

Chapter 1 · A Stranger Moves In

Jazz and Mortimer are very excited to have new neighbours moving in next door, but when they arrive something isn't quite right. Why is there only one set of footprints? And what is Mrs Heckle hiding?

THE CURIOUS CASE OF DR SALAMANDER

Damian Harvey

CONTENT



READ!

→ **Reading comprehension questions:** 10 multiple choice questions to test text retrieval and reading comprehension. These questions may also be completed online at www.fictionexpress.co.uk

→ **Guided reading:** teacher's notes and a written response worksheet comprising 6 questions which allow for deeper response to the story, looking at personal response, inference and prediction



WRITE!

→ **"Inspire!" words** to encourage children to include them in their own writing

→ **"Spotlight!" word list** of the words highlighted and defined online

→ **Writing worksheet:** write a new story opening using the same characters but in a different setting

→ **Grammar worksheet:** verb forms



TALK!

→ **Voting options:** discussion points for each voting option

→ **Discussion activity:** give well-structured descriptions of new setting (link to writing)



EXPLORE!

→ **Activity:** crossword



Name: _____

1

Why did the twins go into the empty house?

- ☐ A. To play games on a rainy day
- ☐ B. To hide from the bully next door
- ☐ C. To keep an eye on the house with Dad

2

How does the empty house make them feel?

- ☐ A. Jealous that their house is not as big
- ☐ B. As if they are being watched by someone
- ☐ C. As if they are spies carrying out detective work

3

What is the twins' plan for getting to know the neighbours?

- ☐ A. Throw a party
- ☐ B. Build a snowman
- ☐ C. Take round a cake

4

How do the twins know that someone has arrived next door?

- ☐ A. They see footprints in the snow
- ☐ B. They hear strange music
- ☐ C. A car screeches to a halt outside the house at night

5

Why are they surprised to find people have arrived?

- ☐ A. They thought the snow would stop people arriving
- ☐ B. They have been watching closely and seen no one arrive
- ☐ C. The letter said no one would come until tomorrow



Name: _____

6

Who is the first person Jazz sees in the morning?

- ☐ A. A lady on a bike
- ☐ B. Dr Salamander
- ☐ C. Mr Ahmed with his dog

7

What does the lady on the bike do when she sees them?

- ☐ A. Slams shut the basket
- ☐ B. Greet the children cheerily
- ☐ C. Cycles away quickly

8

Who is the lady on the bicycle?

- ☐ A. Dr Salamander's housekeeper
- ☐ B. Dr Salamander
- ☐ C. Dr Salamander's wife

9

Why is Mum pleased about the new neighbour?

- ☐ A. It is someone famous
- ☐ B. He has children
- ☐ C. He is a doctor

10

What do the children spend most of their time doing?

- ☐ A. Playing in the garden
- ☐ B. Watching television
- ☐ C. Watching out of the window



1

Ask: What are the main events of this chapter? Agree that the children look out of the window, they see footprints and they meet Mrs Heckle. Compare this opening with more dramatic openings of other stories. Ask: What is the effect on the reader of a chapter all about two children watching and waiting? (It builds suspense, it covers Dr Salamander in mystery, it adds to the children's desire to meet him.)

2

Ask: How do we know that the children are excited about having new neighbours? (They wait by the window.) Ask: What does this tell us about the twins and their family? (Perhaps that nothing much happens to them, they have rather dull lives and so on.) Ask: What are the twins like? (They seem to have similar ideas at similar times.) Locate examples of the pair of them working together, for example arriving on the landing at the same time.

3

Ask: How does the author build tension without much happening? (Lots of whispering between characters, a detailed description of the house etc.) Ask: What is the house like? (It's been empty for years, it's old and creaky, the twins feel as if someone is watching them when they go inside, strange boxes are delivered.) Ask: What is the first strange event? (Footprints in the snow suddenly appear.) Ask: What is the second strange event? (The arrival of Mrs Heckle and her unfriendly behaviour.)

