The Ghost of Genny Castle

by John Escott

SUMMARY

The Ghost of Genny Castle is a thrilling ghost story by a popular writer of books for students and young people.

One Christmas holiday, fifteen-year-old Claire goes to stay with her aunt in the country. Just outside the village near to her aunt's house there is a ruined castle. Many ghostly stories are told about the castle locally. When Claire arrives at her aunt's house, she is fascinated by the castle, but her aunt tells her to stay away from the place. This makes Claire even more curious about the castle and she secretly goes to explore it. She is nearly killed by a falling stone and decides that perhaps after all her aunt was right. Then Claire finds a book which tells a terrible story about the death of a witch in Genny Castle two hundred years ago.

On the way back from the village one evening Claire and her aunt have an accident in their car and have to walk home in the dark and the snow. They reach a cottage where Walter Burge and his cat live. Everyone says the old man is a little crazy. He isn't in his house and Claire realizes that he must have gone up to the Castle. She is desperate to get help for her aunt, who is ill and tired. She goes to the Castle but can't find the old man. Then she sees a light at the top of the Black Tower. She goes up and finds the old man there with his cat. An evil force seems to be at work: the stones of the Tower give way, sending the cat to its death. But was it really a cat? Or was it the ghost of the witch of Genny Castle?

ABOUT JOHN ESCOTT

John Escott started by writing children's books and stories for children's comics. Now he writes and adapts books for students of all ages. He especially enjoys writing crime and mystery thrillers, and is a member of the British Crime Writers' Association.

John was born in Somerset in the south-west of England and he now lives in Bournemouth, on the south coast. When he is not writing he enjoys walking along empty beaches, watching old Hollywood movies on video and searching for long-forgotten books in small back-street bookshops. He also likes to travel, especially in North America and Canada. He is married, and has two grown-up children and three grandchildren.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Like other books by John Escott, the story of The Ghost of Genny Castle is easy to follow and very exciting. Readers will want to read it to find out what will happen. There are several elements in The Ghost of Genny Castle that are instantly appealing to children. First, there is the idea of ghosts and ghost stories. Children often talk about whether ghosts really exist and will tell each other ghost stories when they are together without adults in order to frighten each other.

This particular story has many of the characteristics typically found in ghost stories. For example, the setting is in a wild and remote castle. Castles are places with long, bloody histories. They were owned by rich noblemen, who often treated their servants very badly. At Genny Castle, a servant (or witch) took revenge on the castle owner in an unhappy event that has remained in the memory of the people of the village.

Often in ghost stories the main victim of the ghost is a female on her own. In this story, Claire is the victim, but she is also the power for good which brings about the end of the witch/ghost. In order to do this, she has to go on her own at night to the dark, cold and very frightening castle in the blood-chilling final chapter of the book.

The topic of witches is traditionally also popular with children. Still today, many people think of dark, evil powers when they hear the word ‘witch’. The witches in the Genny Castle story are, however, not the wicked spell makers of many children's stories. Instead they are actually typical of the victims of the terrible witch hunts of the 1400-1700 period in European history. During this time, many thousands, possibly millions, of women were tortured and burnt to death. Often these women were natural healers and could cure illnesses, but they were persecuted because their powers were not understood. When bad things, such as epidemics, took place in a community, these women were accused of causing them. Hence the new servant at Genny Castle is both suspected of causing illness and at the same time asked to cure it.

Finally, an intriguing aspect of all supernatural and ghost stories is whether or not we can believe them. Are there really things which cannot be explained except by some
teacher’s notes

ghostly cause? Or is it possible to find a practical explanation? So in this story we may wonder whether old Walter is really surrounded by fire or whether he’s just crazy, as people think. Is the cat with the same name as one of the witches really her reincarnation, or just an ordinary old stray ginger cat? These kinds of questions will provide a good basis for lots of discussion of the book.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book see the photocopyable Student’s Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with classroom readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

Activities before reading the book

1 Introduce the topic of castles to the students. Ask students to bring pictures of castles to class and/or bring some yourself. Discuss questions such as the following with the class:


This discussion could be done in the students’ first language if you prefer.

2 Teach the words believe and favourite. Then put students into pairs. They ask their partner:

* Do you believe in ghosts?
* Do you like ghost stories?
* Why/Why not?
* What is your favourite ghost story?

