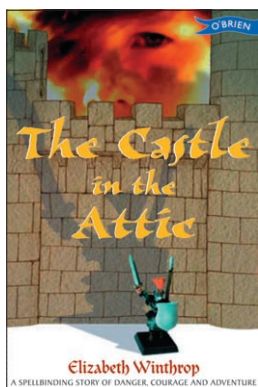


# THE CASTLE IN THE ATTIC

by Elizabeth Winthrop

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Mrs Phillips has taken care of William for ten years and in that time he has come to depend on her for the comfort, love and support not always available from his hard-working parents. When she announces that she is returning to her own family in England, he feels angry, hurt and above all fearful of his ability to cope without her. But Mrs Phillips knows William better than he knows himself, and by entrusting him with a family heirloom of a model castle, she provides him with the key to self-discovery. Her often-repeated tales of the adventures of Sir Arthur have inspired him with the ideals of chivalric behaviour and honour, and when he embarks on his own quest through the magical castle, he discovers that he is well-prepared to face the many difficulties which await him.

## LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Palsy, potion, edicts, pallet, brusque, revelations, suffice, acrid, quest.
- ◆ Discussion: 'Every family has its own traditions ...' (p.14). Children list objects which may have been handed down through generations in their families, suggesting how these acquired importance.
- ◆ Discussion: Children describe some familiar setting, such as their own home or school, from the viewpoint of a miniature person, remembering to concentrate on those details which would not be immediately noticeable in their own daily lives.
- ◆ Discussion: 'Nobody should have the power to look at the secrets inside another person' (p.174). Children analyse the truth or otherwise of this statement, giving reasons for their opinions.
- ◆ Discussion: 'Not even Alastor could hide' from the mirror which showed 'all the horrors inside yourself' (p.154). 'When you look inside it, you will see all the cowardice and hatred and greed inside yourself' (p.157). List the advantages and disadvantages of possessing such a mirror. Might the ready availability of such a mirror influence people's behaviour? Given the choice, would you choose to use a similar mirror in your home or classroom? What might the images reveal about your own personality or character?
- ◆ Creative: Children suggest other gifts which might be suitable for an 'early-birthday/late-goodbye' present (p.76), focusing on the appropriateness of gifts for particular occasions.
- ◆ Creative: Having discussed the powers of Alastor's magic token (p.34), children imagine how they would feel if they witnessed a close friend being turned into lead. How might they break the spell?
- ◆ Creative: Sir Simon's magic token was 'about the size of a baby aspirin' (p.24) and on one side was the outline of a man's head, while the other surface was smooth and empty.

Design your own magic token and describe its powers, listing any words necessary to operate the spell.

- ◆ Creative: Sir Simon didn't always appreciate the modern foods supplied by William, preferring instead to use his magic token to miniaturise sow bug beetles which he then speared and ate raw (p.52). Usually, William brought him long-life foods such as 'small bits of dried fruits, granola, cracker crumbs and crumbled potato chips' (p.50). Imagine you are responsible for the daily nutritional requirements of a miniature friend: List the foods you would supply and give the reasons why you have chosen these particular items.
- ◆ Story: Children read or listen to one of the many stories which feature King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, noting the rules and codes of chivalry.

## SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ Local studies: Buildings, sites or ruins in my locality. Exploring some features of a castle or tower-house in the local environment, investigating origins and location, former and present appearance, purpose of construction and elements which have changed or remained unchanged.
- ◆ Life, society, work and culture in the past: Life in Norman Ireland. Becoming familiar with aspects of the lives of the Normans: Homes (pp.10–12, 94), clothes (pp.19, 95–96), foods and cooking (pp.51, 165, 167), tools and weapons (pp.22, 97–99).
- ◆ Story: Myths and legends. Listening to, discussing and retelling some of the Arthurian legends.

## SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Human environments: People at work. Exploring and investigating the activities of people who work in the Health Services, such as doctors, nurses and surgeons, and assessing the importance of their work in the community. William's mother was a paediatrician who worked evening office hours so that 'working parents could bring their children in for check-ups' (p.17). Discuss the

necessity for surgeries that cater for parents working outside the home or for hospital staff to work at Christmas.

## SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Developing self-confidence. Becoming more confident in coping with change and with situations that are unfamiliar. Discuss William's reliance on Mrs Phillips in his gymnastics classes (pp.3, 59–61), his fears of being left to cope without her (pp.15, 44, 61) and adjusting (p.82).
- ◆ Myself: Feelings and emotions. Identifying strong feelings and learning how to express these feelings in a socially appropriate manner. Discuss William's initial self-assessment that he 'cried too easily' (p.10), and his eventual realisation that 'it was right to feel sad. It was right to show it' (p.169).
- ◆ Myself and my family: Exploring and discussing different kinds of families, recognising that families vary in structure. Examine William's relationship with his parents; did they assume a new importance when Mrs Phillips left (pp.75–78)? Was she correct in her assessment of the situation (p.15)?
- ◆ Myself and the wider world: Local and wider communities. Recognising how people have both an individual and a communal responsibility to the community. Discuss the rules of conduct explained by Sir Simon (p.98) and examine how these might prove valuable in modern times.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Gymnastics: Movement. Practising and performing forward and backward rolls with control, beginning to practise headstand and/or handstand, showing increased control in take-off, flight and landing, producing and performing sequences on the floor and using apparatus (p.60).

## MUSIC

- ◆ Listening and responding: William did his homework 'to the blare of Vivaldi's trumpets' (p.77). Listen to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and give your reactions to the music.