

The Door



The Door

Full Lesson Plan

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Read a suspense story, check your understanding and discuss the clues. Practise vocabulary from the story, take part in a debate and write your own continuation.

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Introductory Questions

1. If you discovered a strange door in a house, what would you do?
2. What would you do if the door was locked and someone had told you never to open it?
3. Why might someone keep a room locked?

The Door

They found it while playing hide and seek in their grandmother's house.

"Granny is no longer with us," Mum had said.

Peter wasn't quite sure what that meant. Perhaps Granny had gone to the big room where old people sat at tables and marked crosses on pieces of paper.

He had gone there with her once. It had been terribly boring, although an old man had given him a sherbet bonbon.

Now Mum was upstairs, sorting through Granny's things, and Peter was hiding from his little sister, Gemma.

He had chosen the basement because Gemma was frightened of it. Peter was frightened too, but he would never admit that.

He waited on the bottom step for what seemed like ages. Gemma didn't come. She didn't even open the basement door.

At last he climbed halfway up and heard her talking to Mum in the kitchen.

"Gemma!" he called.

The door opened a crack. Gemma peered down at him, her bright blue eyes framed by blonde curls.

“I’m not going down there,” she said. “There’s spiders. And a big snake.”

Peter glanced behind him. A snake would be brilliant. His friend Darren said snakes ate mice and sometimes even cats.

Granny had owned a cat, but Mum said it had gone away too.

Then Peter noticed something he hadn’t seen before.

Behind a stack of suitcases and cardboard boxes, a wooden frame rose from the basement wall. He could just make out the top hinge.

A door.

“Gemma,” he whispered. “Come and look at this.”

She shook her head. “There’s spiders.”

“I chased them away,” Peter lied. “They’ve all gone outside.”

“You’d better not be lying. I’ll tell Mum.”

“There’s another door down here. A secret one.”

Gemma leaned forward, gripping the frame of the basement doorway. Peter pointed into the shadows.

When she finally spotted it, her face lit up.

“Maybe it goes to the Magic Garden,” she said. “Where Iffy and Bang live.”

Peter had no idea who Iffy and Bang were. They were probably characters from one of her silly books. But he didn’t want to open the door alone, and having Gemma beside him would make it easier.

“Maybe,” he said. “Come on. Let’s find out.”

Gemma took one cautious step down. The stairs were steep, even for Peter.

He climbed back up, took her hand and helped her down.

A gust of wind blew through the cracked basement window. The door at the top of the stairs swung shut with a creak.

Gemma stopped.

“It’s all right,” Peter said. “We can go back up whenever we want.”

The single bulb in the ceiling cast a weak yellow light over the room. Old furniture stood beneath dusty sheets. The air smelled

of damp cardboard and something stale that Peter couldn't identify.

"Granny never liked us coming down here," Gemma said.

Peter remembered that. Whenever he had asked what was in the basement, Granny had told him it was full of rubbish and nothing worth seeing.

He looked at the hidden door again.

"Help me move these."

Together they pushed aside the smaller boxes. Peter dragged a heavy suitcase across the floor. Its wheels squealed, making Gemma jump.

"Sophie says the Magic Garden only opens for Wanderers," she said.

"Who are Wanderers?"

"I don't know. But Sophie does."

Peter wasn't listening. They had cleared enough space for him to stand in front of the door. It was old, with peeling varnish and a dark brass handle.

He turned the handle.

Nothing happened.

He pulled harder, then put his shoulder against the wood. The door didn't move.

"It's locked," he said.

Gemma looked disappointed. "Maybe we're not Wanderers."

Peter was about to give up when she pointed at the wall.

"What's that?"

A brass key hung from a nail, almost hidden behind a strip of loose wallpaper.

Peter took it down. The metal felt cold in his palm.

He pushed it into the lock and turned it. There was a heavy clunk.

For a moment, neither child moved.

Then Peter turned the handle and pulled.

The door opened slowly.

Beyond it lay a room without windows. Light from the basement stretched across the floor, revealing a narrow bed in one corner. It looked more like a cot. A thin blanket lay crumpled at its foot.

Peter leaned forward.

Something moved on the other side of the room.

At first he thought it was another pile of old clothes.

Then it lifted its head.

A woman sat against the wall. She was naked, covered in dirt and so thin that Peter could see her ribs. A chain ran from a metal ring around her neck to a bolt in the wall.

She stared at the children, her eyes widening.

“Help me,” she said.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Which three family members are at the house?
3. Where does Peter think his grandmother has gone?
4. What did an old man give Peter when he visited that place with Granny?
5. What is Mum doing at the beginning of the story?
6. Why does Peter choose the basement as his hiding place?
7. How does Peter really feel about the basement?
8. What does Gemma look like?
9. What does Gemma say is in the basement?
10. What does Darren say snakes eat?
11. What does Mum say happened to Granny's cat?
12. What does Peter notice behind the suitcases and boxes?
13. What lie does Peter tell Gemma to encourage her to come downstairs?
14. What does Gemma think is behind the hidden door?
15. Why does Peter want Gemma beside him when he opens the door?
16. What are the basement stairs like, and how does Peter help Gemma?

