

The sun beat down on his back as he rode the warm thermals high into the sky. Today was a good day for flying. Perfect weather conditions meant very little physical effort from him was required. From this height, he could survey his territory – all 155 km of it. His keen eyes scanned the ground, as even at this distance he would be able to spot a potential target. To the untrained eye however, this land would look like nothing more than a never ending sea of orange and yellow. Some would argue that the land was empty and that it was an impossible place to inhabit. Yet he knew better. This was his land and he knew every rocky outcrop, every shrub, every cactus and every dried up river bed. It was possible to survive here, to thrive even, if you maintained a healthy respect for this hostile but magnificent environment. This was his home. He had been flying these skies for the last 28 years and these were his skies: for the moment at least.

**E: Why was today a good day for flying?** The perfect weather conditions meant that very little physical effort was needed. Also, the warm thermals were helping to lift him higher.

**D: Who is our flyer? What clues are there to suggest this?** The children may suggest a bird of prey due to its ability to ride thermals, the physical effort required to fly, keen eye sight, territorial nature and need to look for prey.

**M: What does the word ‘thrive’ mean? Suggest TWO more words which mean the same.** To develop well in a particular area. Suggestions could include: flourish, prosper, succeed, blossom, bloom, grow well.

**S: What evidence is there to suggest that this is a desert environment?** We know that it is hot. The land is described as being orange and yellow. The author mentions the presence of cacti and dried up river beds, all of which can be found in a desert environment.

Today, he was appreciating the feel of the warm air as it rushed over his sleek, streamlined body. His wings were outstretched in a shallow ‘V’ shape, which was perfect for gliding and soaring. His dark brown plumage lay flat against his strong muscular body and his massive, bright yellow talons were tucked up out of the way – for now. Golden brown feathers adorned his head and the nape of his neck like an assassins hood. His small, yellow beady eyes were on constant look-out for possible prey or potential danger. He observed that the sun was rising higher in the sky and if he didn’t get to work soon, all the best pickings would be hidden away in safe, shady places.

**E: What is the purpose of this paragraph?** It confirms that the main character is a bird (golden eagle) and it describes what he looks like.

**M: ‘Golden brown feathers adorned his head and the nape of his neck like an assassins hood.’ Why were the feathers described in this way?** The feathers covered his head and neck like a hood would do. The word ‘assassin’ is associated with a killer which reminds us that this bird is a bird of prey.

With renewed purpose, he tipped his wing and changed direction. He was heading for an old, reliable hunting ground. He circled silently overhead and it wasn’t long before he spotted something: a rattlesnake. Rattlesnakes could be deadly and this was a big one but it was too good an opportunity to miss. His first strike would have to be quick and fatal if he was to stand a chance of securing a meal. The snake was quietly winding his way across the dusty floor, unaware of the Grim Reaper circling high above him. He had managed to catch a rat this morning and the combination of a full belly and the warmth of the sun, was making him feel complacent. The snake slithered contentedly towards the shelter of a nearby rock. He was in no hurry. Just to be sure though, he flicked his tongue out to check for danger. Something wasn’t quite right. He stopped and flicked his tongue out several more times. Yes, there it was again. There was a disturbance in

the air and the scent of something worrying. Suddenly, he caught sight of a shadow on the ground, bearing down on him quickly. His body reacted instinctively. As fast as lightening, he twisted himself into a protective coil, with his tail rattling and his fangs ready to strike. Just in time! He felt a strong draft of air as the bird swooped right over his head, before flapping frantically away, in a desperate bid to gain distance from the snake's deadly fangs.

**E: When attacking the snake, why does the eagles first strike have to be 'quick and fatal'?** He could see that the snake was big and he also knew that it could be deadly. If he didn't kill it quickly, he might risk being hurt or killed.

**S: Why is the bird referred to as the 'Grim Reaper'?** The Grim Reaper is the personification of death who appears to collect his victims. The author wants to remind us that the intention of the bird is the kill the snake.

**D: 'As fast as lightening' is an example of what? Write another example using the same theme of speed.** It is an example of a simile. Children write their own examples using the words 'like' or 'as' to compare one thing with another.

