

The Stiblers

The Stiblers are a secret group of animals that live all around us. Grown-ups can't see or hear them, but they pop up to help children whenever needed.

The Stiblers know that children love magic, fun and learning in different ways from adults. They don't mind if you jump in muddy puddles or get chocolate cake around your mouth and they won't tell you to be quiet. Not ever.

Tom and Martha are used to visits from the Stiblers – to help them with life's little lumps and bumps.

Come and meet them...



storyteller

Cat: Story Teller

The children had been told a million times that there was nothing to fear from a visit to the Dentist's, but somehow... it was hard not to be a little afraid. They needed help, a distraction, a Stibler to keep their hearts from pumping too loudly. As if by magic, the white Cat appeared and settled himself carefully and slowly in front of Martha and Tom.

'Once, when I belonged to a witch, we travelled all the way round the world and saw the green earth below and blue seas from high above the ground,' said the white Cat, as he eyed the children solemnly, his two front paws placed neatly together, his haunches tucked in, long furry tail stretched out behind.

'Wow!' said Tom who loved flying to other countries. 'Did you go in an aeroplane?'

'Broomstick,' said the Cat.

Martha, who was a little doubtful about the business of witches and broomsticks put her head on one side. 'Didn't you ever fall off? How did you see in the dark? Broomsticks don't have engines.'

The Cat blinked slowly; there was a long pause and he continued as if the girl had not opened her mouth. 'On our travels, the witch and I, we met merchants and kings, travellers, farmers and acrobats, creatures from the trees and skies and the depths of the earth.'

'Wow!' said Tom again, not quite sure what to say to such a speech. Martha said more helpfully, 'That must have been fun.'

'It wasn't just fun,' said the Cat. The children were flummoxed. Though unlikely, it did sound rather good to be travelling round the whole world on a broomstick, chatting to everything and everybody in sight.

Again, the Cat closed his eyes briefly, as if remembering his journeys and conversations from the past. 'We Cats know so much!'

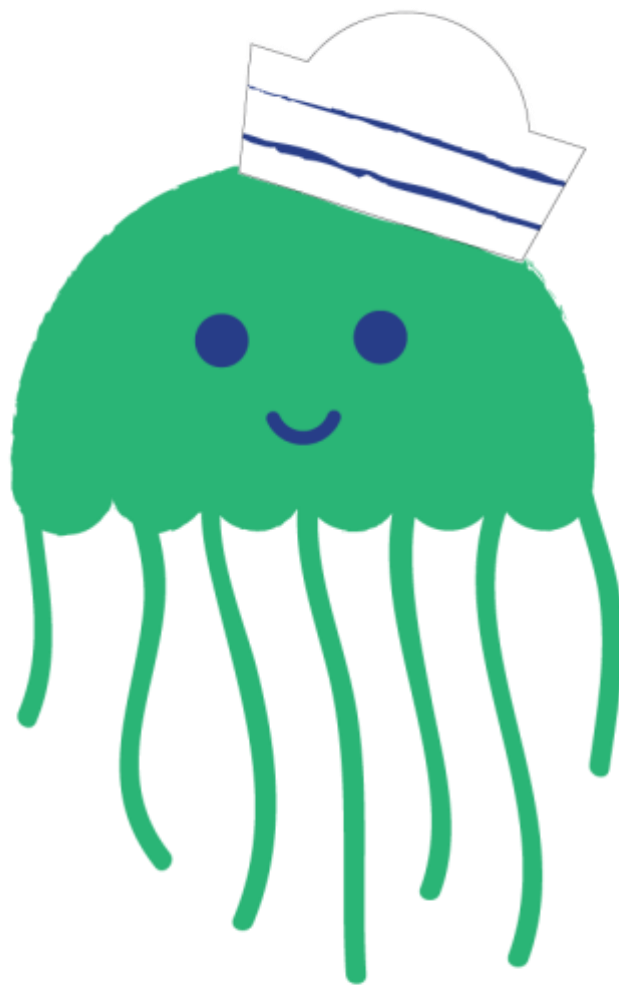
Tom couldn't help snorting with laughter. 'That's silly. Cats don't go to school'

As usual, Martha had one or two things to say about that. 'You don't just learn things at school, Tom. You learn in lots of different ways and places.'

'I'm talking about stories,' interrupted the Cat, his tail twitching slightly with impatience. 'We Cats have collected stories for centuries from our earliest beginnings in Egypt. We tell strange and beautiful stories of magic and truth and all that is real and imagined.'