Activities after reading a section

Chapters 1-2

Put students into groups of three or four people. They choose the picture on page 6 or the picture on page 13 to work with. Teach them the words dialogue and scene (from a film). Tell them that these pictures are photos from a film. Students are going to write the words for the scene in the film. First students talk about what happened just before the picture and what happened just after. Then they can write the dialogue.

Each person in the group can then be one of the people in the scene. Everybody can speak at least one line. Get them to learn their lines by heart and act out the scene. They can act their scene to the whole class.

Chapter 3-4

Put students into pairs. Ask them to look at the map on page vi of their books and to say where the accident happened. They then compare their answers with other pairs.

Activities after reading the book

1 Ask students to look up explanation and normal in their dictionaries. Then tell them: Many people believe in ghosts but sometimes strange things have very boring explanations. Is it possible that the strange things in this story can have normal explanations? Ask students to work in pairs. They try to give normal reasons for these things:

- sounds and lights in the Castle at night
- stones falling from the tower - on a woman in the village and in Chapter 4
- the birds in the Castle - why they died
- the dead dog in the Castle
- the lost boy - why he never spoke again
- the orange cat - why it arrives; why it goes to the Castle; why it is not there at the end
- the fire in chapter 4

2 Students work in pairs. Student A: You live in Little Genny. You believe in the ghost of the Castle. Tell Student B that the ghost is there. Talk about the strange things that happen there. Student B: You do not believe in ghosts. Tell Student A that the ghost is not there. Give normal explanations for the things that happen there.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the ‘Before You Read’ sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1-2

- ago (adv) in the past
- burn (v) to hurt with fire
- castle (n) a very big, very strong house
- Christmas (n) December 25th; the day Jesus Christ was born
- cottage (n) a small house in the country
- crazy (adj) strange in the head
- field (n) ground with a wall of wood round it; people keep animals in fields
- ghost (n) this ‘person’ is dead but people can see it
- must (v) have to
- secret (n) when you know something and other people don’t know it, it is your secret
- servant (n) this person works in another person’s house
- stone (n) people make walls with stones
- tower (n) a tall thin building or tall thin top of a building
- visitor (n) this person visits a person or place
- witch (n) people think that this woman is strange and can do strange things
- worry (v) to think about a problem a lot and feel unhappy about it

Chapters 3-4

- footprint (n) when you walk in the snow, you leave footprints in the snow
- orange-coloured (adj) of the colour orange
- line (n) this is long and thin; paper has lines and you write on them
The Ghost of Genny Castle

Activities before reading the book

1 Look at the map on page vi of your book. Find these on the map: a village, houses, roads, woods, fields. What is near these places?
(a) Aunt Min's cottage
(b) Walter Burge's cottage
(c) Genny Castle

2 Read the introduction to your book. Put these words in the right sentences:
Aunt Min, Claire, the people in Little Genny (a) ........................ thinks Genny Castle looks interesting.
(b) ........................ says Genny Castle is dangerous.
(c) ........................ don't want to talk about Genny Castle.

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-2

Chapter 1

Page 1 to halfway down page 2

1 These sentences are wrong. Make them right.
(a) It is summer.
(b) Claire is five.
(c) Walter Burge is in his cottage.
(d) Walter Burge likes visitors.
(e) Walter Burge is watching Claire.
(f) The orange cat is watching Walter Burge.
(g) The orange cat goes into Walter's house.
(h) Claire sees Genny Castle when she is at her aunt's house.

2 Answer these questions.
(a) Where are Claire's parents?
(b) How long is Claire staying with her aunt?
(c) Why is Genny Castle dangerous?

Halfway down page 2 to page 8

1 Who says these sentences? Who are they talking to, and when?
(a) 'Did you sleep well?'
(b) 'You can look round the village.'
(c) 'Nobody likes Walter Burge.'
(d) 'The flowers are beautiful.'

2 Make sentences from these half sentences.
(a) Aunt Min has to go to the church because....
(b) Claire buys writing paper and envelopes because....
(c) Claire can't buy a book about Genny Castle because....
(d) People are afraid of Walter Burge because....
(e) A woman died at the castle because....
(f) Claire had an interesting morning because....
(i) ........................ the Black Tower fell on her.
(ii) ........................ there isn't one in the shop.
(iii) ........................ she is going to put flowers in it.
(iv) ........................ she wants to give her aunt something for Christmas.
(v) ........................ she saw Walter Burge and the boy.
(vi) ........................ he is crazy.