17. What makes the door at the top of the stairs swing shut?
18. What had Granny told Peter about the basement?
19. According to Sophie, who can enter the Magic Garden?
20. Is the hidden door locked when Peter first tries to open it?
21. Where do the children find the key?
22. What piece of furniture does Peter first see inside the hidden room?
23. What does Peter initially mistake the woman for?
24. What prevents the woman from leaving the room?
25. What does the woman say to the children?

Essential Vocabulary

Find these words and phrases in the story. Use the surrounding sentences to help you work out their meanings.

hide and seek	sorting through	sherbet bonbon
peered	hinge	gripping
cautious	steep	gust
creak	dusty	damp
stale	dragged	squealed
Wanderers	peeling varnish	brass
palm	clunk	cot
crumpled	naked	ribs
chain	bolt	

Vocabulary Exercise

Choose any unfamiliar words or phrases from the list. Write them in your vocabulary notebook, look up their meanings and write a sentence of your own for each one.

For example:

Hide and seek — *a children's game in which one person looks for the others while they hide.*

The children played hide and seek in the garden.

Cot — *a small, simple bed. In this story, the word suggests a basic bed rather than a comfortable one.*

There was a narrow cot in the corner of the room.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the story? Which moment was most effective?
2. In your own words, describe what happened.
3. How old do you think Peter and Gemma are? Which details support your ideas?
4. What do you think has happened to Granny? What does Mum's phrase "no longer with us" mean?
5. What kind of place does Peter remember visiting with Granny? What game were the people probably playing?
6. Why is Mum sorting through Granny's possessions?
7. Why does Peter pretend not to be frightened? Does this make his behaviour believable?
8. How does Gemma's belief in the Magic Garden affect your reaction to the ending?
9. Who might the woman be? Which ideas are supported by clues, and which are guesses?
10. Do you think Granny knew about the woman? What evidence supports your view? Can you suggest another explanation?
11. Why might someone have hidden the door behind boxes and suitcases?
12. What should Peter and Gemma do next, and why?
13. Which questions does the ending leave unanswered? Would you prefer a complete explanation?

Debate

Should Children Explore Forbidden Places

The motion:

Children should always obey adults when they are told not to enter a room or place.

Divide the class into two teams. Choose a chairperson to introduce the motion, give each team time to speak and keep the discussion orderly.

Team A

Support the motion. Argue that children may not recognise dangers such as steep stairs, unstable furniture or unsafe buildings. Adults may also have good reasons to protect private spaces. Explain why asking a trusted adult is better than exploring alone.

Team B

Oppose the word “always” in the motion. Argue that children should be able to question rules and report anything suspicious. Explain whether there are circumstances in which seeking help or challenging a rule is necessary. Consider how children can act responsibly without putting themselves in danger.

Prepare your main arguments and examples. Refer to Peter and Gemma's discovery, but remember that the story does not tell us who imprisoned the woman.

Each team presents its arguments. Allow time for replies and questions, then take a class vote.

Writing

Continue the story from the moment the woman says, “Help me.”

Peter and Gemma have discovered a woman chained inside a hidden room. What happens next?

1. Who is the woman?
2. What do Peter and Gemma do?
3. What does the woman say or do?
4. How does Mum react when she learns about the discovery?
5. What explanation will you give for the hidden room?

Use details from the original story so that your continuation feels connected to it. You may invent answers to the unanswered questions, but make your explanation consistent with what the children have already seen.

Read your continuation aloud or exchange it with a classmate. Ask for feedback on the clarity of the events, the use of story details and the ending.

Reading Comprehension Answers

1. In their grandmother's house, mainly in the basement.
2. Peter, his little sister Gemma and their mother.
3. He thinks she may have gone to the big room where old people mark crosses on pieces of paper.
4. A sherbet bonbon.
5. She is upstairs, sorting through Granny's things. Later Peter hears her talking to Gemma in the kitchen.
6. Because Gemma is frightened of the basement and is unlikely to look there.
7. He is frightened too, but will not admit it.
8. She has bright blue eyes and blonde curls.
9. Spiders and a big snake.
10. Mice and sometimes even cats.
11. She says it has gone away too. The story does not establish what actually happened to it.
12. A wooden door frame and the top hinge of a hidden door.
13. He says he chased the spiders away and they have all gone outside.
14. The Magic Garden, where Iffy and Bang live.

15. He does not want to open it alone; having Gemma beside him would make it easier.

16. They are steep. Peter goes back up, takes Gemma's hand and helps her down.

17. A gust of wind through the cracked basement window.

18. That it was full of rubbish and there was nothing worth seeing.

19. Wanderers. The story does not explain who they are.

20. Yes.

21. Hanging from a nail on the wall, almost hidden behind loose wallpaper.

22. A narrow bed that looks more like a cot.

23. Another pile of old clothes.

24. A chain connects a metal ring around her neck to a bolt in the wall.

25. "Help me."

Credits

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