**SUMMARY**

It is Nicky’s first trip to New York, his first time outside England without his mother and father, and he is nervous. He is going to stay in a city he doesn’t know with a person he doesn’t know, his Aunt Carrie. He doesn’t know where she lives or even her phone number. And he only has a few dollars in his pocket. So when Aunt Carrie isn’t at the airport to meet him and he is met, instead, by a man, Lou, who he has never heard of, his anxiety increases. But as he travels in the taxi to meet Aunt Carrie, he begins to relax. Luckily, Lou mentions in passing that Mrs. Minerva couldn’t meet him because it is her day for going on a boat tour around Manhattan. This information proves vital later.

Lou stops off at Sam’s Meat Shop and disappears, with Nicky’s bag. Nicky gets bored waiting and wanders outside, where he is kidnapped by a boy with a motorbike and sidecar. His adventures with the boy and his mates, including a girl who involves him in shoplifting, eventually lead to a police chase, but he is a fast runner and he manages to give them the slip. But now he is lost in New York, lost, like in the dream he constantly has.

Now he uses the one piece of information he has to get him to Aunt Carrie’s. He finds the boat tour with Mrs. Minerva on it. Whilst he is searching, he saves a little girl from falling off the boat. He gets into conversation with a man selling tour books on the boat and reveals that he is looking for Mrs. Minerva. It turns out that she is a monkey, who belongs to Lou. The man offers to phone Carrie’s restaurant and the bad dream ends happily with Nicky a hero.

**ABOUT JOHN ESCOTT**

John Escott writes books for students of all ages. He enjoys reading and writing detective stories more than anything. When he is not writing, he likes going for long walks by the sea. Or he looks for old books in small bookshops, or watches old films on TV. He lives in Bournemouth, a town by the sea in the south of England.

John Escott’s other stories for Penguin Readers are *The Missing Coins* and *The Climb*.

**BACKGROUND AND THEMES**

The story is in the tradition of ‘road’ novels, in which a person encounters a number of adventures on the way to a happy ending. But it also has the dreamlike quality that forms a backdrop to the narrative. Nicky has a recurrent dream of getting lost, and then it actually happens, in New York of all places! Just as in a dream, he appears to get deeper and deeper into difficulties as each episode is more dangerous than the last. Finally, he takes charge of his own destiny and solves the puzzle. On the way, he grows a little, changing from a nervous young boy at the opening of the story into a brave young man by the end.
ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Ask students to imagine that they are going to visit a country they have never been to before. They are going to stay at a place they have never stayed at before. Someone is going to meet them at the airport. They must think of all the things that could go wrong and how they could prepare themselves for each problem, e.g. Perhaps nobody meets at the airport so they need the address and telephone number of the place where they are staying.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–3

1. The conversation between Sam and Lou when they come back into the room where they left Nicky.
2. The conversation between Lou and Aunt Carrie when he telephones her to explain what has happened.

Chapters 4–8

1. Ask students to imagine that Nicky couldn’t get away from the fruit-seller. Ask them to work in groups of three and role play the conversation between Nicky and the policemen. Nicky explains everything that has happened and, after disbelieving him at first, the policemen agree to help him and work out how to do it.
2. Ask students to work in small groups.
   (a) They must make notes on each of these characters from this section:
       • Sarah
       • Sarah’s mother
       • the fruit-seller
       • Joe
       • Mrs. Minerva
       • the woman in the bus tour office
       • the taxi-driver
   (b) Each student in the group choose one of the characters and the other students try to guess which character they have chosen by asking Yes/No questions.

Ask students to work in groups and make a list of the mistakes that Nicky made during this story. What should he have done instead, in each case?