The eagle landed on a nearby ledge, in order to gain his composure. That was not the outcome he had hoped for but he was wise enough to know when it was time to cut his losses. He couldn't risk injury; there was too much at stake. He sat and rested for a while. The temperature was rising rapidly and any animal with any sense would be seeking out shade until dusk. He would have to try again soon. He stretched out his wings and propelled himself majestically from the ledge. A thermal lifted him high above the world, giving him an enviable view of the land below. He glided gracefully through the blue, cloudless sky as his eyes peered beyond the shimmering, distorted air in search of his next victim. It wasn't long before he spotted it. He would make sure his shadow didn't betray him this time.

**D: Why is it important for the eagle to try and hunt again soon?** The bird understood that as the temperature rose, animals would be finding shelter out of the sun. This would make it harder for him to catch anything.

**S: The bird 'propelled himself majestically'. What type of word is 'majestically' and why did the author choose to use this word?** The word 'majestically' is an adverb. It suggests that the bird is acting in some sort of grand or regal way, as we know that the bird believes that he controls all of the land around him.

**M: Why do you think the air is shimmering and distorted?** Distorted means to be pulled or twisted out of shape. Shimmering means to shine with a soft light. These are the characteristics of a heat haze. This is when distant objects appear obscured and distorted due to the heated air of a desert environment.

The ground squirrel seemed oblivious to his presence and that was how the eagle wanted to keep it. This target was fairly defenceless and should cause him no trouble. There was no time to waste. He eased himself into a dive and took aim at his quarry. As he neared his prey, he folded his wings out wide in order to slow his descent and uncurled his deadly yellow talons. To his immense surprise however, the ground squirrel ducked his left shoulder suddenly and darted off to the right at such a speed that the eagle only succeeded in snatching a claw full of hot sand. He staggered to a rather undignified halt on the ground. He needed to take stock of the situation. The ground squirrel had bolted towards the safety of a rather prickly looking cactus. It would be impossible for the eagle to follow him in there. The eagle hopped onto a tree stump and waited. Failure was common out here. Some days were better than others but today was turning out to be a particularly bad day. He could wait. He wasn't ready to give up on this one yet. This just required a more cunning approach. He perched momentarily and waited.

**D: Identify THREE words the author has used in this paragraph that mean the same as 'victim'. The author has used the words 'target', 'quarry' and 'prey'.**

**S: Even after two recent failures, the eagle's not ready to give up yet. Why do you think this is?** It says that 'failure was common out here' which suggests that this happens a lot. It also states that 'it was imperative that he secured his prey'. This suggests that there must be a really important reason for him to catch the ground squirrel.

**M: Why was the ground squirrel safe under the cactus?** We know that the cactus is prickly, so those prickles might injure the bird in some way. If the bird damages his wings he would not be able to fly. Eagles can be large birds so it is very unlikely that he could fit underneath.

The ground squirrel was well aware of what was waiting for him if he dared poke his head out from under the cactus. He was safe for now and he had no intention of moving anytime soon. He had shade from the sun whilst the eagle was sat out in the open, fully exposed to the dangerously high temperatures. He knew his best chance of escape would be to slip away under the cover of darkness but he was hoping that the eagle would have given up long before that – he had a family relying on him. What happened next took him completely by surprise and was certainly not part of his plan. He sensed a movement behind him and quickly realised that he was not the only one seeking shelter under this prickly cactus. He whirled around and came face to face with a rattlesnake, who was coiled and ready to spring. The ground squirrel had no choice but to dart out from under the protective prickles of the cactus. He inadvertently found himself in the open and darting across hot, barren land. He knew that there was an abandoned hole up ahead of him where he might be able to find safety. His heart pounded and his legs raced as fast as they could. 2 metres... 1 metre... he was nearly there! He wasn't quick enough though. Sharp, unforgiving talons gripped him firmly around the body and he was whisked high into the air and into eternal darkness.

**E: What does the word 'exposed' mean?** It means to be made visible.

**M: '2 metres... 1 metre... he was nearly there!' Why do you think this sentence is written like this?** The ellipsis works by pausing the reader in an attempt to represent the time between each distance. It could also suggest that the ground squirrel is out of breathe due to panic and exertion.

**D: The ground squirrel was whisked into 'eternal darkness'. What does this suggest has happened to the ground squirrel?** The word 'eternal' means lasting or existing forever. In which case, the author is stating that the darkness lasts forever which suggests that the ground squirrel has been killed.

