

Five Children and It

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Introduction

This ungraded summary is for the teacher's use only and should not be given to students.

The story

This is a story about five children and the wishes they are given by a sand fairy or Psammead. The children – Robert, Anthea, Jane, Cyril and Baby – move to the country with their mother. When they go exploring, they start to dig a deep hole. In the hole they discover a sand fairy who can grant them one wish a day. Anthea begins by asking for all of them to be very beautiful. All the children change except for Baby and when they go home for some lunch, their nurse Martha only recognizes Baby; she tells the other children to go away!

From now on each wish has unexpected consequences for the children. The children try to be more careful by first wishing that Martha must not see anything different about them after each wish. But when Robert wishes for them to be rich he does not consider how this might be achieved – he asks for lots of gold but the children find it difficult to buy anything with the gold coins. Eventually a policeman takes them to the police station. They wait for Martha to arrive by which time the wish has worn off and there are no coins.

The next wish, from Anthea, is for them all to have wings. They are thrilled to be able to fly high above the countryside but their problems begin when they get hungry. They are not sure whether it is right to eat the plums out of somebody's orchard – when the angry farmer approaches them he gets a shock. Anthea, who does not wish to steal anything, flies down to give him some money. They try asking people for food and drink but everyone is afraid of them. The children eventually fall asleep on top of a church tower and cannot get down. The vicar comes and unlocks the door for them and sends them home in a carriage.

The next day, Martha tells the children to stay out of trouble and in the house. But Robert goes out and makes a wish – that the children did not have to be with the Psammead to make a wish. When the children go out the day after, Robert has a fight with the baker's boy and afterwards wishes that he is bigger than the boy – he becomes three metres taller. He finds the baker's boy and puts him on top of a haystack. Later



he feels very hungry because Martha only gives him his usual portion of food. The children become bored because they cannot go anywhere because everyone will point and stare at Robert. Jane has an idea: the children take Robert to the fair to charge people to see him. The head man agrees to give Robert food and fifteen pounds but then keeps him prisoner for the afternoon while people pay to see him. At the end of the day Robert goes back to being a small boy.

The problems with wishes get very much worse when Jane wishes that her mother should have all the jewellery of Lady Chittenden, recently stolen by thieves. When mother finds all the jewellery, she does not believe their story about the sand fairy and thinks that the vicar's servant might be the thief. The children are very worried and ask the Psammead for several wishes at once in return for making no further wishes. They ask for Lady Chittenden to discover that all her jewellery has not been stolen after all; for Mother not to go to the police; and finally, for Mother and Martha to forget about the jewels.

The Psammead asks the children to wish that they will never tell anyone about the Psammead. But Jane's final wish is that she will see the Psammead again some day.

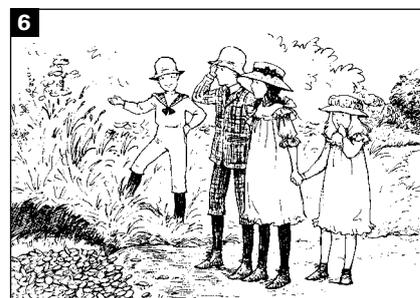
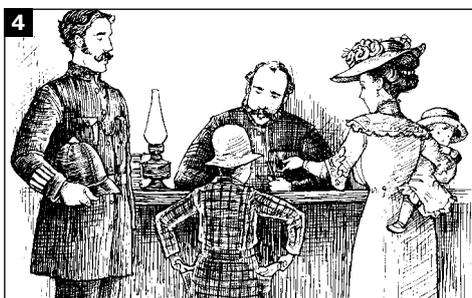
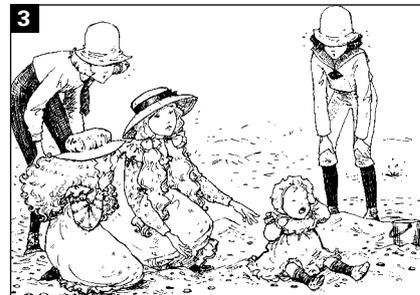
Background to the story

There is a long history of stories about fairies in Britain and most children are told that the Tooth Fairy will collect their 'milk' teeth when they fall out and leave them some money under their pillows! Fairies are usually described as good-natured, beautiful creatures with wings; most unlike the Psammead.

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Pre-reading activity

Match the words with the pictures



- a Anthea put her arms around the Psammead.
 b Baby began to cry loudly.
 c Cyril put his hands into his pockets – but they were empty!
 d Everyone hurried to get out of the carriage.
 e Everyone screamed and ran away when they saw them.
 f The gravel-pit was full – with new, shining, gold coins.
 g The gravel-pit was very large, with grass and flowers at the top.
 h Then she found a diamond necklace – and brooches – and bracelets.

To the teacher

Aim: To familiarize students with the setting

Time: 10–20 minutes

Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or to each pair of students. Ask the students to match the picture with the correct caption. When they have matched the pictures and the captions, ask them what the relationships between the people in the pictures are.

Then ask them:

- to look again at the pictures and put them in order as they think they occur in the story (tell them that picture number 1 is also first in the sequence);
- to predict, in general terms, the story from the pictures.

Key: 1d, 7g, 3b, 6f, 4c, 5e, 8h, 2a

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After reading activity

Order puzzle

Put these wishes in the order that they occur in the story.
Three wishes are missing – what are they?

THE CHILDREN WISH . . .	ORDER
a . . . for the Psammead to come out of the pit.	
b . . . for Martha not to see any changes in them.	
c . . . for mother not to go to the police.	
d . . . for mother to have all Lady Chittenden's jewels.	
e . . . for themselves to be beautiful.	
f . . . for wings so they can fly.	
g . . . that they themselves will never say anything about the Psammead to other people.	
h . . . to be very rich.	
i	
j	
k	

To the teacher

Aim: To order, revise, remember what has been read, summarise

Time: 10–20 minutes

Organization: Hand out the worksheet to pairs or groups of students. Ask them to put the following wishes in the correct order. There are three wishes missing – ask students if they can remember which ones they are.

Key: 1a, 2e, 3b, 4h, 5f, 6d,7c, 8g; the three missing wishes are: Robert wishes to be bigger than the baker's boy, Janes wishes to see the Psammead again, Robert wishes that the children did not have to go to the gravel-pit to make wishes