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 1–3

alone (adj) not with other people
avenue (n) a road in a town
dream (n) a series of thoughts, images, and experiences that come into your mind while you are asleep
island (n) a piece of land completely surrounded by water
motorbike (n) a bicycle with an engine
ride (v) to sit on and control the movement of eg. a motorbike
scarf (n) a piece of material that you wear around your neck
sidecar (n) a seat that is attached to the side of a motorbike
taxi (n) a car with a driver that you pay to take you somewhere
thief (n) someone who steals things
tour (n) a journey in which you visit several different places
tourist (n) someone who visits a place for pleasure

Chapters 4–8

guard-rail (n) a metal fence which protects people from falling off a boat, bridge, etc.
monkey (n) a type of animal that lives in hot countries and uses its tail and hands to climb trees
peach (n) a soft round fruit with yellow and red skin and a large seed inside
pier (n) a structure that is built out into water so that boats can stop next to it
statue (n) a stone or metal object that is made to look like a person or animal
Activities before reading the book

1. Look at the titles of the chapters. Work in pairs. Think of a story to match the titles.

2. Look through the pictures in the book. Does your story fit with the pictures?

3. Read the first part of the Introduction. Find these characters in the pictures – you’ll have to guess!
   - Nicky
   - the older boys
   - Melissa
   - Mrs Minerva
   - Aunt Carrie

Activities while reading the book

Chapters 1–3

1. Answer these questions about the information in Chapter 1.
   (a) Where is Nicky going?
   (b) How is he going there?
   (c) Why is he going there?
   (d) Who is he going to stay with?
   (e) What does his aunt do?
   (f) How is he feeling?

2. Put these events from Chapter 2 in order.
   (a) A boy called Jake pushed Nicky into the sidecar.
   (b) Lou and Nicky got into a taxi.
   (c) Lou and Nicky went into Sam’s Meat Shop.
   (d) Lou and Sam went through a door into the back of the shop.
   (e) Lou met Nicky at the airport.
   (f) Lou talked to Sam.
   (g) Lou took Nicky’s bag out of the taxi and paid the taxi driver.
   (h) Nicky got hot and went out of the shop into the street.
   (i) The boys drove up to Nicky and started to talk to him.
   (j) The motorbike and sidecar drove away fast.
   (k) The taxi drove away.
   (l) The taxi drove to Sam’s Meat Shop.
   (m) Three boys with a motorbike and a motorbike and sidecar saw Nicky.

3. Why did Nicky stay with the boys?

4. Find a suitable answer (i–x) for each question or statement (a–j).
   (a) Take me back!
   (b) I’m going out Mum. See you later.
   (c) Who’s this?
   (d) Where did he come from?
   (e) Are you a visitor to New York?
   (f) Do you want to go shopping?
   (g) Do you want to buy it?
   (h) Can I help you?
   (i) This clock is only eighteen dollars.
   (j) That’s our cheapest clock.
   (i) Don’t do anything bad.
   (ii) His name’s Nicky.
   (iii) How much is this clock?
   (iv) No, thanks.
   (v) No.
   (vi) Pete will take you back later.
   (vii) Sorry, it’s too expensive.
   (viii) That’s OK.
   (ix) We … found him.
   (x) Yes.

Chapters 4–8

1. Complete this summary of the story in Chapter 4 with a suitable noun from the box in each space.

   arm avenues boy buses car dream fruit-seller hand name peaches policemen shop sidecar street taxi thief

   (a) The motorbikes moved between the car and … again.
   (b) The three boys knew the streets and … of the city.
   (c) Red Hair stopped in a small …
   (d) Nicky got out of the … and spoke to Red Hair.
   (e) ‘Tell me the … of the right street.’
   (f) ‘I can get a … from here.’
   (g) But the … pushed him away.
   (h) Jake and Red Hair walked across to a fruit …
   (i) They took some … and threw one to Nicky.
   (j) The … ran out of his shop.
   (k) The boys ran but Nicky couldn’t move - it was like a bad …
   (l) A police … came up the street.
   (m) Nicky felt the fruit-seller’s … on his arm.
   (n) Two … got out of the car.
   (o) They think I’m a … thought Nicky.
   (p) He pulled his … away from the man and ran.

