



Varjak Paw does such a wonderful job of introducing younger readers to the genre of action and adventure. Its plot and content are ideal for captivating children of any age, though I find it ideal for strong Year 2 students all the way up to adult (I really loved re-reading it for the blog and found the themes relatable and compelling despite being many decades outside the target audience).

This comprehension takes an extract from the book just as Varjak leaves the comparative safety of the Contessa's house and pitches him into the unknown world of the city.



Instructions:

Students should look to spend 40 minutes on this comprehension, but it can also be tackled question by question in the session.

There are many approaches to setting up a comprehension in a tutorial, but my system is:

1. Give students 5 minutes to read the text. Encourage them to underline key details and circle any higher level vocabulary, particularly words they do not know.
2. Allow the student to ask me any questions about the text. If they ask about words that specifically come up in the text, answer them in detail (though don't reveal that they've asked a question that will be posed later). The idea here is to reward students who seek to ask questions and identify gaps in their knowledge.
3. Read the passage out loud for the student. Try to read in a way that emphasises the tone, pace and emotional backdrop to the passage.
4. Tackle the questions one by one. Students can practice timing and multiple questions in their own time.
5. Aim for perfect answers. There's a time and place for mark schemes, PEE/PEA, sentences per mark, etc. I like to talk to students in terms of writing what they understand as 'perfect' answers. Look to include evidence and analysis with every point they make - it's much easier to remove these over time rather than add them as needed.

The Comprehension

Varjak finds himself in a new place, facing a new adventure.

1. Varjak woke up at the foot of the wall. His head was pounding, his paws hurt. It wasn't quite light yet, but the night was almost over. The fall from the tree must have knocked him out. What a night! He wondered if he'd ever have another like it.

5. He shivered. It was cold out in the open, and the grass beneath his body was wet. He stood up, shook the moisture from his fur, and looked around.

The view cleared his head instantly. Outside was like nothing he'd seen, or even dreamed of.

10. His friend's house stood on top of a high hill. Beneath it was a broad, green park. Beyond it, away in the distance, was a city.

15. Stretched out under the open sky, shining like silver in the pre-dawn light, the city was a huge, mad jumble of shapes and sizes. It had tall towers, gleaming steel and glass - but also squat brick houses, dark with chimney smoke. Wide open gardens jostled with narrow alleys; sharp pointy spires topped soft, curved domes; concrete blocks loomed over bright painted billboards.

They were all in there together, side by side, each one part of the whole. There was so much, he couldn't take it in. All he could hear from here was the wind rustling through the treetops, but down in the city it looked noisy and bustling, a place that never went to sleep.

20. His whiskers twitched with a mix of energy, excitement, danger. His heart beat faster, just looking at it. It seemed like a city where anything could happen, and probably did...

The Questions:

1. Why is Varjak's head pounding?

(1 marks)

2. What time of the day does the story take place?

(1 mark)

3. a) What type of animal do you think Varjak is?

b) Write down two pieces of **evidence** from the story that **explain** your answer.

i) _____

ii) _____

(3 marks)

4. In your own words, can you describe where Varjak is?

(3 marks)

5. Write down 4 different types of building that Varjak sees when he looks down at the city below him.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

(4 marks)

6. What can Varjak hear when he is standing on the hill looking over the city?

(2 marks)

7. What is a 'billboard'? (line 15)

(1 marks)

8. Find a word used in the story which means short and fat.

(1 marks)

9. Do you think that Varjak thinks the city looks like a friendly place or an unwelcoming place? What makes you think this?

(2 marks)

10. What do you think makes Varjak's heart beat faster? (line 20- 21)

(2 marks)

11. Imagine you are looking at a new city for the first time having always lived in a small village. How would you feel? Answer in as much detail as you can.

(4 marks)

12. Find one word from the story which means the same, or nearly the same, as the words below:

immediately	
shining	
full of energy	

(3 marks)

13. Put these words in order to make the best sentence possible. Remember to add the capital letters and punctuation.

a) rose the over sun the city

(1 marks)

b) beautiful probably ever he seen most sight the it had was

(1 marks)

Total 30 marks

Recommended Time: 40 mins