**S: The eagle has now acquired his dinner but do you agree with his actions? Refer to the text to support your views.** Various responses supported by evidence from the text. Some may support the eagle because the text states that there is an important reason for him to obtain food. The eagle also needs to eat to stay alive. Some may disagree with his actions because it says that the ground squirrel was fairly defenceless and had a family relying on him.

It wasn't quite what the eagle had planned but the same end result had been achieved nevertheless. Who would have thought that the snake, who had outmanoeuvred him earlier, was to unwittingly help him capture his new prey? He now had the ground squirrel clutched tightly in his talons and he was finally able to head for home. He flew contentedly towards the distant cliffs where he had made his nest high up on the rock face. Unfortunately, he soon began to sense a change in the wind. His day was about to get even more challenging. It was vital that he reached his nest as quickly as possible. He could see the dust cloud approaching. Soon, the choking particles would swamp him and it would be impossible for him to see or breathe. He beat his powerful wings and flew with added determination; this food just had to reach the nest.

**E: Why is the dust cloud so dangerous?** The dust particles make it difficult to breathe and see. If the eagle can't see he might get lost or crash into something and injure himself.

**D: Why do you think it is so important for him to get the food back to his nest?** Various responses but the children might suggest that there is someone waiting there for him.

He was flying into the wind now and the going was really tough. Tiny grains of sand began to pelt his eyes and body. Not far now. He could do this. He gained altitude in an attempt to reach calmer air but conditions did not improve. He battled on. Through the dust he could just make out the very welcoming outline of his cliff. He couldn't risk coming in too fast, so he circled round, fighting the wind as he went, and swooped down towards safety. That was when he saw a sight that made his heart melt - his family. His mate and two baby eaglets made high-pitched whistling noises at his safe return, particularly as he had brought much needed food with him. This was why he faced failure on a daily basis. This was why he willingly risked injury or attack. This was why he would continue to endure this wild and tough environment and why he would do it all again tomorrow. For the moment however, he would rest, eat and sit out this storm in the company of his precious ones.

**M: Has your opinion of the golden eagle changed now that you have read the last paragraph of the text? Use evidence from the text to support your views.** Various answers with reference to main events throughout the text.

**S: Would you recommend this text to others? Why/why not?** Various answers with reference to the text.

## Desert Life

The sun beat down on his back, as he rode the warm thermals high into the sky. Today was a good day for flying. Perfect weather conditions meant very little physical effort from him was required. From this height, he could survey his territory – all 155 km of it. His keen eyes scanned the ground, as even at this distance he would be able to spot a potential target. To the untrained eye however, this land would look like nothing more than a never ending sea of orange and yellow. Some would argue that the land was empty and that it was an impossible place to inhabit. Yet he knew better. This was his land and he knew every rocky outcrop, every shrub, every cactus, and every dried up river bed. It was possible to survive here, to even thrive, if you maintained a healthy respect for this hostile but magnificent environment. This was his home. He had been flying these skies for the last 28 years and these were his skies: for the moment at least.

Today, he was appreciating the feel of the warm air as it rushed over his sleek, streamlined body. His wings were outstretched in a shallow 'V' shape, which was perfect for gliding and soaring. His dark brown plumage lay flat against his strong muscular body and his massive, bright yellow talons were tucked up out of the way – for now. Golden brown feathers adorned his head and the nape of his neck, like an assassins hood. His small, yellow beady eyes were on constant look-out for possible prey or potential danger. He observed that the sun was rising higher in the sky and if he didn't get to work soon, all the best pickings would be hidden away in safe, shady places.

With renewed purpose, he tipped his wing and changed direction. He was heading for an old, reliable hunting ground. He circled silently overhead and it wasn't long before he spotted something: a rattlesnake. Rattlesnakes could be deadly and this was a big one but it was too good an opportunity to miss. His first strike would have to be quick and fatal if he was to stand a chance of securing a meal. The snake was quietly winding his way across the dusty floor, unaware of the Grim Reaper circling high above him. He had managed to catch a rat this morning and the combination of a full belly and the warmth of the sun, was making him feel complacent. The snake slithered contentedly towards the shelter of a nearby rock. He was in no hurry. Just to be sure though, he flicked his tongue out to check for danger. Something wasn't quite right. He stopped and flicked his tongue out several more times. Yes, there it was again. There was a disturbance in the air and the scent of something worrying. Suddenly, he caught sight of a shadow on the ground, bearing down on him quickly. His body reacted instinctively. As fast as lightening, he twisted himself into a protective coil, with his tail rattling and his fangs ready to strike. Just in time! He felt a strong draft of air as the bird swooped right over his head, before flapping frantically away, in a desperate bid to gain distance from the snake's deadly fangs.