Martha rarely missed any opportunity to hear a story and had by now quite forgotten about the dentist appointment. 'Come on then, Cat. Tell us one!'

'Well,' said the Cat, pleased with his audience at last, 'Once, long ago, when the witch and I landed in Bavaria...'



freestyler

Jellyfish: Freestyler

Despite chatting with her friends over lunch time, Martha still didn't know what to do. She'd asked her brother at breakfast, her parents, granny, goldfish and friend next door and they hadn't been much help. Should she sign up for after-school Dance or Gymnastics?

'It's a question of choice,' said a whispery voice nearby. Some very beautiful, almost transparent legs were wafting gently over the edge of the table. They belonged to Jellyfish, whose bell-shaped body was also see-through, catching whatever light was nearby.

'Choosing is tricky for humans,' continued the blob of jelly. 'We sea jellies are much better at doing what we know is best.'

Martha lifted her head and looked at the delicate creature still waving long stringy tendrils.

'You see,' said the blob, 'We jellies think for ourselves. We don't just do what all the others do. We decide what we're best suited to.' The whispery voice gave a husky giggle. 'I'm best at bathing in warm water and making artistic shapes with my tentacles. Some jellies like stinging people. Others adventure in faraway seas.'

'The problem is all my friends are going to Gymnastics and they want me to go with them. Everyone thinks I am really good at it and I've already got my level 2,' said Martha.

"Well, there you are then. Gymnastics it is," said the Jellyfish sweetly.

"Well no," Said Martha. "What I really want to do is Dance Club. I just don't want to upset anyone"

"Ah", said Jellyfish, "Be a Freestyler, is my best advice"

'A Freestyler?'

Jellyfish smiled. 'Do what's right for you. It's hard not doing whatever everyone else is doing, but as long as you don't hurt yourself or others, you must do what your heart tells you is best for you.'

'D'you think my friends will be hurt if I don't do as they wish?' Martha asked.

'Hurting someone is serious,' whispered Jellyfish. "Making different choices from them is not serious at all.'

'That's what my Mum said,' remembered Martha, 'But Jodie said she'd never speak to me again if I don't go to her class.'

Jellyfish made a strange wheezing noise. Was it some kind of laughter? 'Jodie is trying very hard to make you think as she does,' said the Blob soothingly, 'but you must think your own thoughts and do what is right for you.'

'What is best for me,' said Martha with new-found certainty, 'is to sign up to Dance. I've been trying so hard to do the same as my friends, but really, that's crazy, isn't it?' Martha jumped up from the table with excitement. 'Look, Jellyfish. I'm going to be a Freestyler!' She looked at where Jellyfish had been perched, but there was no sign of her, but for a slight trail of glistening water from the graceful, weightless tentacles.



self believer

Fox: Self Believer

Tom's pocket money had been stopped this week, so rather than visit the toy stall, the children were flicking through the boxes of battered second-hand reading at the local market. Tom was unusually quiet. He was in trouble with his parents.

'It's no use sulking,' said Martha in her best grown-up voice. 'You shouldn't have used the scissors. You're not allowed.'

'I am allowed to use scissors,' Tom protested.

'Not to cut up a perfectly good football net!' said Martha.

'There's a book here on horses,' said Tom, desperate to change the subject.

Martha felt a surge of sympathy for her brother. He had lost his pocket money and upset his parents, but you could see that holding back his tears was really difficult. Why wouldn't he just say sorry and be done with it?

Just then a face popped up over the box of books. 'Hi,' said the face. It was Fox. They hadn't seen Fox for some time.

'Where've you been?' said Martha.

'Here and there. Out and about. Busy, busy, busy.'

'Being chased by cross farmers, very likely,' Martha said, thinking of a cartoon she'd seen on TV.

'Have to keep up. Work hard, do the best you can,' said Fox, perched on the book box and swishing his extremely fine tale with pride.

'You steal chickens,' said Tom, not in the mood for a lecture.

'Hey. I'm a fox. That's what we do. I must eat. You'll have dinner tonight, so, what's the difference?' Fox grinned. Tom thought about all the stories of foxes he had read, where they were shown to be sly and cruel. Stibler Fox seemed rather more perky and confident.

'Foxes are animals,' explained Martha, 'They have to hunt and eat too.'

'You'd better believe it!' said Fox. 'I was born to be who I am: not popular. Everyone thinks I am sly and sneaky, but I can do amazing things like climb trees fast and use my ears to hear what's moving underneath the ground. I believe in myself!'

