

The Curse of Cogston House

Jack strode up an overgrown path away from the park as though relishing a mission through the jungle, dodging the occasional stinging nettle with an effortless skip or jump.

"Come on, Luca. This is going to be epic!" Dipping his head and swiping away leaves like some intrepid explorer, he manoeuvred under a tree branch which hung over the narrow track.

Luca dawdled behind. Only a few minutes earlier, he had been perfectly happy practising his limited gymnastics moves upside down on the monkey bars. Now, he was torn between making the effort to keep up with his friend and deliberately getting left behind.

"Speed up, we're nearly there!" Jack called eagerly over his shoulder.

Luca wasn't at all sure that they should be leaving the park swings, where they had been allowed to hang out without their parents since both recently celebrating their eleventh birthdays in the same week. He was even less sure that he wanted to be venturing towards the Top End, as everyone called that part of the park grounds. He spun around to look behind him. The monkey bars were now way out of sight and the watery evening sun above was being muscled out of position by ever-darkening shades of grey, layering over each other in the sky like a collage.

"Maybe it's getting too late for today," Luca suggested hopefully. He looked down towards his watch. Scowling at the time – 10:31 – he shook his wrist vigorously. Clearly, the watch had stopped working, as it was only just beginning to go dark. He was going to need a new excuse. "We could come back tomorrow, when it's lighter. I think it's going to rain, from the look of those clouds, and Dad's making bolognese for tea. We don't want to miss that!"

Being two days older than his friend clearly gave him no superiority at all.

"Come on, forget about your stomach for a minute! I can see the scaffolding through this gap!" enthused Jack, trampling undeterred over the thorny undergrowth.



Luca followed him unhappily along the gradually dwindling path. Hands up in front of himself and elbows tucked in, he was now having to place his trainers precisely onto prickly stems to pin them down with his soles and avoid any contact with his bare arms or legs.

On the other side of a tangled row of bushes, the broken-looking building loomed. Fifty-foot-high scaffolding encased the crumbling walls of Cogston House like a rusty exoskeleton. The long, metal poles, bolted together at regular right angles, seemed as though they were keeping the whole house from falling apart.

About a hundred years ago, the house had apparently been quite a grand sight, belonging to a rich family who owned the entire park. Until about thirty years ago, it had still been inhabited but for decades now, it had wasted away, shedding scraps of brickwork and hiding itself under a cloak of creeping ivy. Even from the outside, it had a look of being infested with sadness.

Everyone had a story about Cogston House. No one quite knew what was true and what was rumour, and Luca didn't want to stick around to find out.

"Ow!" he squealed, as Jack reached back and hauled him through the gap he had just made in the twisted greenery. Luca rubbed at a fresh, pale scratch on his arm.

Unconcerned, Jack stood triumphantly, his hands on his hips, admiring the enormous house. His eyes swept the building as if they belonged to an ancient explorer who had just discovered a long-forgotten corner of the world.

"Told you it would be epic," Jack grinned.

"'Epic'? Looks like it's barely still standing up".

At home, Luca had heard his stepmum say that it was about time Cogston House was renovated, and that it would be good for the area if it was properly restored with access opened up again. In reply, his dad had said that it would be better to take a wrecking ball to it, after everything that had gone on. Luca didn't know exactly what 'gone on' meant, but he was now regretting mentioning the place at all to Jack.

The house had always been there, as long as both boys could remember, but was just somewhere that they had never visited. Of course, it had been Jack's idea to go and investigate, after Luca had brought it up that day at the swings. No doubt, Jack would know some story about the place, and if he didn't, he'd be

making one up anyway.

"Have you heard the story of what happened to those two girls here?"

Right on cue, thought Luca. Here it comes.

"I heard it from my cousin's next-door neighbour," Jack went on. "Her mum knew one of the girls from school, years ago, and her grandad worked in the factory that the Cogston family owned."

"What are you going on about?" Luca asked with a shake of his head, distracted by pulling furry goosegrass buds from his shoulders.

Before an answer came, the crack of snapping wood grabbed Luca's attention and he looked up, eyes widening, to see Jack grinning back at him from a narrow doorway at the side of the house. The splintered length of rotten wood in his hand matched a large panel, daubed with graffiti, which hung limply at angle where a proper door should have been.

"Come through here and I'll tell you," said Jack.

"Oh, I really don't think we should be doing that," Luca responded, looking around in search of any other signs of life. He flicked a creepy-crawly from his arm with his finger and rubbed manically at a telltale tickle on his head which suggested that more critters were making a new home in his hair. By the time that he'd dealt with them, Jack's feet were just disappearing after the rest of his body into the building.