Chapter 2

Page 8 to halfway down page 10

1 Which thing happened first, second, third, fourth...? Number the sentences 1 to 10.
(a) Claire sees a fire-coloured head at the top of the tower.
(b) She arrives at the castle.
(c) She sees Walter outside his cottage.
(d) The stone hits the ground.
(e) She doesn't want Walter to see her.
(f) Claire goes out for a walk.
(g) She hears something.
(h) She throws herself down on the ground.
(i) She feels afraid.
(j) She sees a stone fall from the tower.

2 Why do you think Walter Burge is afraid?

3 Work with another student.
Student A: You are Walter. You catch Claire. Ask her what happened. Say why you are afraid.
Student B: You are Claire. Tell Walter what happened.

Halfway down page 10 to page 15

1 Why does Claire think that she will not go back to Genny Castle? Write one or two sentences.

2 This is the story of the witch of Genny Castle. Put the words below in the right places.
died, witch, ago, one, three, green, because, fire-coloured, burned, after, took, hated, help

A long time (a) ........................................ a new servant arrived at Genny Castle.
(b) ........................................ she arrived, bad things started to happen. People said 'This woman is a
(c) ........................................: The man in the castle had a daughter. (d) ......................... day the daughter was badly ill and the man asked the new servant to (e) .......................... But, (f) ......................... years before, in a different castle, the man (g) ......................... her sister, Alexa. So the new servant (h) ......................... the man and she did not help him. The man’s daughter (i) .......................... Then the man (j) ......................... the new servant to the top of the Black Tower and burned her (k) ........................ he said she was a witch.  Today, people see her ghost. It has (l) ......................... hair and (m) ......................... eyes.

CHAPTERS 3-4

Chapter 3

1 Put one word in these sentences. Don’t look at the story!

(a) There was a ........................................ wind.
(b) The car made ........................................ in the snow.
(c) The car could not ........................................ easily.
(d) Everything was .........................................

Write the words again below. Put one letter on each line. The letters down the middle make a word. What is it?

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

2 Talk with a friend or write about these questions:

(a) Is Walter really crazy? Why/why not?
(b) Why do you think he says: ‘I must stop you, Alexa’?

3 How do Claire and her aunt feel in this chapter? Find words from these words:
afraid, worried, happy, tired, interested, ill, bored, angry, hungry, cold, excited

For each word, find places in the story where they felt like this.

Chapter 4

Page 22 to the bottom of page 24

Answer these questions.

1 What things happened in the castle after the cat made its home in Walter’s cottage? Write down as many as you can. Don’t look at the book!

2 Why did Walter call his cat ‘Alexa’?

3 Why is Alexa ‘more than a cat’?

4 Why is Alexa afraid of Claire? What do you think?

Bottom of page 24 to near the bottom of page 28

1 Finish these sentences.

(a) Claire thought a cat was in the Tower because she could see ..........................................
(b) Mr Burge did not hear Claire because .............................................
(c) Claire wants to find Mr Burge because her aunt .............................................
(d) It was dark in the Tower so it was .............................................
(e) Claire knew there was a fire because she saw .............................................
(f) When she knew there was a fire, Claire was .............................................
(g) She could not go back down the tower because .............................................
(h) She is worried about Mr Burge and she thinks .............................................

2 Who says the following words and why?

(a) ‘Alexa. Stop! Stop! Stop this!’
(b) ‘Mr Burge...Mr Burge.’
(c) ‘But Claire is dead.’
(d) ‘Not dead?...Claire?...Not dead?*

Near bottom of page 28 to page 31

Look up the word power in your dictionary. Then talk about these questions with another student, or write your answers.

(a) Why do you think the fire ‘began to die’ (page 28)?
(b) Why does the orange-coloured cat move away from Claire?
(c) Why does the Tower fall down?
(d) Why does the cat die?
(e) What does Aunt Min understand (page 29)?
(f) Why isn’t the dead cat there the next morning?

Talk with another student.

(a) Do you know any ghost stories? If so, tell one.
(b) What do you usually do at Christmas time? Do you have a holiday?
(c) What do you think of this story? Is it a good ghost story or not? Why/Why not?