'You're a Self-Believer!' said Martha. 'That's good, being a Self-Believer. Miss Silva said.'

'That's me. Even if it doesn't suit others, I'm a Fox and proud of it!' Two pointy front teeth rested on his lower lip.

'I think I'm a Self-Believer,' said Tom suddenly. Martha gazed at her brother in amazement.

'I saw a Reception year kid had his foot stuck in the football net so I cut him free with a pair of scissors,' Tom said all in one breath.

'Nice work,' approved Fox.

'He cut up a new football net!' Martha declared, 'and the school and Mum and Dad are very angry with him.'

'He saved a little kid's foot,' cried Fox. 'Too bad if everyone else is upset!'

For once, Martha was silenced. She looked at Tom and saw, for the first time in two days, a smile appear on his face. 'It was the right thing to do,' he said quietly.

Fox chuckled.

'Ok' said Tom, by now feeling altogether more cheerful. 'What would be a good game to play with us today?'

'Rescue a chicken?' suggested Fox with an extremely cheeky smile.



joy finder

Dog: Joy finder

'I'm bored, said Martha. It was a stifling hot summer's day in the holidays and the children had played with every toy they could find, splashed in the paddling pool and bounced balls up and down until they were dizzy.

'Me too,' said Tom. The children trudged off inside to escape the searing sunshine, and sat down with The Stiblers feeling hot and bothered.

'I suppose we could go for a walk,' said Martha.

A voice yelled, 'Yay! Take me. Walking is awesome.'

'Not now Dog,' said Martha

'We could collect insects,' said Tom.

'No,' said Martha, 'that's really yuk.'

'Epic! – I love insects. We could dig under trees and bushes and hunt them and put them in jars and say which one is yukkest. Let's go, let's go!' said the voice, more of a yelp now.

'There are times when Dog can be a bit annoying,' said Martha, to no-one in particular.

Dog leapt out of the box, paws balanced on the edge, his tongue lolling breathlessly, his tail wagging, ears twitching. 'What's up?' he asked with glee. 'We could throw balls or hurl a hoop or dig for bones or sniff. Sniffing is epic!'

'Sniffing is not fun,' pointed out Martha.

'Wrong,' said Dog. 'There's fun everywhere. Scratching, laughing, jumping up and down, counting clouds, hiding shoes – come on you two– you're good at this sort of stuff.'

'It's way too hot,' complained Tom lying flat on the cool floor.

Suddenly, Dog landed on him, slobbering his tongue over the boy's face. 'No, Dog, no licking,' shouted Tom.

Dog stopped in his tracks. His huge brown eyes looked both soft and hurt; his tail drooped and he slumped into the far corner of the room with a grunt. Nonetheless, Dog's sadness didn't last for long. Within seconds he'd found a plastic tractor with some very interesting wheels to chew off. Dog set to the task with enthusiasm.

'Do you know what Tom?' said Martha. 'Dog has a really furry coat and doesn't ever complain about the heat. Maybe we're being a bit silly. Let's go outside and build a den.'

'Great idea,' laughed Tom.

'Yay!' cried Dog. 'I can bring stuff for the den; twigs and tractors and bones.'

Dog looked up, panting with excitement. It was impossible to refuse him. Even though the children knew that building a den with Dog would be a bit of a challenge, it did seem like the best way to spend the afternoon.



**earth
lover**

Rabbit: Earth Lover

It was hard for Tom and Martha to build their super Lego spaceship with a small, hairy rabbit wedged between them. Rabbit's feet tapped the ground, while she busily made notes with a pencil and notepad. 'Mmmm,' said Rabbit chewing the end of the pencil. 'We'll need to keep away from the road and make sure the oak tree roots don't get hurt.'

'Would it be too much trouble for you to work over there, by the table?' said Martha. 'Tom and I are trying to build a spaceship.'

A soft, white paw took hold of her wrist. 'This is serious work,' said Rabbit, 'I'm planning a new warren, a new home for the many rabbits round here. But I need to be careful. There's a large tree to think about. We need to take care of the Earth.'

Just at that moment there was a clatter of plastic bricks as the Lego spaceship was launched from the table. 'I'm bored with Lego,' cried Tom. 'I really want some night goggles but Mum says they're too expensive and we have to wait until Christmas.'

'Mmm,' said Rabbit, 'Night goggles you say...'

'Can you get us some?' Tom's voice was hopeful.

'Could you maybe make some? Or use something from the toybox to turn into night goggles?'