4

Ask: What does Mrs Heckle look like? (Like a raven.) Discuss other ravens in stories such as the witch in Disney's *Snow White*, the ravens at the Tower of London, ravens that live in spooky houses and so on. Ask: What do you think Mrs Heckle has in her basket? How does she behave? (She looks at them strangely, she is unfriendly, suspicious and secretive.) Why do you think this is? (Perhaps she has something to hide, perhaps she is from another planet!)

5

Ask: How does the weather add to the story? Discuss different options: it creates a sense of isolation around the two houses, it makes everything very quiet and cold, it creates a chilly atmosphere, and most importantly, it allows the children to track who has gone in and out in the snow. Ask: Is it important that Dr Salamander arrives at a time of strange weather?

6

Ask: Who or what do you think Dr Salamander will turn out to be? Will he be peculiar? Will he be dangerous? Discuss the children's ideas, encouraging them to explain their thoughts. Ponder other options: perhaps Dr Salamander doesn't exist at all? Perhaps he is the creature in the basket? Perhaps Mrs Heckle is Dr Salamander? Ask: What sort of story do we have here? (Mystery, fantasy, magical?)



Name: _____

1

What are the main events of this chapter?

2

How do we know that the children are excited about having new neighbours?

3

What makes the house and its owners seem strange?



Name: _____

4

What does Mrs Heckle look like?

5

How does the weather add to the story?

6

Who or what do you think Dr Salamander will turn out to be?



Here is some of the challenging or potentially unfamiliar vocabulary used in chapter 1 of *The Curious Case of Dr Salamander*.

You may wish to explore this vocabulary, to improve children's understanding of the chapter, and inspire and enhance the quality of their own writing. You might like to display the words in the classroom, and encourage children to use new vocabulary as part of the Write! worksheet tasks.

complained

creaky

huddled

odd-balls

plunged

rooting

slammed

tucked up



Find these words in chapter 1. Use the definition to check that you understand the meaning of the sentences you find them in.

avoiding – keeping away from

bothering – disturbing someone

buried – covered up

calm – not showing or feeling strong emotions

complained – sounded annoyed or unhappy about something

completely – another word for 'totally'

consulted – looked at

cotton wool – fluffy, often white, material originally made from cotton

dashed – ran very quickly

definitely – without a doubt

expected – believed that something was about to happen

fake – not real, pretend

fault – do something wrong

freezing – very, very cold

frowned – a facial expression that showed displeasure or concentration

glared – stared at someone in an angry way

groaned – another word for 'moaned' or 'grumbled'

heating – equipment that is used to warm up a building

heavier (snow) – falling thickly

housekeeper – a person who looks after and cleans someone else's home

huddled – crowded together

imagine – another word for 'think'

impressed – felt admiration and respect for something



insisted – said forcefully

interrupted – stopped someone from speaking by saying or doing something

landing – (in a house) the level area at the top of the stairs or between the floors

lookout – a watch

narrowing (eyes) – almost closing your eyes to focus on something or to show a feeling of anger or another emotion

odd-balls – strange people

peering – looking at something closely

plunged – pushed in quickly

private concert – a concert performed for a small, select group of people

raven – a large crow with thick black feathers

realised – another word for 'understood'

reappeared – came back into view

reassured – said in a way to make someone less worried

reminded – caused someone to remember something

removal vans – vehicles that are used to load and unload belongings when moving house

repeated – doing or saying something that has been done or said more than once

replied – answered back

rooting – looking for something

slammed – shut something quickly

spare key – an extra key, often to a house or building

spooky – another word for 'ghostly'

squawk – make a high-pitched sound like a bird

suspiciously – distrusting of someone or something

uncertain – another word for 'unsure'



Name: _____

A good story opening has setting, action and dialogue. Reread the opening chapter of *The Curious Case of Dr Salamander* and identify these three things. Now rewrite the opening three paragraphs of the story, keeping the characters and their dialogue but placing them in a different setting.

