

## Fiction: Comprehension Practice 6

**Text for Section A**, an extract from 'Private Peaceful' by Michael Morpurgo

*Three boys are at home with their mother. One of the boys, Charlie, is worried because he has done something bad. He has stolen an old dog, a foxhound\* called Bertha.*

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'He'll know,' Charlie whispered to me in bed at dawn. 'As soon as they find Bertha gone, the Colonel will know it was me. I won't tell him where she is. I don't care what he does, I won't tell him.'

Charlie and I ate our breakfast in silence, hoping the inevitable storm wouldn't break, but knowing that sooner or later it must. Big Joe sensed something was wrong – he could always feel anxiety in the air. He was rocking back and forth and wouldn't touch his breakfast. So then Mother knew something was up as well. Once she was suspicious Mother was a difficult person to hide things from, and we weren't very good at it, not that morning.

'Is Molly coming over?' she asked, beginning to probe.

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There was a loud and insistent knocking on the door. She could tell at once it wouldn't be Molly. It was too early for Molly, and anyway she didn't knock like that. Besides I think she could already see from our faces that Charlie and I were expecting an unwelcome visitor. As we feared, it was the Colonel.

Mother invited him in. He stood there glaring at us, thin-lipped and pale with fury. 'I think you know why I've come, Mrs Peaceful,' he began.

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'No, Colonel, I don't,' said Mother.

'So the young devil hasn't told you.' He was shouting now, shaking his stick at Charlie. Big Joe began to whimper and clutched Mother's hand as the Colonel ranted on.

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'That boy of yours is a despicable thief. First of all he steals the salmon out of my river. And now, in my employ, in a position of trust, he steals one of my foxhounds\*. Don't deny it, boy. I know it was you. Where is she? Is she here? Is she?'

Mother looked to Charlie for an explanation. 'He was going to shoot her, Mother,' he said quickly. 'I had to do it.'

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'You see!' roared the Colonel. 'He admits it! He admits it!' Big Joe was beginning to wail now and Mother was smoothing his hair, trying to reassure and comfort him as she spoke. 'So you took her in order to save her, Charlie, is that right?'

'Yes, Mother.'

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'Well, you shouldn't have done that, Charlie, should you?'

'No, Mother.'

'Will you tell the Colonel where you've hidden her?'

'No, Mother.'

Mother thought for a moment or two. 'I didn't think so,' she said. She looked the Colonel full in the face. 'Colonel, am I right in thinking that if you were going to shoot this dog, presumably it was because she's no use to you anymore – as a foxhound I mean?'

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'Yes,' the Colonel replied, 'but what I do with my own animals, or why I do it, is no business of yours, Mrs Peaceful. I don't have to explain myself to you.'

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'Of course not, Colonel,' Mother spoke softly, sweetly almost, 'but if you were going to shoot her anyway, then you wouldn't mind if I were to take her off your hands and look after her, would you?'

#### Glossary

foxhound: a type/breed of dog

### Section A: Reading

Read the **Text** in the insert, and answer questions 1–18.

1 What does Charlie refuse to do?

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Read the second paragraph (lines 4–9).

2 Which word means 'cannot be avoided'?

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3 '... the inevitable storm ...' (line 4).

What is the narrator referring to?

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4 What do we learn about Mother from lines 4–9? Tick (✓) **one** box.

She is strict about setting rules for her children.

She is foolish about her children's needs.

She is observant of her children's behaviour.

She is trusting of her children's honesty.



Read the third and fourth paragraphs (lines 10–14).

5 Give **one** word that shows Mother is trying to find out what is happening.

6 Give **two** reasons why Mother knows it is **not** Molly knocking at the door.

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7 'Besides I think she could already see from our faces that Charlie and I were expecting an unwelcome visitor. As we feared, it was the Colonel.' (Lines 13–14)  
Give **two** ways the writer uses language or sentence structure to build suspense.

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8 Suggest **one** reason why Big Joe 'began to whimper and clutched Mother's hand' (line 19).

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9 What had Charlie previously taken from the Colonel before he took Bertha?

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10 Give **two** rude phrases that the Colonel uses to refer to Charlie.

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11 What does Mother do to Big Joe in response to the noise he makes?

12 Read these sentences: 'Don't deny it, boy. I know it was you. Where is she? Is she here? Is she?' (Lines 23–24)

Why does the Colonel repeat his questions? Tick (✓) **two** boxes.

He's a bully.


He thinks it's funny.

He hasn't been heard.

He's feeling worried.

He's impatient.

13 (a) Give a short phrase from the text that describes the Colonel's appearance and shows that he is angry.

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(b) Look at lines 18–29. Give **two** verbs from the text that describe how angrily the Colonel was shouting.

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14 What is the ‘it’ that Charlie is referring to when he says, ‘I had to do it’ (line 26)?

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15 Look at lines 25–35.

(a) Which of the statements below about Charlie is true? Tick (✓) **one** box.

He lied about the dog to the Colonel.


He behaved disrespectfully to his mother.

He did what he believed was right.

He didn’t realise taking the dog would be a problem.

(b) Mother asks Charlie if he will tell the Colonel where he has hidden Bertha and he replies ‘no.’ (Lines 33–34)

Explain how Mother’s response shows how well she knows Charlie.

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16 Look at this sentence: ‘She looked the Colonel full in the face.’ (Lines 35–36)

Give **one** word with the same meaning as *full* as it is used in this sentence.

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17 Give a **five-word phrase** that shows that Mother wants to take responsibility for Bertha from the Colonel.

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18 Give **two** reasons from the text to explain why the name ‘Mrs Peaceful’ is a good name for Mother.

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### Section B: Writing

19 Read the final paragraph of the extract again.

Mother buys Bertha from the Colonel, and Bertha becomes the family’s pet dog. Not long after, the boys get into a dangerous situation. They are saved by Bertha.

Now continue the story to explain what happens next.

Ideas to help you:

Plot

What is the dangerous situation?

How do the boys get into trouble?

How does Bertha save them?

characters

- the boys (narrator, Charlie, Big Joe)
- Mrs Peaceful
- the Colonel
- Bertha

Setting

- the Peacefuls’ home
- somewhere outside the Peacefuls’ home
- anywhere else?