

# The Demon Headmaster

Gillian Cross

## Teacher notes: *The Demon Headmaster*

**Curriculum references:** Years 5–6

**Programme of study:** Reading comprehension

Children should be taught to:

- maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:
  - continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks
  - recommending books that they have read to their peers, giving reasons for their choices
  - identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing
  - making comparisons within and across books
- understand what they read by:
  - checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context
  - drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
  - summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas
- participate in discussions about books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, building on their own and others' ideas and challenging views courteously
- provide reasoned justifications for their views.

## Running the task

- Explain that this is an extract from *The Demon Headmaster*. The book is about Dinah, who goes to a school where everyone is very well behaved.
- Ask the class to imagine their school completely silent: children only talking if answering a question and where every child does exactly what they are told to do. Ask the children if they think they would like that sort of school, and how they might feel about it.
- Now ask the class to read the text independently. Ask them to identify any words in the text that they are not familiar with. Ask the class to use dictionaries to support their understanding of more complex vocabulary.
- Read through the questions as a class. Remind the children to give evidence in questions 1 and 7. Remind the class to keep using the text to answer all the questions, especially questions 3 and 4.
- When the children have finished, ask them to discuss whether they enjoyed the extract or not. Ask whether they would like to read the whole book or would recommend this to someone else. Encourage the children to give reasons for their thoughts.

## Assessment guidance

Use the list below to identify the content domains that the children are working on in this task.

Typically, children working at the expected standard will:

- show an understanding of the meaning of vocabulary in context **2a**
- retrieve key details and quotations from fiction and non-fiction to demonstrate understanding of character, events and information **2b**
- provide developed explanations for key information and events and for characters' actions and motivations **2b**
- accurately and selectively summarise main ideas, events, characters and information in fiction and non-fiction texts **2d**
- make accurate and appropriate comparisons within texts. **2h**

## What to expect

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- 1 What is the problem that Dinah has in the first paragraph? Explain using evidence from the text.** (2b)
- Children working at the expected standard should be able to explain the problem clearly. They may need prompting to use evidence from the text. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard should be able to clearly explain using carefully selected pieces of evidence. Children working towards the expected standard may offer a simple explanation or just that she cannot sleep.
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- 2 “she did what she always did when things baffled her.” Suggest a word that the author could have used instead of “baffled”.** (2a)
- Children working at the expected standard should be able to offer a suitable word. Those working towards the expected standard may simply offer an explanation of the sentence rather than demonstrating an understanding of the word, e.g. “she doesn’t know what to do”.
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- 3 What does she do to try to solve her problem? Tick the best answer.** (2b)
- Most children should be able to select the correct answer. Those working towards the expected standard may need the section of text slowly read to them to be able to select the correct response.
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- 4 Number the following events from 1 to 5 in the order they happen.** (2c)
- Most children, with a reminder to refer to the text, should be able to sequence these events correctly.
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- 5 What does Dinah decide she needs to do at school? Explain why she decides this.** (2b)
- Children working at the expected standard will be able to explain her decision but may not explain, without prompting, why she decides this. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard should be able to do this clearly. Children working towards the expected standard should be able to simply explain her decision.
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- 6 Find and copy *one* word from the final paragraph of the text that tells us Dinah had made up her mind or “settled something”.** (2a)
- Children may find this question challenging; to be able to select this word takes a clear understanding. Some children may incorrectly select more than one word or the phrase “settled something” from the question itself.
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- 7 How do Dinah’s feelings change between the start of the text and the end? Explain using evidence from the text.** (2h)
- This is a challenging question for the children to answer clearly. Those working at greater depth within the expected standard should be able to answer it correctly. Children working at the expected standard will need reminding to use evidence from the text to support their answer. Children working towards the expected standard may offer a simple explanation without using evidence from the text.
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## From *The Demon Headmaster* by Gillian Cross

Dinah sat up in bed for a long time that night, a stiff little figure in a white nightdress, hugging her knees. She knew that there was something wrong about the school, with its well-behaved children, all doing the right thing at the right moment, but she could not understand what it was. And she knew that she did not like the Headmaster at all. She could not understand why she kept saying how wonderful he was. She hated not understanding things.

In the end, she did what she always did when things baffled her. Slipping quietly out of bed, she pulled back the curtains so that the room was lit by moonlight from outside. Then she went to stand in front of the mirror. Pale and prim, her reflection stared back at her, the eyes thoughtful and the mouth pursed up, considering.

“Well?” she murmured. “What’s wrong? Why is the school so peculiar?”

Gazing into her own eyes, she suddenly knew that answer. *Fear. It’s because they’re all afraid.*

She nodded briskly. Yes, that was the right answer. “But what are they afraid of?”

The reflection stared back, unwinking, and she heard the reply in her head. *That’s what you’ll have to find out.*

“How?” But she hardly needed to ask. The answer to that one was obvious.

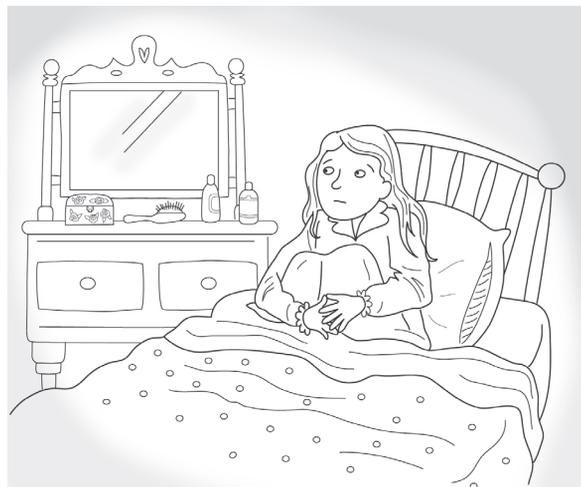
*You’ll have to be naughty, and see what happens to you.*

Her hands, clasped on top of the dressing table, began to shake slightly, but the face that looked back at her out of the mirror was amused.

*See? You’re afraid yourself, and you don’t know why.*

Defiantly, she stuck her chin up and pulled a face into the mirror. “I don’t care if I am scared,” she said out loud. “I want to know, and if that’s the only way to find out, that’s what I’ll do.”

With a determined hand, she closed the curtains and climbed back into bed, feeling as though she had settled something. Curling up under the covers, she fell asleep trying to think of something bad she could do.



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| Name: | Class: | Date: |
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Read the text, then answer the questions.

1 What is the problem that Dinah has in the first paragraph? Explain using evidence from the text.

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2 “she did what she always did when things baffled her.”

Suggest a word that the author could have used instead of “baffled”.

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3 What does she do to try to solve her problem? Tick the best answer.

- She went and opened the window.       She stared up at the moonlight.
- She stood in front of the mirror.       She went back to bed.

4 Number the following events from 1 to 5 in the order they happen.

- She looked at herself in the mirror.       She opens the curtains.
- Dinah could not sleep.       She decides what she is going to do at school.
- She decides why the school is so strange.

5 What does Dinah decide she needs to do at school? Explain why she decides this.

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6 Find and copy one word from the final paragraph of the text that tells us Dinah had made up her mind or “settled something”.

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7 How do Dinah’s feelings change between the start of the text and the end? Explain using evidence from the text.

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