'We really want new ones.' Martha said firmly. 'All our old toys are rubbish.'

'D'you know what happens to all that stuff you call rubbish?' said Rabbit.

In fact, the children did know very well about land-fill and re-cycling and how lots of plastic in the sea causes damage to sea birds and fish. They knew about not wasting food and turning out lights, but still: the thought of new night goggles was very exciting.

'We'd give our old toys to the charity shop,' Martha said, noting the look on Rabbit's face.

'Excellent,' said Rabbit bouncing up from the sofa 'Always good to re-cycle, but let's see if we can find a way to make some night goggles – the sort that nobody else will ever have!'

Tom was intrigued. Rabbit was always a whirlwind of ideas and plans and she began to race around the playroom dipping into boxes here and there. 'Have you any glue? she hummed. 'And elastic? Otherwise, I think we have all we need here.'

For the next hour, Martha, Tom and the Rabbit re-fashioned some old sunglasses into unusual night goggles. There were various bits of string and elastic stuck to them and one of them had a small light glued messily onto a lens, but there was no doubt that they were goggles. A bit wobbly, not top of the range but night-goggles nonetheless.

'Is this taking care of the Earth? asked Tom, just a little doubtful about the finished product.

'Absolutely,' said Rabbit seriously. 'We must be very, very careful what we destroy. If we can stop any kind of waste, save toys from the bin, look after that oak tree, then we are proper Earth Lovers.'

For a moment, the children were unable to move or speak, held by this small animal's earnest gaze.

Rabbit laughed suddenly. It was a surprisingly loud, fruity laugh and her little feet thumped the floor with gusto. 'You two,' said Rabbit jumping up from the floor. 'Right now, you should go and try out your goggles.'



**good
listener**

Owl: Good Listener

It was Tom's first day at his new school. 'I'm scared,' he said aloud, hoping no-one heard. He stood at the edge of the playground by the field, feeling utterly lost and alone. He knew he had to line up over there when the buzzer went, but after that was anyone's guess. Too old to have his mum come beyond the gate, but too young to know quite what to do.

'You'll be fine,' Martha had told him at breakfast and then, 'there's nothing whatever to be scared about,' knowing this was not totally true. She had felt nervous on her first day too.

Suddenly, Tom heard a voice from a nearby tree. It was Owl. 'Hello Tom. Just thought I'd pop by to see how you are.'

Silence.

Owl said, 'Starting anything new is a bit tricky. Till you get used to it, that is, then it doesn't feel tricky at all.'

'It feels bad now,' muttered Tom, shuffling his feet.

Silence.

More silence.

'Go on,' whispered Owl.

Tom looked up and met Owl's gaze. It was a kind gaze, the kind of gaze that you might want to share stuff with, a gaze that wouldn't tell you things that weren't true, maybe one that wouldn't tell you anything much at all.

'It's just that...' started Tom. 'I feel so silly and I don't know anyone and I'm on my own and people will ignore me or look at me in a funny way and, and ...'

'What else?' said Owl softly, as if what he'd said already wasn't bad enough.

Another silence.

'Best to say how you feel,' said Owl, with a little sigh. 'Best let the words come out into the air, rather than whirl around in your head.' He waved a wing in a circle to show where the feelings might go once out and about.

And then Tom, amidst tears and frustration, talked about what it felt to be alone in a strange place and how his stomach would rumble and he'd be scared to go to the toilet and...It went on for some time and then he stopped suddenly and looked up at Owl.

'Do you feel a bit better now?' Owl asked.

Tom wiped his face on his sleeve and stood up straight. 'I do, Owl, I do. I think I'll be all right,' he said, with a sudden burst of courage. At that moment the buzzer went. Tom looked up at the tree and Owl gazed down at the boy: and then the day began.

424 words



**team
player**

Bee: Team Player

'What are you doing?' asked Martha to the small black and yellow creature jiggling up and down on the garden path.

'Dancing,' said the creature, out of breath.

'Someone might tread on you,' warned Martha.

'Got to practise,' gasped Bee, for it was Bee who was jiggling.

'Why?' asked Martha. She didn't know that bees wiggle their bodies in a dance to tell other bees where there are flowers, so they can collect nectar and pollen for their hives. Bee stopped for moment to stare at Martha with both of her enormous googly eyes.

'Do you know how many jobs we have to do today?' said Bee, still panting.

'No,' said Martha, 'but probably not as many as mine.'

'You humans eat all our honey and use our beeswax and you have no idea of the effort involved in making it all,' said Bee, wiping sweat from her brow.