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The ground squirrel was well aware of what was waiting for him if dared poke his head out from under the cactus. He was safe for now and he had no intention of moving anytime soon. He had shade from the sun, whilst the eagle was sat out in the open, fully exposed to the dangerously high temperatures. He knew his best chance of escape would be to slip away under the cover of darkness but he was hoping that the eagle would have given up long before that – he had a family relying on him. What happened next took him completely by surprise and was certainly not part of his plan. He sensed a movement behind him and quickly realised that he was not the only seeking shelter under this prickly cactus. He whirled around and came face to face with a rattlesnake, who was coiled and ready to spring. The ground squirrel had no choice but to dart out from under the protective prickles of the cactus. He inadvertently found himself in the open and darting across hot, barren land. He knew that there was an abandoned hole up ahead of him where he might be able to find safety. His heart pounded and his legs raced as fast as they could. 2 metres...1metre...he was nearly there! He wasn't quick enough though. Sharp, unforgiving talons gripped him firmly around the body and he was whisked high into the air and into eternal darkness.

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Section A

1. Why was today a good day for flying?
2. What is the purpose of the second paragraph?
3. When attacking the snake, why does the eagles first strike have to be ‘quick and fatal’?
4. What does the word ‘exposed’ mean?
5. Why is the dust cloud so dangerous?

Section B

6. Who is our flyer? What clues are there to suggest this?
7. ‘As fast as lightening’ is an example of what? Write another example using the same theme of speed.
8. After the failure of the snake, why is it important for the eagle to try and hunt again soon?
9. In the paragraph beginning with ‘The ground squirrel seemed oblivious...’ identify THREE words the author has used that mean the same as ‘victim’.
10. The ground squirrel was whisked into ‘eternal darkness’. What does this suggest has happened to the ground squirrel?
11. Why do you think it is so important for him to get the food back to his nest?

Section C

12. What evidence is there to suggest that this is a desert environment?
13. Why is the bird referred to as the ‘Grim Reaper’?
14. The bird ‘propelled himself majestically’. What type of word is ‘majestically’ and why did the author choose to use this word?



15. Even after two recent failures, the eagle's not ready to give up yet. Why do you think this is?
16. The eagle has now acquired his dinner but do you agree with his actions? Refer to the text to support your views.
17. Would you recommend this text to others? Why/why not?

### Section D

18. What does the word 'thrive' mean? Suggest TWO more words which mean the same.
19. 'Golden brown feathers adorned his head and the nape of his neck like an assassins hood.' Why were the feathers described in this way?
20. Why do you think the air is shimmering and distorted?
21. Why was the ground squirrel safe under the cactus?
22. '2 metres... 1 metre... he was nearly there!' Why do you think this sentence is written like this?
23. Has your opinion of the golden eagle changed now that you have read the last paragraph of the text? Use evidence from the text to support your views.

## Whole Class Guided Reading – Teaching Guide

- The text is for the children to read. Give each pair a copy of the text (without questions) to read individually or as a whole class. This text has been aimed at Year 6 (Wales)/Primary 7 (Scotland)/Grade 5 (Australia).
- The teacher should use the teacher version. It shows you where to pause after each section and provides questions for you to ask. The colours refer to our levels so that you can direct specific questions at specific students in terms of difficulty (their version does not have these colours to show them which is which).
  - Beginner – (Red)
  - Easy – (Blue)
  - Tricky – (Orange)
  - Expert – (Green)
- The children can record their answers to the questions at the end of the shared read/discussion or in a different session by using the comprehension sheet. The questions have been re-grouped into abilities so that you can assign sections to specific children.
  - Section A – Beginner
  - Section B – Easy
  - Section C – Tricky
  - Section D – Expert