

## The Skeleton Key

Erik rang his grandparents' doorbell and silently wished the next four hours would go by quickly.

He didn't want to give up his entire Saturday afternoon at his grandparents' house where there were no kids in the neighbourhood.

"You're right on time," Grandma Bethany said, opening the door. "There's tea and cake in the dining room." Cake? At least the first ten minutes would go by quickly.

Erik hung his coat on the rack by the door and saw a strange looking key hanging on a hook. "Grandpa Bill, what's this funny key for?"

"That's a skeleton key. It opens the best room in this house," Grandpa Bill whispered so no one else could hear.

"It's the room I go to when your grandmother tries to make me help with the dishes."

"What's so special about the room?" Erik asked. "It's a game room," Grandpa Bill said. "Take the key and see if you can find the room by the time I finish my tea."

Erik grabbed the key and stared at it. "A skeleton key? It looks old." Erik decided the oldest things in the house were probably upstairs in the walk-up attic. He headed past the dining room and to the stairs.

Grandpa Bill sipped his tea and shook his head. Erik knew that meant he was going the wrong way.

He headed back to the front door where he'd found the key. Erik thought about the oldest part of a house. "The basement! It's the first part that's built."

He rushed to the basement door and looked at the lock. It was different from a normal lock. He slid the key inside and turned it. With a click, the door opened. Erik switched on the light and walked down the stairs. The basement was one giant room with a pool table in the middle and a dartboard on the far wall.

"Awesome!" Erik said. "Ever learn to play pool?" Grandpa Bill asked, coming down the stairs. "No," Erik said. "Well then, grab a cue from the rack and I'll teach you." Erik smiled. The next four hours were going to fly by.

Answer the questions below using the text above.

1. What is the setting of this story? (2 marks)

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2. Why didn't Erik want to visit his grandparents' house at the beginning of the story? (2 marks)

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3. Grandpa told Erik that the skeleton key opened... ( 2 marks )

- a. a trunk with secrets
- b. the basement door
- c. the attic door
- d. a game room

4. Why did Erik think the key would open the attic door? (2 marks)

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5. What is the author's purpose in writing this passage? (2 marks)

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6. What does the underlined pronoun it refer to? (1 mark)

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7. Circle **True/False** (1 mark each)

a) Tea and cake are waiting for Erik in the basement.

**True or False**

b) Erik thinks the key is 'Funny looking'

**True or False**

8. How does Erik spend the four hours he is at his grandparents' house? ( 1 mark )

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9. When does the grandfather say he goes to the best room in the house? ( 1 mark )

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<b>5</b>

## Part II: Long Comprehension

### *The Cartoonist* **Betsy Byars**

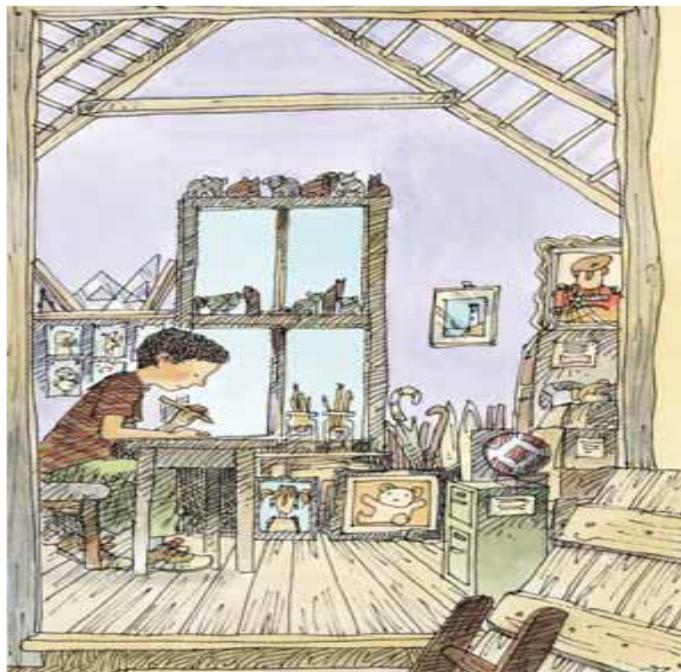
“Alfie?”  
 “What?”  
 “You studying?”  
 “Yes,” he lied.