'Oh! Well, I have to tidy up my room and then lay the table,' Martha announced and then, aware of how ordinary her tasks were in comparison with making beeswax, 'So, shall I take you back to the toybox now?'

'I can't go yet!' gasped the insect. 'I have a million jobs to do.' Bee stood up on her two hind legs and began...'We have to clean out the cells, feed the brood, collect nectar and pollen to take back, tell the sister bees where the flowers are, clean out the hive, go on guard duty and then forage again!'

'My jobs are billions worse than that,' said Martha, desperately trying to recall what they were. Bee noticed that the girl's bottom lip was trembling a little.

'Thing is,' said Bee in a much softer voice, 'we all have to pull together in the hive. There are thousands of us to look after and help the Queen grow big and do all the jobs. So that being without each other wouldn't work.'

Martha stared at Bee and Bee stared back. 'Thing is,' said Bee, 'We're a team, just like in a football game or....' Bee was a bit stuck thinking about human games. 'Or a family,' she said with more certainty. 'A family is a team and everyone does a bit to keep it going, don't they?'

'It's not fair,' said Martha. 'They make me do loads.'

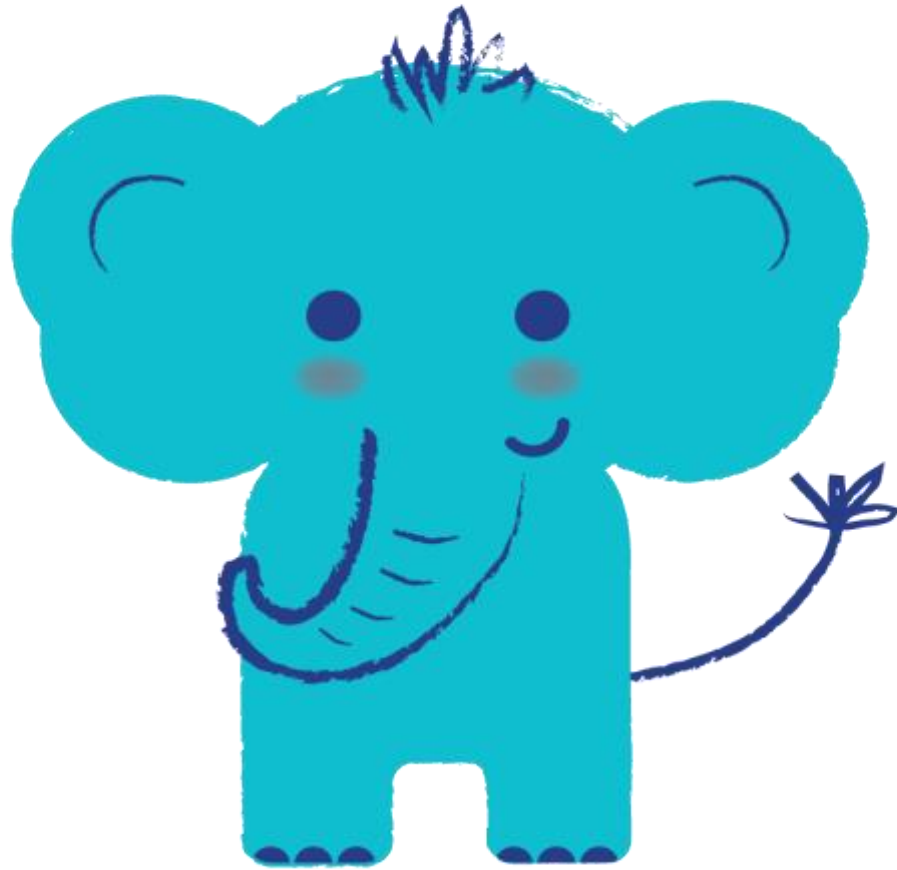
'That's because there'll be loads to do. Just like in the hive.'

Bee began jiggling her funny dance again. 'No-one said it was easy being a team player, Martha, but it's the best way to keep things going.'

Seeing the girl smile made Bee feel a little more relaxed. 'Well, if you could pick me up and pop me on that leaf, I'll join my team and then see you later.'

'We talk about team players in our PE lessons, I'm going to tell my teacher about you!' said the girl.

'Thank you, Martha. No-one does teamwork better than we bees.' And with that she buzzed off into the summer sky.



big thinker

Elephant: Big Thinker:

The children sat at opposite ends of the backseat of the car, staring out at the rain. Between them, as a way of stopping arguments about who had the most space, was a very large blue

Elephant. They were on a long and boring journey to see some relations. Martha and Tom were so fed up they wanted to cry.