A few raindrops were released from the bulging grey clouds. Inside Luca's head, a slow drumbeat was gathering momentum and a voice was screaming at him to turn around, yet his dry mouth barely let out a murmur in protest. Inwardly, he wished that an invisible force field would propel him backwards from the narrow opening in the doorway but instead, he swallowed hard and copied Jack's crouching motion to squeeze through the broken door frame.

*Extract from the Twinkl Originals short story
'The Curse of Cogston House'*



Questions

1. Match these nouns with the adjective that describes them.

creeping

stems

overgrown

path

prickly

ivy

2. Find and copy one word that means 'moved expertly'.

3. Label these events 1-4 in the order that they happened.

- ☐ Jack and Luca went to the park to play on the swings.
- ☐ The boys celebrated their eleventh birthdays.
- ☐ The boys arrived at Cogston House.
- ☐ Jack and Luca went to the Top End.

4. Find and copy one word that shows how Luca was feeling.

5. "Have you heard the story of what happened to those two girls here?"
Right on cue, thought Luca. *Here it comes.*

Why has the author written some of these words in italics?

6. How did the boys get into the house?

7. Read through the last three paragraphs. What impression do you get of Cogston House?
Which words or phrases give you this impression?

8. Which of these words best describes how Jack was feeling?

- ☐ bored
- ☐ anxious
- ☐ excited
- ☐ nervous

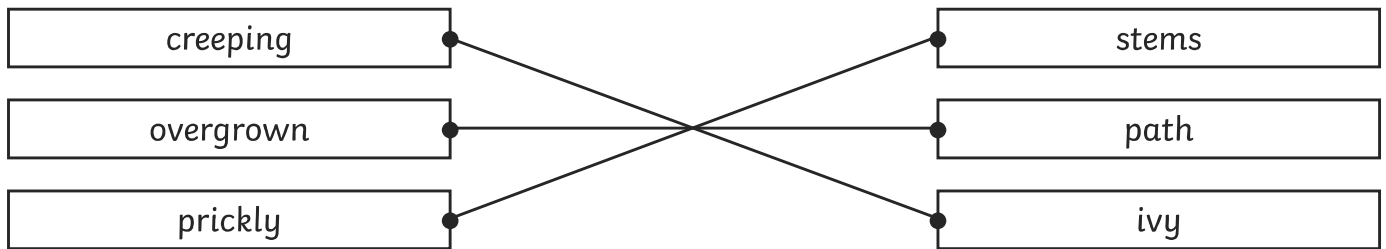
Explain your choice.

9. Why do you think Luca doesn't want to go inside the house?

10. What do you predict will happen next? Explain why you think this.

Answers

1. Match these nouns with the adjective that describes them.



2. Find and copy one word that means 'moved expertly'.

Accept 'manoeuvred' only.

3. Label these events 1-4 in the order that they happened.

- ☐ 2 Jack and Luca went to the park to play on the swings.
- ☐ 1 The boys celebrated their eleventh birthdays.
- ☐ 4 The boys arrived at Cogston House.
- ☐ 3 Jack and Luca went to the Top End.

4. Find and copy one word that shows how Luca was feeling.

Accept any from: torn; hopefully; unhappily.

5.

"Have you heard the story of what happened to those two girls here?"
Right on cue, thought Luca. Here it comes.

Why has the author written some of these words in italics?

These words are written in italics because they show Luca's thoughts. If they were in speech marks, Luca would have been saying them out loud.

6. How did the boys get into the house?

Jack pulled a piece of rotten wood out of a large panel, daubed with graffiti, on the side of the house.

7. Read through the last three paragraphs. What impression do you get of Cogston House? Which words or phrases give you this impression?

Children's own responses, justified using evidence from the text, for example: 'I think that Cogston House sounds dangerous because the text says that the scaffolding is keeping it from falling apart.'

8. Which of these words best describes how Jack was feeling?

- ☐ bored
☐ anxious
☒ excited
☐ nervous

Explain your choice.

Accept any evidence from the text which shows that Jack is excited, for example: 'I think that Jack is excited because he 'strode' around and called 'eagerly'. This shows that he was looking forward to getting to the house.'

9. Why do you think Luca doesn't want to go inside the house?

Accept any of the following: because he had been happy on the monkey bars; because it was getting too late; because it was getting dark; because the house looked like it was going to fall down; because his dad had said that something had 'gone on' there; because there were lots of rumours and stories about the house; because it looked like it was going to rain; because he didn't want to miss his dinner; because the house looked like it was infested with sadness.

10. What do you predict will happen next? Explain why you think this.

Children's own responses, justified using evidence from the text, for example: 'I think that Luca and Jack will go inside Cogston House because Jack grinned when he got to the house, implying that he was excited to continue exploring! Also, I think that they will find something horrible because the title suggests that a curse is inside the house.'