

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

The Ice Palace by Robert Swindells (Puffin)



1. Explore it

Read the extract from the book below, thinking about what is happening and the characters you meet:

Turn your face into the east wind, and if you could see for ever you would see Ivan's land. It is a land where summer is short and pale like a celandine; winter long and cold as an icicle. Ivan does not live there now for he grew old long ago, and is gone. But the people of the pine-woods remember him. They remember him all the time, but most of all they remember him in winter because they are not afraid of winter any more. They have no need to be afraid, because of something Ivan did when he was very small.

Ivan and his brother lived in the house of their father the blacksmith, in a village in the shadow of the great, dark forest. The people of the village were poor, but in the summertime they were mostly happy, so that the pale, warm air rang with their laughter and their singing as they worked.

But as the short summers gave way to autumn their songs became sad songs, and their laughter thin. For they knew that far away to the north, Starjik was greasing the runners of his sled and rounding up his wolves. Starjik! Whisper his name and it was winter in your heart. Hissing over crisp snow in the black of night came Starjik behind his hungry team. Their eyes were yellow and their fangs were white. When Starjik was in a village the people lay very still behind their shutters but always, in the morning, a child was gone. For Starjik was known in every pine-woods village as the child-taker, and those he took were never seen again.

One night when an icy wind whined through the black trees, and powdery snow sifted under everybody's doors, Starjik came to Ivan's house, and when Ivan awoke in the morning his little brother was gone.

What do you think is happening in this extract? Who are the central characters? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences?

Focus on the character of Ivan. What do you think you know about him, his family and his childhood to this point in the story? What kind of person do you think he might be? How would you describe him? Now think about the introduction of the character of Starjik. What initial impression do you gain of this character? What makes you think this? What does the introduction of this character make you think about the story that lies ahead? What type of story do you think it will be? What do you think might happen?

Now take some time to think about the setting. What clues to you get about where this story might be taking place? What is this place like for the people who live here? At what time of year do you think it is? What is it like at this time of year?

Think about how this extract makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you know in stories or real life? How? Think about how it is written. Do any parts of the extract really stick in your mind? Which words and phrases do you like best? What do you like about them? Do they help you make a picture in your mind?

2. Illustrate it

Re-read the passage, or ask someone to read it to you, or maybe record it for you so you can play it over again. After you have read the extract a few times, think about what sticks out the most as you listen. What do you see in your mind's eye? When you have a clear picture, take a pen or pencil and a bit of scrap paper;

you can use the back of an old letter or envelope if you don't have any to hand, and draw what you see in your imagination. If you have some coloured pencils, felt tips, or crayons, you could think about how colour could help you describe the setting and mood. When you have finished, think about what you have drawn. Did you draw Ivan and his brother playing carefree in the summertime, nervous families holed up in the winter, Starjik coming into the village, his sled pulled by hungry wolves? Why do you think this part of the extract stuck in your mind?

3. Talk about it

Read the extract again and think more about what you have read:

- How do the people of Ivan's village spend their summers and winters? How do they feel about each of the seasons?
- Ivan's father is a **blacksmith**. What does the job of a blacksmith involve?
- How do the villagers feel about Starjik? What in the text tells you this?
- Think about how Ivan is described: ***They remember him all the time, but most of all they remember him in winter because they are not afraid of winter any more.*** What does this tell us about the character of Ivan and his role in this story?

4. Imagine it

Think about the line: ***They have no need to be afraid, because of something Ivan did when he was very small.*** What does this tell us about Ivan's character? What does it tell us about what might have happened in the rest of this story? What does it tell you about how what he did affected the other villagers? Do you think small children can have an ability to create change?

Do you know any other stories where a child has been brave or been able to change people's lives for the better? These may be stories from a book or they may be real life examples, such as the work done by Isra Hirsi, Greta Thunberg and Timoci Naulusala to raise awareness of the climate crisis, Malala Yousafzai's activism for female education or Bana Alabed's work to raise awareness of children in conflict. If you have not heard of any of these people, look them up and find out more about how they have used their voices for change.

5. Create it

In what ways have children you know used their voice to change things for the better? Think about projects that you have done in school, such as how a group of students have made changes in the school through school council. What issues are there in your school, local or the world community that are important to you? In what ways could you start to raise awareness of these issues to make others aware and to begin to be a voice for change? This may be something like how to improve the local area through an anti-littering or community gardening campaign, it may be how to make changes in school to improve facilities for children, like a campaign to increase access to books and devices for all children to be able to learn at home.

Think about how you could present these issues to a wider audience. Could you make a poster, leaflet, presentation or speech about this issue? Think about who you want to hear your message – do you want to engage other children or adults? How does this change the way you might want to present and the kind of language you might want to use? Put your ideas together then share these with someone at home. What did they think of your presentation? Do they think your issue is an important one? Are they persuaded to listen to your issue and take it seriously? What made your presentation effective?