

The Punnie by Sheena Blackhall

‘You’re so fond of wasting time, Neil Paterson,’ said Miss McTavish, ‘you can spend the whole morning doing just that. As your punishment for not handing in your homework today, you can sit and twiddle your thumbs in the classroom on Friday while the rest of the school visits the Dinosaur Exhibition.’

Could she nae hae gaen me an ordinary punnie, like lines, or sums, or missin gym? Bit na, nae her. Nae Miss McTavish. My ma says Miss McTavish maun ett nasty peels tae makk her sae illnayturet. Ye dinna need tae watch a horror movie tae get a fleg – jist come intae oor class an see Miss McTavish. Frankenstein’s monster himself wid rin frae HER.

‘Dinna fash yersel, ma loon,’ ma da tellt me. ‘Yer cousin, Dauvit, saw the dinosaur exhibition doon in Embro. He says it’s jist a puckle clockwork beasties that hodge frae ae fit ontae anither an gie a bit roar. He says he’s haen mair excitement at a Sunday school picnic on a weet Setterday efterneen.’

Bit I kent da jist said thon tae cheer me up, and I wis gey hinin-luggit last Friday fin the ither loons an quines gaed ontae the bus wi their packed lunches. ‘Never mind, Neil,’ said Maisie Duthie, ‘Ye’ll be haein schule denners. Likely it’ll be mince an tatties, wi ice cream efter.’

‘Ay,’ quo Sannie Birnie, ‘I’ll bring ye back dinosaur’s tae clippins if I win near enough.’ I brichtened up at yon. Efter the class hid line up like a raw o penguins, Miss McTavish roared an gurred at them aa a whyle.

‘There will be NO carry-on at the exhibition,’ she warned them. ‘I haven’t forgotten it was one of this class who ate a tin of chocolate gifted by Queen Victoria to her gallant Gordon in Africa. I only hope the person concerned had an extremely sore tummy.’

She kent fine it wis me, tho she cudna prove it. The Gordon Highlander Museum shouldna leave oot chocolates tae tempt bairns, even if they ARE a hunner year aul.

Aff they set fur the bus leavin me masel in the classroom. I wis gey weariet bidin there, I tell ye. I powkit about ma desk, an caad the styew frae the blackboard clot, an drew a picture o Miss McTavish on the

boord wi a mowser that suited her rale weel. Bit syne I even grew scunnered o yon. I put ma heidie doon on ma desk an shut ma een.

Tam Forbes, the jannie, powked his heid roon the door. ‘Weel, weel, if it’s nae Neil Paterson – the verra loon I wis wintin. Maisie Duthie telt me ye waur here.’ I cockit ma lugs an listened. Tam Forbes is a fine jannie.

Aabody caas him Quasimodo cause he rings the bell an his a gammie leg, bit he disna rage or girn like Miss McTavish – I’ve seen couthier Rottweillers than Miss McTavish! ‘Ye see, Neil,’ said Tam, ‘Friday’s the day I redd up the classroom pets for the wikken. Nane of the cleaners will dae it since Class 3’s rat, Speedy, ran aff an ett the register. Bit a big loon like you, ye’d hae the job daen in nae time. There’s 50p in my pooch for ye if ye’re feenished afore dennertime.’ I didna need twa tellins – I wis aff like a hare tae Room 1, Miss Innes’s class, far the infants bide. Miss Innes keeps a rubbit caad Fuskers in a run in the neuk – a richt bosker o a beast wi lugs as big as bananas. Efter I gaed Fuskers clean strae an a sup carrots an lettuce I tuik him up in ma bosie an we toured the classie. The littlins are daein a project on fishin, seein oor schule’s in Aiberdeen, tho if ony o yon fish on the waa swam inno a net they’d caa a hole in it as big’s a barrel. It’s herrin we hae in Aiberdeen, nae sharks, bit I suppose the infants hae a job cutting oot wi shears. Fuskers wis rale teen wi the fish, bit fin he tried tae chaw the mobile o the fishin fleet, I tuik him back tae his run an left him there fur bein ill-tricket.

Room Fower’s Miss Mitchell’s classie. They hae twa gerbils caad Bacon an Eggs. Bacon’s broon an Eggs is fite an they baith lowp like puddocks! The gerbils bide in a plastic hoose like a kinno gerbil multi-storey – wi their ain playgrun tae keep them entertained. Miss Mitchell’s class are daein a project on North Sea ile. My da wirks aff shore on a rig, sae I wis rale diverted raikin aboot in Room Fower. There wis a muckle paper mashe model o a rig, wi paper divers at its foun an toilet rolls for gas pipes leadin frae the boddom tae a muckle chart on the waa aside Bacon an Eggs’ hoose, wi aa different eeses o ile that wid jist bumbaze ye. I lat Bacon doon the pipes an Eggs efter him an they’d a fine dander roon the rig while I cleaned oot their hoose an teemed some seeds inno their bowl. I bedd a guid while in Room Fower, luikin ower the charts an picters o the ile fields, syne I caught Bacon an Eggs on the rig wi a jam jar an teemed them inno their hoose.

