

A Visit to Baba Yaga

On the edge of a wild and wicked wood stands a simple wooden cabin. If you peep into the window, you'll see a young girl and her father laughing merrily as they sit nestled by the fire. The girl's name is Natasha, and although she looks happy now, I'm afraid this wasn't always the case...

"Natasha!" called her stepmother shrilly.

Although her stepmother had only lived in the house since marrying Natasha's father two weeks ago, the atmosphere in their once-idyllic home had already soured. Natasha had attempted to be a devoted stepdaughter, but her stepmother's tyranny made her life a misery. She forced her to do chores from early morning until the sun went down, never offering even the smallest morsel of gratitude for her hard work.

"Yes, Mama?" she replied politely as she stirred the cooking pot. She could feel her stepmother's cool gaze lingering over her.

"Natasha, my darling," she said, her voice suddenly oozing like warm treacle, "I want to mend your father's shirt, but I don't have a needle strong enough. Won't you be good, and run along to Baba Yaga's hut to ask her to lend me one?"

Even though she was standing by the warm stove, Natasha felt her blood turn to ice. Baba Yaga, a powerful and cruel witch, was rumoured to feast on any children unfortunate enough to cross her path, using her vicious iron teeth to crunch through their bones.

"Baba Yaga?" she gasped.

"Yes, dear. Now go quickly — Baba Yaga will be delighted to see you," answered her stepmother, a cruel smile curling her lips.

Natasha gathered a small bundle of bread and ham for the journey and set off into the forest. As she travelled, the branches of the trees grew closer together, blocking out any light from the pale, watery sun. Eventually, she came to a rusty gate surrounded by overgrown weeds. As she pushed it open, she noticed it was squeaking painfully. Glimpsing a can of oil abandoned on the ground nearby, she carefully oiled the gate's hinges until it swung open without a sound.

The story continues over the page. 



Beyond the gate was a hut, carelessly assembled from mismatched, crumbling planks of wood. The curtains were tightly drawn, but smoke poured from its twisted chimney. As Natasha tiptoed forwards gingerly, a low whimper rose from beside the hut, and a mangy, thin dog emerged. Once it might have been a magnificent creature, but now it made for a pitiful sight. Natasha felt sad to see it in such a sorry condition, so she hurriedly reached into her bundle to pluck out the hunk of bread she had brought with her. The dog sniffed it cautiously, then snapped it up eagerly.

Satisfied, Natasha crept up to the crooked doorway and knocked softly. Almost immediately, a raspy voice responded, "Come in, child!"

Baba Yaga's hut was crowded with furniture, and every surface was buried under heaps of jars, trinkets and what looked disturbingly like bleached bones. The scrunched figure of an old woman sat at a loom* in one corner, her gnarled fingers weaving with surprising speed. Natasha delivered her stepmother's request to Baba Yaga with a quavering voice.

"Oh, certainly," said Baba Yaga, her iron teeth glinting in a sinister smile. "Would you continue my weaving while I fetch the needle?"

Once Natasha had seated herself timidly, Baba Yaga hobbled into the next room. As the loom began to click and clack under her trembling fingers, Natasha noticed a cat hunched in a corner, its thin tail swishing sluggishly. Once again, pity struck her heart, so she pulled the ham she had brought out of her bundle and held it forwards. The cat devoured it ravenously as Natasha carried on weaving. Then, to her astonishment, the cat spoke.

"Thank you, dearie," it said. It licked its lips, then addressed her with a firm gaze. "She's planning to have you for her supper, you know. But since you've been so generous, I'll help you escape."

"How?" whispered Natasha, her heart pounding.

"I'll keep weaving while you run home," said the cat, flexing its claws. "She won't know you've gone if she can still hear the loom going. But you'll have to hurry!"

Natasha nodded hastily, gave the cat a grateful scratch between its ears, and dashed out through the door. The cat quickly flung itself towards the loom and began batting at it with its paws.

"Are you still weaving, my pretty?" croaked Baba Yaga.

* loom — a frame used to weave (make) cloth

"Yes, Baba Yaga!" trilled the cat, trying its best to mimic Natasha's voice.

"That's not my supper!" roared Baba Yaga, storming in. When she spotted the cat at the loom, she let out a deafening shriek.

"You flea-infested traitor! Where is the girl? Why didn't you scratch her eyes out when she tried to escape?"

The cat jabbed its paw in Baba Yaga's direction. "You let me starve, but that girl gave me her last bite of food. That's why I let her go."

Baba Yaga threw the cat a poisonous glare and charged out of the hut, heading straight for the dog.

"You foul mongrel! Why didn't you bite the girl as she escaped?"

The dog levelled a hard stare at Baba Yaga. "You make me hunt all day for something to eat. She gave me delicious bread."

Baba Yaga gnashed her iron teeth, and flew to the gate, delivering it a swift kick.