2. One word in each of these sentences from Chapter 5 is wrong. Can you find each one and correct it?
   (a) The sun was warm on Nicky’s head.
   (b) He felt very big and afraid.
   (c) He stopped running and started to cry.
(d) There was nobody – no police cars – behind him now.
(e) ‘Where am I? This is my smallest dream.’
(f) He never had that dream.
(g) But, in the dream, people always stopped him.
(h) He didn’t know the number of Aunt Carrie’s street.
(i) Her address was in his bag and his bag was in Sam’s restaurant.
(j) He was outside a boat tour office now.
(k) ‘Bus and train tours round New York’ the words said.
(l) Nicky heard Lou’s words ‘Mrs. Minerva likes to go on the two o’clock boat.’
(m) There was a watch in the office window.
(n) It was two o’clock.
(o) Nicky went into the office and spoke to the man at the desk.
(p) She said the boat went from Pier 63.

3 Number in order these two conversations between Nicky and the taxi driver. (Chapter 6)
Conversation 1
(a) Driver: Have you? Why?
(b) Driver: It’s OK. Forget about the money. I’ll take you. A nice ride for my young friend from England.
(c) Driver: Let’s go. We haven’t got much time.
(d) Driver: And you’re lost, right? OK. I’ll take you to Pier 83.
(e) Driver: Hey!
(f) Driver: Stop! Are you English?
(g) Driver: Where are you going?
(h) Driver: You’re in the wrong place. It’s a long way from here.
(i) Nicky: But I’ve got to be at Pier 83 before two o’clock.
(j) Nicky: Thanks.
(k) Nicky: But I can’t pay you. I’ve only got four or five dollars. I’ll want those for the boat tour. My other money is in my bag.
(l) Nicky: I’ve got to go on a boat and find Mrs. Minerva and...
(m) Nicky: Pier 83. I’m looking for Pier 83.
(n) Nicky: Sorry.
(o) Nicky: Yes.
Conversation 2
(a) Driver: A mistake? What do you mean?
(b) Driver: Why are you alone? How did you get lost?
(c) Driver: And you’re hoping to find her?
(d) Driver: Do you know her face?
(e) Driver: Then how will you find her? It will be difficult.
(f) Driver: Yes. I hope you find your Mrs. Minerva.
(g) Nicky: I lost the person with me. Now I’m looking for someone on the boat. Her name is Mrs Minerva. She always goes on the two o’clock boat tour round Manhattan on Fridays.
(h) Nicky: I was ... it was a mistake.
(i) Nicky: Is that the tour boat?
(j) Nicky: No.
(k) Nicky: Thanks.
(l) Nicky: Yes.

4 Complete these sentences from Chapter 7 with a suitable preposition or adverb.
(a) A small girl called Sarah was ... the boat.
(b) She sat next ... her mother and looked ... the water.
(c) They were ... the top deck.
(d) There was a guard rail ... the deck.
(e) Nicky came ... the stairs.
(f) He looked ... for Mrs. Minerva.
(g) The boat moved ... from Pier 83.
(h) The boat moved ... the water.
(i) They went ... the Statue of Liberty.
(j) People moved ... the boat and looked at it.
(k) Sarah wasn’t interested ... the Statue of Liberty.
(l) She climbed ... on to the guard-rail.
(m) Her mother’s eyes were ... the statue.
(n) Sarah began to fall back ... the guard rail.
(o) Nicky stopped her falling ... the water.

5 Find an answer (i–vii) to each question (a–g) about the information in Chapter 8.
(a) Who is Nicky looking for?
(b) What is Mrs. Minerva.
(c) Whose monkey is she?
(d) Where was she?
(e) Why was she on the boat?
(f) Who is Joe?
(g) What is he going to do?
(i) Because Lou has to work late every Friday.
(ii) He is the man with the tour books.
(iii) He’s going to phone the restaurant and tell Lou to come and get Nicky.
(iv) Lou’s.
(v) Mrs Minerva.
(vi) She was on the guard rail.
(vii) She’s a monkey.

3 Which is the best part of the story? Why? Discuss in pairs.