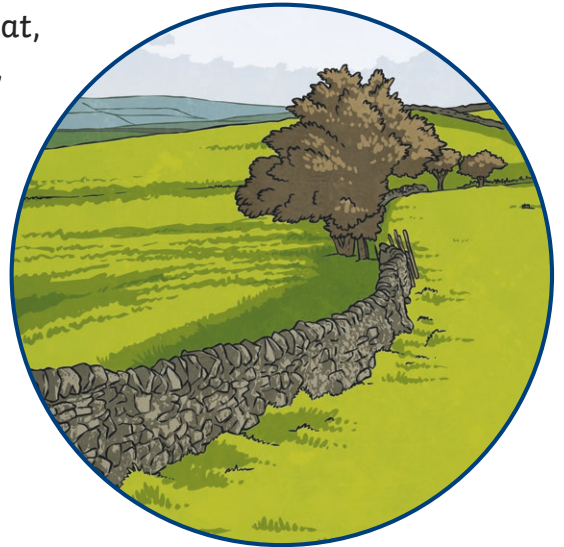




The Legend of the Elfwind

Ave was walking in the Fens on her own. It was a flat, harsh landscape stretching as far as the eye could see, with miles of brown fields and grey skies that seemed never-ending. Ave had been here plenty of times before, delivering messages or tending the land; sometimes she could walk for hours without spotting another human being. It could be bleak but, over time, Ave had developed a form of love for the place. It didn't ask anything from her. It treated her as an equal. There was a certain beauty to the stillness of the Fens that she'd never known growing up in the house: a peacefulness that even now seemed so strange.



Today was different.

For a start, she was out after six. She was never out after six; it was forbidden. The wind was biting and the mists had begun to roll in from the sea. She was still three miles from her adopted home, Auberon's Keep, and it was getting dark. Her master would not be happy.

She wrapped her scarf tightly around her head, bending into the wind as the rains lashed at her hands and body. She prayed that her master would understand; hoping beyond hope that he would be merciful this time.

But at the back of her mind, she hoped the stories of the creatures were true.

Q1: Find and copy two facts about the Fens from the first paragraph.

- _____
- _____



Q2: '*...tending the land;*'

How else could the author have written this phrase?

Q3: Why do you think that it was forbidden to be out after six o'clock?



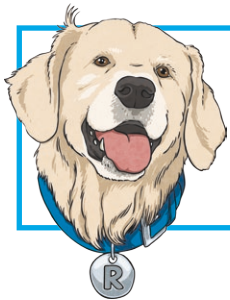
Ave decided to take a short cut through the fields and along Elven Dyke. All the fields had dykes running alongside them. They were man-made waterways built to drain the land. Most were made two or three hundred years ago when the Fen people had reclaimed the land, but not Elven Dyke. Some said it had been there since Roman times, some said even longer. Its long, straight course had separated her master's land from the other farmers' fields for centuries. Her master always said its steep banks and deep waters were the perfect protection from thieving villagers. 'To walk its banks is to invite trouble', he would sneer by the fireside.

But Ave had no choice. There wasn't enough time to take the long road; not with the mist thickening and daylight almost gone. Deep down, something told her to go this way anyway. With the wind howling and the rain stinging her eyes, Ave jumped across and made her way along Elvin Dyke, her sodden boots squelching through long grass and overgrown reeds.

A mile or so later, Ave came to a thin, dead-looking tree. She could just about make out its twisted, leafless branches silhouetted against the charcoal-grey sky beyond. Wet and cold, she peered back the way she came. She could hardly see a thing. As if a thick blanket had been thrown across the land, the fields were now shrouded in blurry darkness.

That's when she first heard the noise. Like a laughing, or a howling, the sound was high-pitched and distant. Ave stopped. Her heart was racing. She had heard of the Elfwind. She had listened to the children and to her master's stories about how the Fenland air could play tricks on lost travellers in the night.

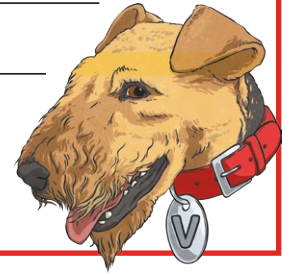
That's when she heard a voice. A soft voice, singing on the wind.



Q4: What was the name of the dyke that Ave walked along?

Q5: Find and copy three ways in which the author gives the impression that the setting is unpleasant.

- _____
- _____
- _____



Q6: *'But Ave had no choice.'*

Why do you think that Ave felt this way?

Q7: How do you think Ave felt when she first heard the noise? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.



Q8: Why do you think that the author compares the mist to a thick blanket being thrown across the land?



“Avery Tanner from Auberons Keep,” the voice sang. “You’ve come to find us, your memories weep.”

Ave stood frozen as the wind and rain continued to whip at her face and body. “Who’s there?” she shouted.

“Make up for the past, yourself you must give; let us protect you, you cannot forgive,” the voice whispered on the wind.

“Show yourself!” Ave yelled.

The rain eased and the mist cleared, revealing the eerie looking tree and a bright yellow moon. “We are the Elfwind, we know you by name; we know of your sorrow, we know who’s to blame,” the voice replied. “The one you call master, he took you away; he took you from Mother, and now he must pay.”

Ave stepped closer to the tree. The legend of the Elfwind was true! In the legends, the elves were carried unseen by the wind. They would seek out wrong-doers and carry out their own elf-like justice. All you had to do was ask for their help. But, Ave had been warned, it always came at a price. “What do you want from me in return?” Ave asked.

“Your heart,” was all the Elfwind sang back.

Ave closed her eyes and tried to picture her mother. It was so long since she’d last seen her, the image had become faded and incomplete. Auberons had done that. When he took her, he robbed Ave of her childhood memories and her mother’s love. His crime was unforgivable. He had to pay. “Agreed,” Ave whispered, tears falling from her cheeks.

When she returned to Auberons Keep, the fire was roaring in the hearth but there was no sign of her master, just his chair rocking gently on the wooden floorboards. She never saw him again. Never more was she sent to deliver messages or tend the land; never again would he treat her cruelly. She had a new master now.

Years after her death, the village children would talk of a mysterious woman who walked along Elven Dyke in the dead of night, singing songs of love. But they never saw her face; it was only ever her voice they heard. Like the legend of the Elfwind, drifting on the breeze...

Q9: How does Ave’s life compare to her master’s?



Q10: Why did Ave stand 'frozen'?

Q11: What do you think happened to Auberon?



Q12: Retell the main points of this text in three sentences.