A large rectangular area for writing, enclosed by a dashed blue border. It contains 12 horizontal solid black lines for text entry.



Name: _____

Look at these sentences and underline the correct verb form. Don't forget this rule:
If the subject is singular, use 'was'. If the subject is plural, use 'were'.

1. "I thought the new people were / was moving in today," complained Jazz.
2. Now, someone were / was finally going to move into the house.
3. The snow were / was getting heavier.
4. "And it's time you two were / was in bed," added Mum.
5. After making sure no one were / was watching, she plunged one hand into the basket.
6. The road and the footpaths were / was almost completely covered.

Underline the subject of each sentence below. Is it singular or plural?
Write an 'S' or a 'P' in the box.

1. The house was old and creaky.

2. Jazz and Mortimer were already standing on the footpath
in front of their neighbour's house.

3. It wasn't until he was tucked up in bed that Mortimer
realised something.

4. Just as Jazz was about to open the front door,
Mortimer stopped her.



What does Mrs Heckle pull from out of the basket?

A

An old camera

Why do you think Mrs Heckle might have a camera in her basket? Have there been any clues to suggest what might be in the basket so far? What do you think the twins will make of Mrs Heckle's strange behaviour? What do you think will happen in chapter 2 if this is the winning option?

B

A huge snake

How might Mrs Heckle react to pulling out a snake from her bicycle basket? Are snakes usually friendly or dangerous animals? Have you ever seen or touched a snake? What did it look and feel like? What might this suggest the new neighbour is up to? Predict what will happen in chapter 2 if this is the winning option.

C

A twisted key

Why do you think Mrs Heckle has a key in her basket? What do you think Jazz and Mortimer will make of it? Does it give you any clues as to what Dr Salamander might be doing in the house? What do you think will happen in chapter 2 if this is the winning option?

→ Which option do you think would be the most exciting one for the next chapter of *The Curious Case of Dr Salamander*?

Discussion Activity

In pairs or a small group, read your new story openings to each other. Discuss the different settings you have created. What was the hardest thing about writing your new openings? What elements were easier to write and why? Are these the parts of your writing that you think work the best? Do your friends agree? What similarities and differences are there between your story openings? How do you think the change of setting has altered the narrative of the story?



