

Making Inferences

When things are not explained literally in a text, you can use clues to reach a logical conclusion. This is called inference.

Read the short story then answer the questions in full sentences.

The Wind in the Willows The River Bank (Adapted)

The Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters; then on ladders and steps and chairs, with a brush and a bucket of white paint; till he had dust in his throat and eyes, and splashes of white paint all over his black fur, and an aching back and tired arms. Spring was in the air above and in the earth below and even in his dark and simple little house. It was small wonder, then, that he suddenly threw down his brush on the floor, said, "Bother!" and "O blow!" and also "Hang spring-cleaning!" and ran out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above was calling him and he made for the steep little tunnel that would take him nearer to the sun and air. So, he scraped and scratched and scabbled, and then he scabbled and scratched and scraped, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself, "Up we go! Up we go!" till at last, pop! His snout came out into the sunlight and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

"This is fine!" he said to himself. "This is better than painting!" The sunshine felt hot on his fur, soft breezes stroked his heated brow, and after the loneliness of the cellar he had lived in so long, the song of happy birds fell on his ears almost like a shout. Jumping off all his four legs at once, in the joy of living and the delight of spring without its cleaning, he chased his way across the meadow till he reached the hedge on the other side.

Questions

1. How do we know that Mole did not like spring cleaning? How can you tell?

2. Why did Mole have 'an aching back and weary arms'?

3. What leads you to think that Mole lived under the ground? Find and copy clues from the text.

4. How does the description of the grass and the sun help to tell you the time of day?

5. Where do you think Mole was going? What do you think he was going to do?

Answers

1. How do we know that Mole did not like spring cleaning? How can you tell?
The Mole became fed up with spring cleaning because he says 'bother' and throws down his brush before rushing out. If he was enjoying it, he might have finished his painting job before going outside.
2. Why did Mole have 'an aching back and weary arms'?
Mole had been cleaning for a long time and standing on stools and chairs to paint with white paint. That would have made his back and arms ache because it takes a lot of effort to stretch up to clean and paint.
3. What leads you to think that Mole lived under the ground? Find and copy clues from the text.
I think that Mole lived underground because the text says that he needed to climb up the tunnel, 'nearer to the sun and air'; he describes that there is 'something up above'; and tells us that Mole says, "Up we go! Up we go!" as he popped out into the sun.
4. How does the description of the grass and the sun help to tell you the time of day?
I think it is almost lunchtime because the grass is described as 'warm' and the 'sunshine felt hot', so it must be quite late in the morning for a spring day to be so warm.
5. Where do you think Mole was going? What do you think he was going to do?
I think the Mole was going to find a friend to chat to as he had been working very hard by himself. He was fed up of painting under the ground so he was looking for company and to have a rest in the sunshine.

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It all seemed too good to be true. Here and there, through the meadows, he rambled busily along the hedgerows, across the woods, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting—everything happy, and busy, and occupied. And instead of having an uneasy conscience pricking him and whispering, “white paint!” he somehow could only feel how jolly it was to be the only lazy animal among all these busy citizens. After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other animals busy working.

He thought his happiness was complete when, as he strolled aimlessly along, suddenly he stood by the edge of a river. Never in his life had he seen a river before—this sleek, winding animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver—glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. The Mole was bewitched, entranced and fascinated. By the side of the river, he trotted as one trots when very small, by the side of a man who holds one spell-bound by exciting stories; and when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river still chattered on to him, babbling the best stories in the world, sent from the middle of the earth to be told at last to the hungry sea.

Questions

1. Why would Mole have an 'uneasy conscience'?

2. Do you think that Mole really believes that it is better to be resting on holiday, or watching others work? Why?

3. Why had Mole 'never...seen a river before'?

4. What does the description that the river 'chattered' tell you about how it sounded?

5. How could the river tell stories of the world if it was located in one place?

Answers

1. Why would Mole have an 'uneasy conscience'?

Mole has been working hard and he may feel like he has to keep working as all the animals that he sees are busy with their jobs. He may have a nagging feeling that he should be working rather than enjoying the fresh air and sunshine.