‘Are we there yet?’ Tom asked. The reply from the driver was short and clear.

A different voice said, almost as a whisper. ‘Maybe ninety-nine times is enough for the same question.’ It was Elephant. Normally, his voice was deep and rasping, but he was trying hard not to be annoying.

Tom said irritably, ‘It’s your fault, Elephant. You’re always telling us to ask questions. That’s what Big Thinkers do. Ask questions, you say. And look what happens when I do? I get shouted at!’

Elephant’s trunk twizzled round and perched on Tom’s knee. The trunk could land anywhere, anytime – on a nose, a foot, top of the head and it always made the children smile. ‘Let’s play ‘I spy’,’ said Elephant, back to his usual deep voice.

The game worked for a short time: Martha chose a window, Tom an ear, then a blanket, and then a knight. There was a drawing of one on the jigsaw on the floor, and Martha gave a speech about how it began with a letter ‘k’ not an ‘n’.

Tom said slowly, ‘What I want to know is, why are knights called knights if they can fight in the daytime?’

‘I don’t know,’ said sister Martha, ‘Why are knights called knights if they....’

‘That’s what I want to know!’ interrupted Tom.

‘Oh. I thought it was a joke,’ said Martha, ‘Like, why did the toilet roll go down the hill?’

‘To get to the bottom,’ said Tom. ‘No, I’m serious. There are so many questions in the world and not enough answers.’

‘Big Thinking,’ said Elephant. He couldn’t resist his favourite topic of conversation.

Tom liked the Big Thinking subject too. ‘So where do thoughts come from? And what’s fire actually made of and what happens when you get to the end of the numbers and what colour is nothing?’

‘You can find answers easily enough,’ said Elephant, swaying from side to side, his trunk brushing the children’s feet as if they were flies. ‘

‘My questions aren’t always ones you can find answers to,’ said Tom proudly.

‘They’re the best kind,’ snorted Elephant. ‘Because answers can change or different people tell you different things.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Tom, trying hard not to understand.

‘Yes, you do,’ boomed Elephant placing his trunk gently on Tom’s chest. ‘You ask big questions, that’s the most important thing. You listen to answers, but are on the lookout for more which could change your opinion. That’s Big Thinking, that is. A good thing.’

Martha tried to lighten the mood. ‘Here’s my two questions. How can we make the rain stop and why are you a blue elephant and not grey?’

Elephant hooted with laughter. 'Excellent!' he cried. 'Let's have a chat about how we might stop the rain.'

'And the reason you're blue and not grey?' asked Tom.

'Still looking for an answer to that one too,' sniffed Elephant. 'Any ideas?'



peace keeper

Octopus - Peace Keeper

The playdate was not going well. Harry and Jess from down the road loved rifling through other people's treasures and Harry had whipped away several of Tom's favourite Star Wars toys without so much as a please or thank you. Jess was preening herself in Martha's mirror using all her ribbons and hair ties.

Martha thought that maybe there would be enough Stibler toys for them all to play. She let the others choose first and then pulled out Octopus for herself. 'I want Octopus,' said Harry.

'No,' said Martha, holding onto a tentacle, 'I drew the seaside this morning and I need Octopus to sit in it to look real.'

'But I need him,' said Harry his voice rising. 'I've got shells to put in his arms!'

Martha was indignant. 'They're not arms, they're tentacles, and where are your shells? You haven't got any have you?'

'He's got loads,' said sister Jess. 'It's not fair. Harry had Octopus first.'

'No, he didn't,' Tom joined in. 'He chose Cat. I saw him.'

All the children began talking at once so it was hard to hear who said what. A louder voice came from the kitchen. It was Mum. 'Martha and Tom are you sharing nicely with our guests? I hope I don't have to come in there and remind you how to behave.'

'Harry's not sharing,' called out Tom.

'Tell-tale,' Jess sneered.

Octopus listened with some distress and although her voice was rather high-pitched, was able to say with some force, 'Hold on, all of you. Let's just take a deep breath here.'

Octopus had large eyes that wobbled a little in her jelly-like face so that it looked as if they might pop out at any moment. There were eight tentacles to manage too and it wasn't always easy to know which one was doing what. One tentacle was wrapped tightly round her head, another just to her left was twitching and the rather fat one (tentacle number 6) was swishing up and down, up and down, as if painting a shed with a broom.