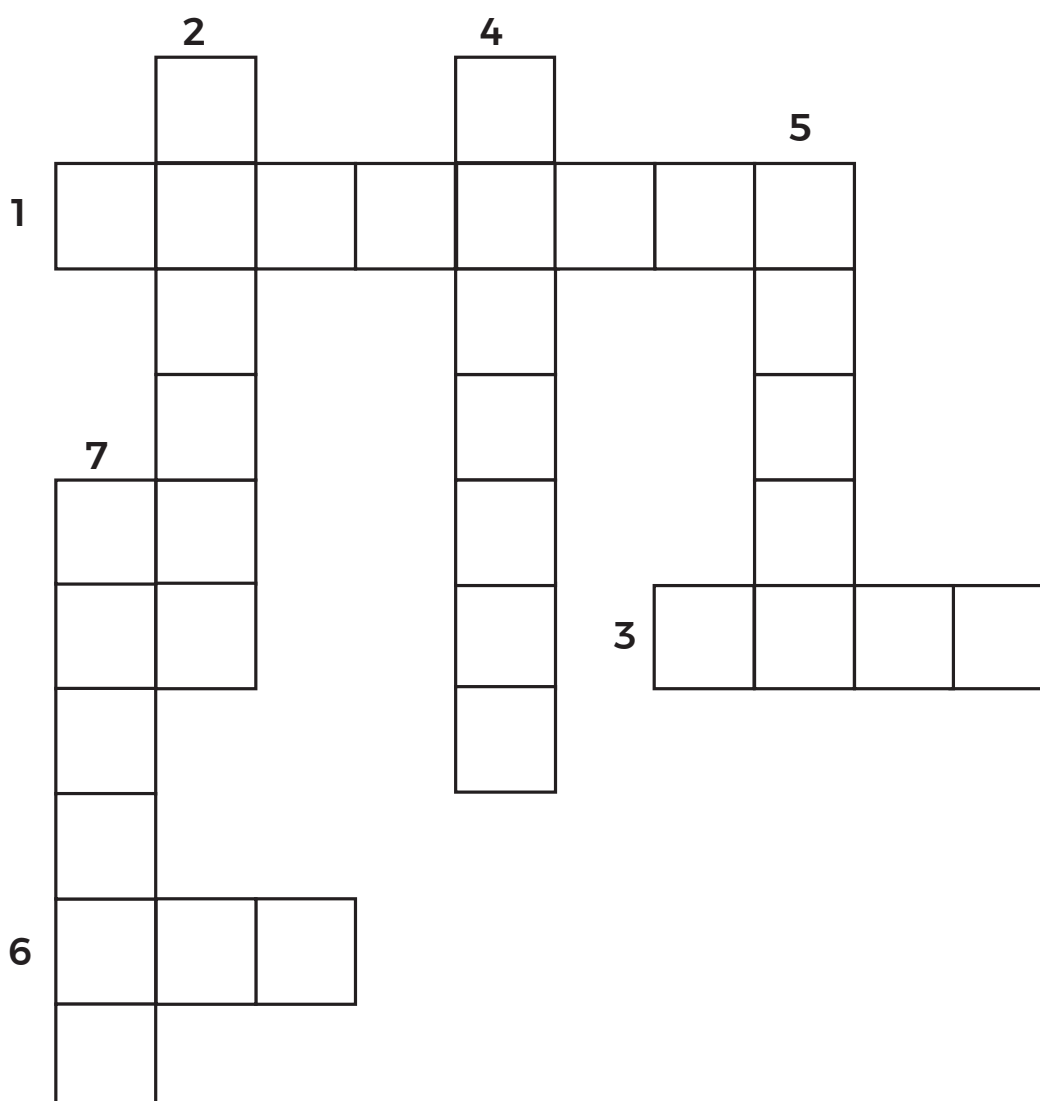
Name: _____

CLUES Across

1. What is Jazz's twin called? (8)
3. What is the weather like in this scene? (4)
6. What was Dad given when Mr Wells had gone? (3)

CLUES Down

2. What job does Mum think the new neighbour do for a living? (6)
4. How does Mrs Heckle get about? (7)
5. What bird do the twins think Mrs Heckle looks like? (5)
7. The twins think the house is old and _____. (6)



The Curious Case of Dr Salamander · Chapter 1 · A Stranger Moves In

ANSWERS

READ! Comprehension

- Why did the twins go into the empty house?
C. To keep an eye on the house with Dad
- How does the empty house make them feel?
B. As if they are being watched by someone
- What is the twins' plan for getting to know the neighbours?
B. Build a snowman
- How do the twins know that someone has arrived next door?
A. They see footprints in the snow
- Why are they surprised to find people have arrived?
B. They have been watching closely and seen no one arrive
- Who is the first person Jazz sees in the morning?
C. Mr Ahmed with his dog
- What does the lady on the bike do when she sees them?
A. Slams shut the basket
- Who is the lady on the bicycle?
A. Dr Salamander's housekeeper
- Why is Mum pleased about the new neighbour?
C. He is a doctor
- What do the children spend most of their time doing?
C. Watching out of the window

WRITE! Worksheet: Verb forms

- "I thought the new people were moving in today," complained Jazz.
- Now, someone was finally going to move into the house.
- The snow was getting heavier.
- "And it's time you two were in bed," added Mum.
- After making sure no one was watching, she plunged one hand into the basket.
- The road and the footpaths were almost completely covered.

- The house was old and creaky. [s]
- Jazz and Mortimer were already standing on the footpath in front of their neighbour's house. [p]
- It wasn't until he was tucked up in bed that Mortimer realised something. [s]
- Just as Jazz was about to open the front door, Mortimer stopped her. [s]

EXPLORE! Crossword

