

WARNING:
CONTAINS
SPOILERS!

Wren



Discussion Notes

'The first time I heard my house sing' is the opening line of the book. What do you think a house singing would sound like? Is it possible? How would you react?

Why does Pa pressure Wren to become a 'proper young lady' and says she needs to study 'poetry, needlework, flower arranging, cookery classes [...] and learning one's place' (p.21) What does this tell you about education in the 1870s? Would Wren's brother Tudur study the same subjects and if not, why?

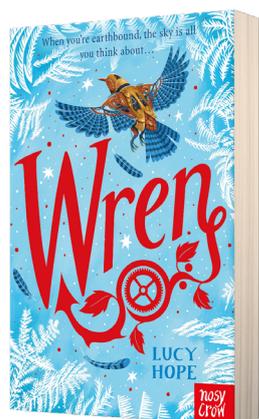
Pa says to Wren that she is 'incapable of accepting [her] limitations'. (p.10) Why does he say this? What does he think her limitations are?

'I can't imagine what it must be like to fly higher than a house, to look down on the world from above, like a god. The thought of it makes my heart soar' (p.36) Why is Wren drawn to the idea and experience of flying? What does it mean to her?

Have you ever flown or soared through the sky – in a plane, for example, or even a rollercoaster or on a trampoline! – and can you describe how it made you feel?

Pa arranges for Wren's head to be compared to their ancestor's skull in the church. Wren feels humiliated. Why would Pa arrange this as a 'surprise'? And why do you think Pa cares so much about his family history? (Chapter Five)

At the beginning of the book, Medwyn and Wren are not friends. Discuss what brings them together as the story develops and how their friendship grows? Are there any key moments you can remember in their friendship?



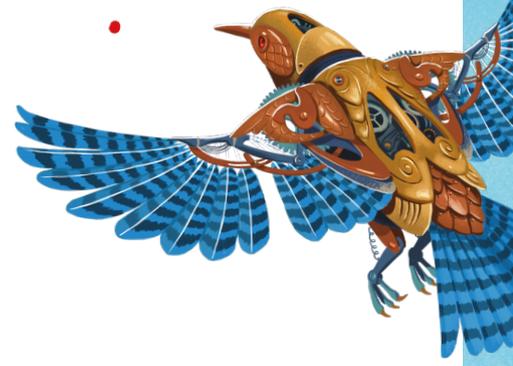
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Wren realises that building a flying machine would help her *'escape all of this'* (p.65). Discuss what Wren wants to prove by flying and how it could help her.

Emrys explains that the strange song from the house is a *'cry for freedom'* (p.61). Can you think of what this means for Wren and the house? How are they alike?

Pa says to Wren *'This is exactly your problem, Wren! Your blind refusal to accept who and what you are. You make no effort whatsoever to embrace your responsibilities.'* (p.110) What do you think Wren's responsibilities are? You might want to think about her family history, being a girl, and her home.

'It is a terrible thing to be so shackled when all you wish for is to soar up into the clouds, as free and high as a bird.' (p.125) Discuss who or what in the book is seeking freedom – there may be more characters than you first expect!

What do you learn about Ma and Aunty Efa's daredevil stunts in the book? Does this help you to understand why Pa doesn't want Wren to go out in her boat or use the flying machine?

When Wren flies she can feel the presence of her Ma – *'She's with me!'* (p.52). Why does flying bring her closer to her Ma?

Were you surprised to discover the secret that was living in the house? What signs did you spot that indicated something strange was going on?

Does your opinion of Pa change at the end of the book? Why?

How did the end of the book make you feel?



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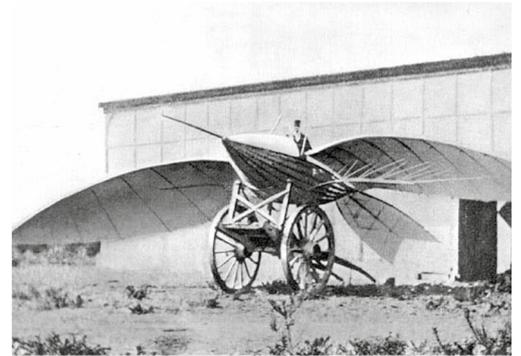


Discussion Notes

Group Activities

Newspaper Report: First Flight in France!

Wren's flying machine 'Phoenix' is inspired by a real glider designed by Jean-Marie Le Bris in 1856 called the *L'Albatros artificiel*. His flying machine was placed on a cart towed by a horse, and he lifted up from the beach at Sainte-Anne-La-Palud, Finistère, in France. It's reported he flew to a height of 100 metres and for a distance of 200 metres. This is believed to be the first ever flight where the craft flew higher than its point of departure – i.e. not as a result of someone jumping off a tall building and gliding or tumbling to the ground.



Can you write a newspaper report of Jean-Marie Le Bris' first flight in 1856?

- Research Jean-Marie Le Bris and see what extra facts you can find
- Write a catchy headline to grab readers' attention
- Include all the key facts: what happened, where it happened, who was involved, why was this moment so special?
- Eyewitness accounts: Can you imagine interviewing Jean-Marie Le Bris – how would he have felt flying? Also imagine interviewing someone watching the flight from the ground – what would that have looked like?
- Include a picture too if you like

Create a magical house collage

Wren's house plays a huge role in the book! Can you design your own house with a story? Start by thinking about why the house was built and who originally built it. Where is it – by the mountains, by the sea, in a town, for example? Does the house have a secret or any unusual features? Using different papers and materials available as well as your drawing skills, can design your house together – labelling its key features, facts and rooms. Give your house a name! Maybe this could inspire you to start writing your own story set inside the house.

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Get to know the characters

In your group, pick one of the characters from the book:

For example: Wren – Aunty Efa – Medwyn – Emrys – Pa

Can you fill out the character profile for them below.

Share your profiles together as a class – did you learn anything new about the characters and the story?

My Character Profile

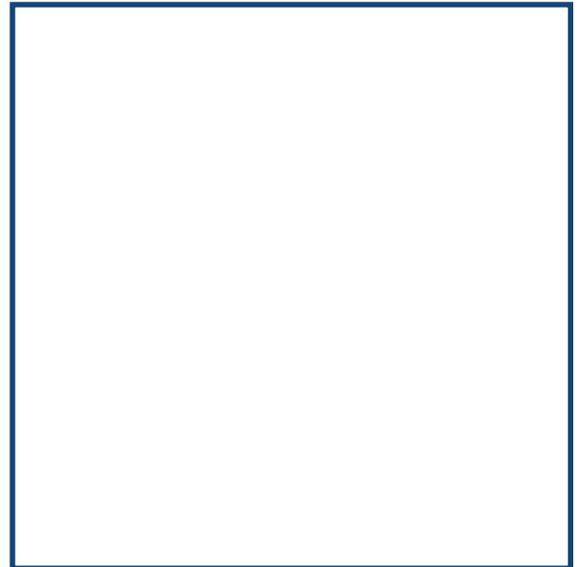
Name:

Describe your character's personality:

Key interests and skills:

Key moments involving your character:

Did your character change by the end of the story? If yes, in what way?



Draw a portrait of your character