"Why didn't you squeak and alert me to her escape?"

The gate clanged shut angrily. "Not once have you oiled my rusting hinges, yet that girl took the time to tend to my aching joints. I've never felt less like squeaking in my entire life!"

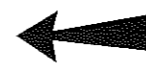
Baba Yaga clenched her bony fists and let out a ghastly howl that echoed through the air.

Natasha raced through the woods until the familiar sight of her cabin came into view. Relief flooded her body as she saw her father chopping wood outside. She barrelled into him and hugged him tightly, breathing in the sweet scent of sap and wood smoke on his shirt.

"Darling Natasha, where have you been?" he asked, stroking her hair.

Natasha explained how her stepmother had sent her to Baba Yaga's hut, and how she had come perilously close to finding herself on Baba Yaga's dinner plate. Her father hugged her closer, a tear rolling down his face.

The next morning, Natasha noticed that all of her stepmother's possessions had vanished from the cabin. Through the window, she saw a trail of slender footprints in the mud outside, heading away from their cabin and towards the city far in the distance.



Open the flap for the start of the story.

Unfold these pages before you start

2b

Fact Retrieval Questions

Answering FACT RETRIEVAL questions is like a treasure hunt — but instead of gold, you're hunting for nuggets of information that are buried in the text.

1. At the beginning of the story, how long had Natasha and her stepmother lived together for?

- two days
- two weeks
- two months
- two years

1 mark

Circle your answer.

2. What did Natasha's stepmother want to borrow from Baba Yaga?

1 mark

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3. What are Baba Yaga's teeth made of?

1 mark

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4. Write down **two** things that Natasha took with her to Baba Yaga's hut.

2 marks

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5. Why did Natasha put oil on the gate's hinges?

1 mark

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6. Read the paragraph beginning 'Beyond the gate...'

2 marks

Write down **two** things you are told about the chimney of Baba Yaga's hut.

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2b

Fact Retrieval Questions

7. Look at page 34.

Natasha approached Baba Yaga's house

- noisily
- quietly
- angrily
- cheerfully

1 mark

Circle your answer.

8. What was Baba Yaga doing when Natasha arrived?

1 mark

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9. Where was Baba Yaga's cat when Natasha first saw it?

1 mark

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10. How did Baba Yaga's cat help Natasha to escape?

1 mark

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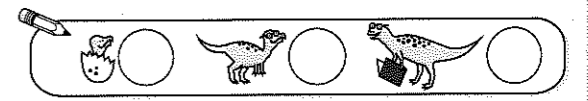
11. Why didn't Baba Yaga's dog stop Natasha from escaping?

1 mark

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A Tellastaurius would have no trouble answering these fact retrieval questions. How did you get on?



2a

Word Meaning Questions



There can be some really tricky words in WORD MEANING questions. If you're not sure what a word means, look at the sentence as a whole for clues to help you work it out.

1. Baba Yaga feasted on 'any children unfortunate enough to cross her path'.

What does the word 'unfortunate' mean in this sentence?

1 mark

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2. '...Baba Yaga will be delighted to see you...'

Which word could the writer have used instead of 'delighted' in this sentence?

1 mark

disappointed	determined	furious	pleased
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Circle your answer.

3. '...her iron teeth glinting in a sinister smile.'

Which of the words below is closest in meaning to the word 'sinister'?

1 mark

friendly	threatening	ugly	cheerful
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Circle your answer.

4. 'Natasha nodded hastily...'

What does the word 'hastily' mean in this sentence?

1 mark

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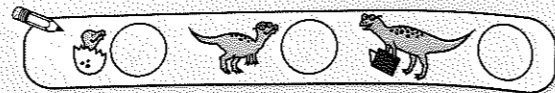
5. Look at the paragraph beginning 'The next morning...'

Find and copy a word from this paragraph that means 'narrow'.

1 mark

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Tellastauriuses can answer word meaning questions with their claws tied behind their backs. Can you?



E6FRF21

2c

Summary Question



SUMMARY questions ask you to bring together information from across the text — so it wouldn't hurt to read 'A Visit to Baba Yaga' again before answering this question...

1. a) Tick the option which is a main idea of the text.

Baba Yaga is kind to animals.

Cats are untrustworthy.

Baba Yaga is cruel.

Natasha loves her stepmother.

1 mark

b) Explain how this is shown in the text.

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2 marks

2g

Language Question



Writers sometimes choose fancier words than usual to make their stories more interesting — LANGUAGE questions are about these words and why they're used. Give this one a go.

1. 'The dog sniffed it cautiously, then snapped it up eagerly.'

Why do you think the writer chose the words 'snapped' and 'eagerly' here?

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1 mark

Tellastauriuses can summarise thirty things before breakfast, and they love fancy words. How about you?