'My dears,' said Octopus to the tentacles, 'Let us be still!'

"She's minnnnnneeeee" cried Martha.

"No. She's MIIINNEEEEEEE" yelled Harry.

“Whoa, Whoa, Whoa,” said Octopus calmly. She’d managed to wrench her head free from number one tentacle, and was soothing the irritated one by nodding kindly at it and winking with one of her wobbly eyes.

The children, open-mouthed, gawped at Octopus. Octopus reached out a tentacle to stroke Martha’s hair and another to tap Jessica’s wrist, together with a wobbly glare. ‘Now then, all of you, unless you really want to have a miserable day fighting, could you find a better way to sort out who plays with which toy today?’

‘I really, really need you for my seascape,’ pleaded Martha.

‘We can get shells from my house,’ said Jess, suddenly anxious to please this strange, talking creature.

‘I want to play with the Cat,’ said Harry .

‘What lovely ideas,’ said Octopus. ‘What about if I sit in front of Martha’s sea picture and Jess and Tom can arrange all the seashells in my eight tentacles. As long as there are enough shells there won’t be a problem.’

You could tell that there might be a problem from the way the tentacles suddenly stopped moving, as if listening, as if preparing for a fight.

‘Sometimes the tentacles argue,’ explained Octopus. ‘It’s quite a job to stop the battles at times. A bit like you children, I imagine. But there’s always a way to keep the peace.’

Just then Mum appeared. ‘Martha and Tom if you can’t be trusted to share your toys nicely, then there’ll be no more playdates!’

‘We’re fine,’ said Martha. ‘Honestly, we’re getting on just fine!’



**problem
solver**

Chimp: Problem Solver:

The children had been told repeatedly to sort out their toys and find better places to store them. Tom had promised to do this chore, but there were always more interesting things to do, especially when Chimp came out to play. Chimp's favourite trick was to take a flying leap from the ceiling light onto any difficult spot, usually Tom's head. Today was that kind of day.

'Yo!!' screeched Chimp as she landed, wrapping her tail round Tom's neck, and shoving her wobbly nose into the boy's face. Tom tried not to laugh, so as not to encourage Chimp's wild ways, but it was quite a task to keep a straight face.

Chimp loved puzzles and riddles. 'Yo, Martha,' she yelled, 'What has to be broken before you can use it?'

'An egg,' Martha said promptly, without looking up from her book.

'Everyone has it, no-one can lose it. What is it?' Chimp's teeth rattled loudly and she began searching into the roots of Tom's hair with great attention.

'A shadow!' Tom's reply was instant.

'What's a ghost's favourite food?' demanded Chimp.

'Ice-cream. Come on Chimp. We've heard all of these before,' said Tom.

'Just checking you've remembered,' said Chimp and jumped suddenly onto Martha who was quietly reading. 'Martha, Martha, Martha,' shrieked Chimp. 'Solve me a riddle?'

'Go on,' she said.

'What gets wetter as it dries?' Chimp began plaiting Martha's hair which she loved almost as much as Tom's.

Neither of the children had heard this one before. 'What goes up and never comes down?' chattered Chimp, not waiting for answers. 'Where can I get a bunch of bananas? What is the easiest way to double your money?'

'Slow down,' complained Tom. 'We haven't had time to think...'

'A towel, your age, the kitchen pantry and looking in the mirror,' Martha said remarkably quickly..

'Well done, big sister,' whooped Chimp, as she leaped back onto the ceiling light, swinging perilously back and forward and scratching one armpit with her long dark nails. 'Now then, tell me about riddles.'

Tom spoke first. 'A question to exercise the brain.'

'And problem solving?' hooted Chimp, getting ready to land. 'What's that?'

'We all have problems,' said Martha, and Tom added, 'And we have to work out the best way to solve them.'

'Bingo!' cried Chimp and instead of aiming for Tom's head, landed straight in the toybox.

'Wow,' said Tom, 'You missed me that time!'

'On purpose!' Chimp laughed crazily. There was a sudden shriek from the box. 'Not enough room in here,' complained Chimp.

'Hey, I've got a bigger box upstairs,' said Tom, thinking of a recent effort to make a kennel for Dog, and realising that this is how his task to find better storage for the toys could be solved.

'Good problem-solving,' said the voice from the box. 'And thanks too for letting me know where the bananas are kept.' For some time, Chimp had been trying to work out where his favourite food was stored.



**world
changer**

Horse: World Changer

Martha sat underneath a tree in the playground, trying not to cry.