“Well, why don’t you come down and study in front of the television? It’ll take your mind off what you’re doing,” his mother called.

He didn’t answer. He bent over the sheet of paper on his table. He was intent.

“Did you hear me, Alfie?”

“I heard,” he called without glancing up.  
 “Well, come on down.”



Alfie didn’t answer. He was drawing a comic strip called ‘Super Bird’.

In the first square a man was scattering bird seed from a bag labelled ‘Little Bird Seed’. In the next square little birds were gobbling up the seeds. In the third square the man was scattering bird seed from a bag labelled ‘Big Bird Seed’. In the next square big birds were gobbling up the seeds.

In the fifth square the man was scattering huge lumps from a bag labelled ‘Giant Bird Seed’. In the last square a giant bird was gobbling up the little man.

There was a smile on Alfie’s face as he looked at what he had done. At the top of the drawing he lettered in the words *Super Bird*. He was going to do twelve of these super comic strips, he had decided, one for each month. When he got through, he would call it ‘Super Calendar’. Maybe he would get it published, and later, when he learned how, he would animate ‘Super Bird’, make it into a film. Whenever he drew something, he always saw it in motion.

“Alfie?” his mum called again.  
 “I’m busy, Mum. I’m studying.”  
 “Well, supper’s ready.”

“Oh.”

“Come down right now.”

“I am. I just want to get my papers in order. If I leave them in a mess, sometimes I can’t...”.  
He trailed off.

He now had two strips for his calendar: ‘Super Bird’ and ‘Super Caterpillar’. He didn’t know which he liked best. He looked from one to the other, comparing them.

In the first square of ‘Super Caterpillar’, a giant caterpillar was happily eating New York City. In the second square he was happily eating America. In the third he was happily eating the world. In the last square, he was unhappily falling through space, his stomach a big ball. Alfie was especially pleased with the expression in Super Caterpillar’s eyes as he tumbled helplessly through space.

“Alfie!” his mother called loudly. Alfie knew she was at the foot of the ladder now.

She rattled the ladder as if she were trying to shake him down.

“I’m coming up there if you don’t come this minute.”

“I’m *coming*.”

He got up quickly and turned his papers face down on the table.  
He started for the ladder that led downstairs.

Coming down from the attic was like getting off one of those rides at the amusement park, Alfie thought. It left him feeling strange, as if he had moved not from one part of the house to another but from one experience to another, without time to get his balance.

Alfie and his family had been living in this house for seven months, and when Alfie had first seen it he had thought of the old rhyme about the crooked man who lived in a crooked house. Nothing about this house was straight. It had started as two rooms, and then another room had been added. A kitchen had been made from the back porch.

The roof was three different colours. The doors were crooked and so were the windows. The floors slanted. If you set a ball on the floor, it would roll to the wall. The house had been built by three different men, none of whom had ever had a lesson in carpentry.

The only thing Alfie liked about the house was the attic. That was his.

**Answer the questions below using the above text.**

1. What was Alfie doing at the beginning of the story? Tick **one** ( 1 mark )

Eating

watching tv

drawing

studying

2. What did Alfie's mother think he was doing at the beginning of the story? ( 1 mark )

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3. Put the pictures that Alfie was drawing in the correct order. (2 marks)

**The first one has been done for you.**

Big birds eating seeds

Giant bird eating man

Little birds eating seeds

Man scattering Little Bird Seed

Man scattering Giant Bird Seed

4. *There was a smile on Alfie's face as he looked at what he had done.*

Why did Alfie smile? ( 2 mark )