By half past ten I'd twa mair classies tae gang till! The Deputy Heid's in Room nummer sax, that's Mr Bruce. I'd tae be gey cannie wi his pets – the Primary 7s are breedin puddocks an the taddies hiv new-grown legs wi the tails nae drappit aff their docks yet. The watter wis glaury an slivery. I'd tae watch an nae loss ony puddocks doon the sink cheengin the watter. An they need a sup meat anna, fur they turn intae cannibals an ett ane anither if they're hungeret.

Mr Bruce his a muckle collage on the back waa. 'The Silver City by the Sea: Aberdeen Through the Ages'. There's war poems on't be local fowk, an the toun motto 'Bon Accord', an the coats o arms o the gentry. Ower in a far neuk Mr Bruce hid a clan map wi the North East tartans on it – Gordon, Farquharson, Forbes, and a when mair. He'd a tape recorder ahin the door wi tales o Auld Aiberdeen on it – aa about bogles an warlocks an even slavery. I didna think Tam Forbes, the jannie, wid gee his ginger if I jist sat doon a while an listened till't. I wish I hid Mr Bruce as a dominie an nae Miss McTavish – some o yon tales wad hae made yer hair curl they war that feary.

The hinmaist pet wis the quatest, Tibbie the tortoise in Room 10, Mrs Hardie's class. 'Dance Around the World' wis her project. I thocht you wad be gey borin for the loons fin I saw the picturs o ballerinas an Heilan dancers, Dutch clog dancers, an Indian temple dancers. Bit ower bi the blackboord the class hid papered the waa wi aa ma best singers....Madonna, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston an a puckle mair. Fin I pit on Mrs Hardie's tape recorder the tap twenty records blared oot, rap, an rave, an disco tunes.

Seein naebody wis there tae watch me, I practised ma disco dauncin. There's a junior disco at the youth club on Setterday nicht an I'd like tae daunce wi Maisie Duthie if she'll let me. Tibbie the tortoise didna think much o the soun, bit I didna forget ma job. I dichtit her shell wi a polish clot in time tae the music. I think she wis gled tae gang back inno her cosy boxie o strae.

Syne Tam Forbes chappit on the door. 'I didna ken ye were a disc jockey in the makkin,' quo he. 'It's jist as weel we've the schule tae wirsels. Here's 50p fur reddin up the pets an twa packets o monster munch crisps fur missin the dinosaurs.'

Maisie Duthie an the rest o the bairns cam back efter dennertime. “Puir Neil,” quo she. ‘Wis ye awfu scunnered bidin yersel?’

I didna say ay an I didna say na fur Miss McTavish wad hae bin in a fizz if she kent the kinno foreneen I’d haen tae masel.

‘Ye cud mak up for it bi letting me dance wi ye at the disco,’ I telt Maisie. ‘An ye can tell me aa about the dinosaurs on the wye hame.’

‘Tae tell the truth,’ quo Maisie, ‘we niver saw the dinosaurs. The bus broke doon at the Brig o Don an bi the time a new bus arrived it wis time tae gang back tae schule.’

So I niver DID get a dinosaur’s tae-clippings, bit there wis a plastic brontosaurus in ma packet o Monster Munch that naebody else in the class hid gotten!

Learning Resources

Reading

Read the story and/or listen to the audio file.

If there are unfamiliar words, try to work out what they mean according to their context, or look them up using a Scots dictionary – you can use an online Scots dictionary at www.dsl.ac.uk.

Understanding

1. Why was Neil forbidden from going on the school trip?
2. Why did Neil not trust his dad when he said that the dinosaur exhibition wasn't any good?
3. What evidence is there to suggest that Neil has misbehaved on school trips in the past?
4. What nickname does the jannie have, and why?
5. In the end, why is Neil glad that he had to stay at school?

Listening and talking – group discussion

Discuss the following points in a pair or group:

1. Have you been on a school trip? Did you enjoy it? Why?
2. Why is it important that children are allowed to go on school trips?
3. Was banning Neil from the school trip a fair punishment? Why? What alternatives could the teacher have chosen?
4. Is Neil a 'sympathetic character'?

Hint – a 'sympathetic character' is a character that the reader can relate to, like and support.