BLY, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

Lucy sat up like a bolt. "Who's that?" she cried.

"I AM THE WEASEL-GHOST OF FRIENDSHIPS PAST," replied the voice.

"Why are you a weasel?" Lucy asked.

"Because, like a weasel, you abandoned your past friendships," said the voice. "Do you remember Wendy Gerber, Dara Diaz, and Lannie Plansky?"

"Of course," Lucy said. "Those are the names of my best friends. My former best friends."

"Just like a weasel, you dumped them all," the voice said. "Why, Lucy? Why were you such a weasel?"

"I don't know," said Lucy. "But I've had enough of this—this dream or whatever it is. I'm waking up now."

And with that, Lucy shook her head, and the weasel-ghost was gone.

"Whew!" Lucy said. "What a bad dream.

That's enough of that." But a few moments later, another strange light appeared, and another ghost entered the room.

"I AM THE SNAKE-GHOST OF FRIENDSHIPS PRESENT," hissed the hideous figure. "I take the form of a snake to show the low, treacherous way in which you treat your current friends. I am speaking of Francy-Jean Swain. Why did you betray her, Lucy? Why?"

"I don't know," Lucy said.

Like a hideous rope, the snake-ghost writhed and coiled, twisting around itself as it hissed and moaned.

"This is ridiculous!" cried Lucy. And she grabbed a broom and whisked the ghost out of the room. But it wasn't long before a third ghost appeared.

"I AM THE GHOST OF FUTURE FRIENDSHIPS," said the ghost.

"Why can't I see you?" Lucy asked.

"Because there is nothing to see," said the voice. "In the future, you won't have any friends."

"That's ridiculous," said Lucy. "I'll always have friends. If not Francy-Jean, then Molly and Polly."

"Are you sure?" asked the ghost. And then, two horrible figures appeared in the room. They looked like pigs. Yet, at the same time, they had the faces of Molly and Polly.

"Oink, oink, Lucy!" the pig-ghosts teased. "We're the most popular girls in school. Will YOU be our friend? Oink oink!"

"Y-A-A-A-H!" Lucy screamed.

This was too much.

Lucy sat up ramrod straight on her bed. The strange lights were gone. The pig-ghosts were gone. The radio was still tuned to Z-105. Hardly any time had passed since Lucy had fallen asleep.

"I was asleep, wasn't I?" said Lucy to herself.

She had a sudden urge to call Francy-Jean on the phone. "Francy-Jean," she said, when her friend answered. "I've been thinking. Is it still possible to go to the concert with you?"

"No, Lucy said. "Actually, you could say that I get ditched by Molly and Polly?"

"No," Lucy said. "Actually, you could say that I ditched them. I decided I'd rather hang out with you tonight."

"Sure you don't want to change your mind?" Francy-Jean asked.

"There's not a ghost of a chance," Lucy said. And she meant it.

5. Taken all together, what do Lucy's dreams reveal?

- A. Deep down inside, she knows she needs to be loyal to her true friends.
- B. Deep down inside, she knows she needs to be loyal to the most popular kids.
- C. Deep down inside, she knows she needs to pretend to be loyal to her friends.
- D. Deep down inside, she knows that friends are unimportant.

6. When Lucy says she changed her mind and wants to go to the concert, Francy-Jean asks, "Did you get ditched by Molly and Polly?" This shows that

- A. Francy-Jean didn't mind that Lucy dropped her for Molly and Polly.
- B. Francy-Jean isn't her friend anymore.
- C. Francy-Jean is going to the slumber party.
- D. Francy-Jean doesn't totally trust Lucy.

7. How does Lucy change as a result of her dreams?

- A. She tries to become a more loyal friend.
- B. She becomes less loyal to Molly and Polly.
- C. She becomes more of a loner.
- D. She tries to focus more on her schoolwork.

8. Imagine that you're Lucy. On a separate sheet of paper, write an apology note to Francy-Jean. Explain how you have changed.