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5. What was Alfie hoping to do with 'Super Bird'? ( 2 marks )

Write **two** things.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

6. In the last square of 'Super Caterpillar', why was Super Caterpillar's stomach *a big round ball*? ( 1 mark )

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What was similar about Alfie's two cartoon strips? ( 2marks )

Give **two** things.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Write three descriptions of Alfie's house. (3 marks)

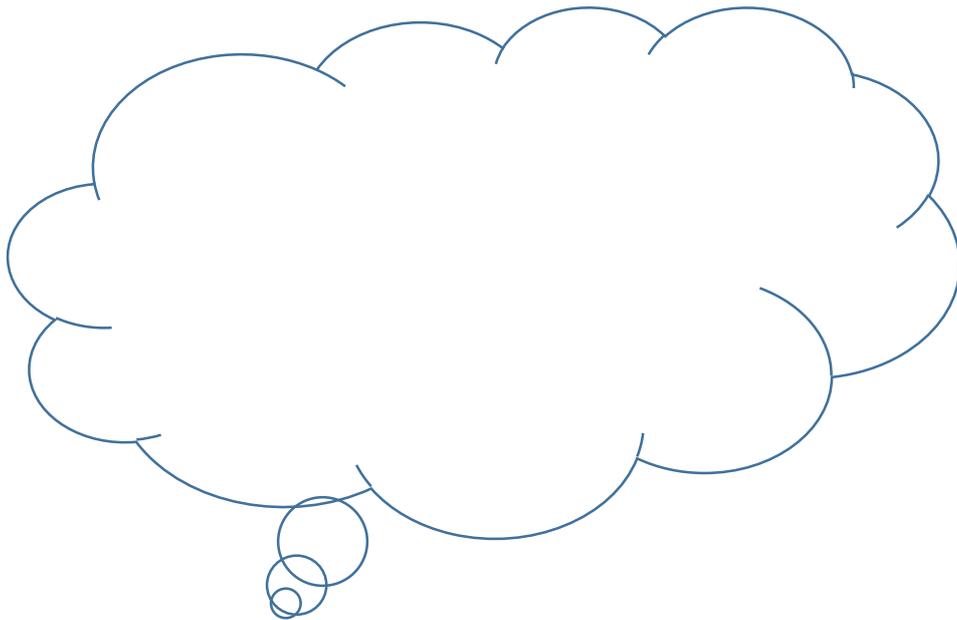
a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Fill in the thought bubble to show what Alfie might have been thinking as his mother shook the ladder. (2 marks)



10. Why did Alfie turn *his papers face down on the table*? ( 1 mark )

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11. What was it about Alfie's house that reminded him of the rhyme about the crooked man? ( 1 mark )

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12. How did Alfie feel about the attic? ( 2 marks )  
Explain your answer as fully as you can.

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### Part III: Vocabulary

1. Complete by writing the antonym of the following words. (7 marks)

Extraordinary \_\_\_\_\_

Challenging \_\_\_\_\_

Arrogant \_\_\_\_\_

Enormous \_\_\_\_\_

Move \_\_\_\_\_

East \_\_\_\_\_

Wet \_\_\_\_\_

2. Fill in the blanks with one of the words in the box. (8 marks)

<p><i>surgeon, motivation ,ancestors , insurance, treatment, malnutrition ,drought , surgery</i></p>
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a) \_\_\_\_\_ are people in your family a long time ago.

b) A new \_\_\_\_\_ has arrived, so now we can do some of the operations.

c) \_\_\_\_\_ is the reason for doing something

d) Because of not having enough food, children are suffering from \_\_\_\_\_

e) Due to the \_\_\_\_\_ most of the crops will die.

f. You cannot get any medical treatment in private hospitals without \_\_\_\_\_

g. *The sick man was given \_\_\_\_\_ from the doctor.*

h. The doctor performed \_\_\_\_\_ on his patients broken leg.

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