2. Do you think that Mole really believes that it is better to be resting on holiday, or watching others work? Why?

I think the Mole seems very happy to be resting as it says, 'he somehow could only feel how jolly it was to be the only lazy animal', and 'best part of a holiday is...to see all the other animals busy working.'

3. Why had Mole 'never...seen a river before'?

Mole had never seen a river before because he spends most of his time in his underground tunnels and burrow.

4. What does the description that the river 'chattered' tell you about how it sounded?

I think that describing that the river 'chattered' tells the reader that it sounds friendly and easy to get along with. The author also uses the word, 'babbling' to describe the sound and that is also a sociable way to describe how someone talks. Giving the river pleasant human qualities makes it sound like a good friend.

5. How could the river tell stories of the world if it was located in one place?

The river could tell stories of the world because the riverbed and bank will stay in one place, but the water in it will flow out to the sea and eventually, around the world in the oceans and maybe back to the riverbank where Mole is again, ready to tell its stories.

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...As he sat on the grass and looked across the river, a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water's edge, caught his eye. Dreamily, he fell to considering what a nice snug dwelling-place it would make for an animal with few wants. He was fond of a bijou riverside residence, above flood level and remote from noise and dust. As he gazed, something bright and small seemed to twinkle down in the heart of it, vanished, then twinkled once more like a tiny star. But it could hardly be a star in such an unlikely situation; and it was too glittering and small for a glow-worm. Then, as he looked, it winked at him, and so declared itself to be an eye; a small face began gradually to grow up round it, like a frame round a picture.

A brown little face, with whiskers.

A grave, round face, with the same twinkle in its eye that had first attracted his notice.

Small, neat ears and thick, silky hair.

It was the Water Rat!

Then the two animals stood and regarded each other cautiously.

"Hullo, Mole!" said the Water Rat.

"Hullo, Rat!" said the Mole.

"Would you like to come over?" enquired the Rat presently.

"Oh, it's all very well to talk," said the Mole, rather sulkily, he being new to a river and riverside life and its ways.

The Rat said nothing, but stooped and unfastened a rope and hauled on it; then lightly stepped into a little boat which the Mole had not observed. It was painted blue outside and white within, and was just the size for two animals; and the Mole's whole heart went out to it at once, even though he did not yet fully understand its uses.

Questions

1. How do you think Mole felt as he saw something move on the opposite bank?

2. Why did the animals 'regard each other cautiously?'

3. Why did Rat wait until 'presently' to invite Mole to the other side of the bank?

4. What do you think the Mole was feeling when he saw Rat's boat? How do you know?

5. When the Mole and Rat got back to Rat's home, what do you think they might do?
Give reasons for your opinion.

Answers

1. How do you think Mole felt as he saw something move on the opposite bank?
I think Mole would feel curious and interested by the movement on the opposite bank. The author uses words like 'dreamily' when Mole was thinking that it would be a lovely place to live and 'twinkling' to describe its appearance. He does not seem afraid or anxious at all.
2. Why did the animals 'regard each other cautiously?'
The animals had not met before and eying each other cautiously would be their way to check to see if they were a friend or an enemy to each other.
3. Why did Rat wait until 'presently' to invite Mole to the other side of the bank?
The Rat was going to wait until he was sure the Mole was not an enemy before inviting him over to the other side of the bank. 'Presently' is a way of saying that he did not rush into things, but waited until he was sure that Mole would not be a threat.
4. What do you think the Mole was feeling when he saw Rat's boat? How do you know?
I think the Mole fell in love with the boat as soon as he saw it because it says 'his whole heart went out to it at once' even though he did not really know what it was for.
5. When the Mole and Rat got back to Rat's home, what do you think they might do?
Give reasons for your opinion.
I think that Rat and Mole would get to know each other when they arrived at Rat's home. If Rat did not want to be friendly, he would not have invited Mole and offered to help him get across the river. If Mole did not want to be friendly, he would have declined the offer to visit Rat's home.