But then a soft nose nuzzled her neck and she felt Stibler Horse's warm mane around her shoulders.

'Now then,' said Horse, ears flicked up, listening. 'Are you all right?'

Martha couldn't speak. 'Not all right, then?' said Horse.

Martha's voice trembled. 'Not all right,' she whispered.

Horse could feel the girl's sadness. 'Well,' she said, 'Try and tell me what's upsetting you?'

'Can't,' said Martha. It was true, because the lump in her throat was getting in the way of speaking.

'No hurry,' said Horse cheerfully. 'Tell me when you're ready.' And she smiled a warm smile.

'I'll never ever tell,' added Martha.

'Never is a long time,' said Horse, 'Almost as long as we horses have been helping people.'

There was a pause, but Martha couldn't help a spark of interest stirring. "How have you helped people?" she asked.

"We helped farmers by pulling machines along. Horse power it was called. And men and women rode on our backs so they could get to places quickly. We made it easier for people to work and move about. We Horses helped to change the world.'

'Oh,' said Martha. The truth was, she loved to hear horse chatting away about long ago, and she no longer felt like bursting into tears.

'Anyone can help change the world,' announced Horse.

'I can't,' said Martha.

'Certainly, you can,' insisted Horse.

There was a long silence. 'I suppose I could pull along a lawn mower.'

'There you are then,' said Horse.

'I could give a friend a ride on my back?' said Martha.

'Yes, true, but there are other ways to change the world,' said Horse.

Quite suddenly, Martha found her voice: 'Not throw rubbish on the floor!' she said, 'Be kind to people who are unhappy. Volunteer to help at school!'

'Well yes indeed Martha,' said Horse, impressed.

'Miss Ajala said in our class,' said Martha.

'Miss Ajala sounds like a World Changer,' said Horse.

'Not be bossy and mean at playtime.' This was said with some feeling.

'Good,' said Horse.

'Put the right stuff in the re-cycle bin, not leave the tap running, give away some of my toys.'

Horse waited for a pause. 'Now, would you like to tell me what's upsetting you?'

'Well,' said Martha. It was surprisingly easy now to speak about her fight in the playground. Perhaps she'd go over to her friend and suggest a different game to play. Maybe she could be a world-changer too: like Horse with her horse power.



**team
leader**

Penguin: Great Leader:

The children had been building the snowman for some time. They were so cold, they would have happily given up on the job after the first ten minutes, but no, somehow it was not possible to tell Penguin this, though it was obvious enough to the creature, who stood by them, tall and elegant with his yellow ear patches and glistening white breast feathers.

‘Cold you say?’ laughed Penguin. He found the fact hilarious. ‘Now the Antarctic, that’s cold, almost 50 degrees below freezing at times, with winds blowing faster than a racing car.’

He laughed again, a weird kind of trumpet noise. ‘In the Antarctic, we slide around on the ice on our tummies for fun.’

Martha and Tom’s red noses peeked out of endless scarves and heavy jackets with hoods. ‘Glad we’re not penguins then,’ said Tom dryly. This made Penguin laugh even louder and longer, but then he stopped quickly. ‘Let’s get on and build,’ he said, clapping two bony wings round the children’s shoulders.

In fact, the snowman was impressive. It was as tall as Penguin and taller than either of the children, with a large head, arms and legs sculpted out of the snow and bits of coal and a carrot for the face. Now it was finished, the children were thrilled.

‘Goodness,’ said Tom, ‘I never thought a snowman could look that good.’ Martha nodded, remembering last year’s lumpy effort. Had they built the snowman or had Penguin? It was difficult to be sure. The big creature hadn’t been especially busy, but somehow, had made a difference.

“Did we build that snowman, or did you?” asked Tom.

“We did it together”, Penguin said, ‘We Emperors are great leaders, you see.’

A light dawned in Martha’s brain. ‘Emperor Penguins, just like Emperors who were...’

‘...powerful rulers.’ Penguin finished the sentence for the girl. ‘However, I prefer the words: Great Leader.’

‘Oh,’ said Tom, puzzled.

‘A good leader joins in, encourages where there is weakness, laughs to keep it fun, takes turns at the hardest of tasks without trying to boss others around. He or she keeps going until the job is done.’

Tom and Martha stared open-mouthed at this huge, beautiful creature who had led them to make the best snowman ever. Martha ran forward and threw her arms round Penguin’s fat body.

‘Thank you, thank you,’ she said.

‘Time for hot chocolate,’ said Penguin and gently guided both the children back to the house.