

Kenneth Grahame's The Reluctant<sup>1</sup> Dragon  
(*target age-group: 14 - 15*)

*("The Reluctant Dragon" is a children's book by Kenneth Grahame written in 1898. In the story, a little boy discovers a poetry-loving dragon living in the Downs above his home. The two become friends, but soon the dragon is discovered by the villagers, who send for St. George to get rid of it. The two of them decide that it would be better for them not to fight a real fight. St. George harmlessly spears the dragon and the villagers rejoice. St. George then reveals that the dragon is reformed in character, and assures everybody that he is not dangerous at all. The dragon is then accepted by the villagers as one of them.)*

Long ago - might have been hundreds of years ago-in a cottage<sup>2</sup> (...) a shepherd lived with his wife and their little son. Now the shepherd spent his days-and at certain times of the year his nights too (...) with only the sun and the stars and the sheep for company, and the friendly chattering<sup>3</sup> world of men and women far out of sight<sup>4</sup> and hearing. But his little son, when he wasn't helping his father, and often when he was as well, spent much of his time buried in big volumes that he borrowed from the affable<sup>5</sup> gentry<sup>6</sup> and interested parsons<sup>7</sup> of the country round about. And his parents were very fond of<sup>8</sup> him, and rather proud of him too (...) so he was left to go his own way and read as much as he liked; and instead of frequently getting a cuff on the side of the head<sup>9</sup>, as might very well have happened to him, he was treated more or less as an equal by his parents, who sensibly thought it a very fair division of labour<sup>10</sup> that they should supply the practical knowledge, and he the book-learning. They knew that book-learning often came in useful at a pinch<sup>11</sup>, what their neighbours said. What the Boy chiefly dabbled<sup>12</sup> in was natural history and fairy-tales, and he just took them as they came, in a sandwichy sort of way, without making any distinctions (...). One evening the shepherd, who for some nights past had been disturbed<sup>13</sup> and preoccupied, (...) came home all of a tremble<sup>14</sup>, and, sitting down at the table where his wife and son were peacefully employed, she with her seam<sup>15</sup>, he in following out the adventures of the Giant with no Heart in his Body, exclaimed with much agitation:

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<sup>1</sup> reluctant = slow and unwilling

<sup>2</sup> cottage = a small house in the country

<sup>3</sup> to chatter = to talk quickly in a friendly way without stopping, especially about things that are not serious or important

<sup>4</sup> out of sight = that nobody can see; beyond all expectation or reason

<sup>5</sup> affable = friendly and easy to talk to

<sup>6</sup> gentry = (old fashioned) people who belong to a high social class

<sup>7</sup> parson = (old fashioned) a Christian priest or minister responsible for a small area, especially in the Church of England

<sup>8</sup> to be fond of (somebody) = to like someone very much

<sup>9</sup> to get a cuff on the side of the head = an action in which you hit someone lightly on the head with your hand open

<sup>10</sup> labour = work

<sup>11</sup> at a pinch = if necessary in a particularly difficult or urgent situation

<sup>12</sup> to dabble = to do something in a way that is not too serious

<sup>13</sup> disturbed = upset, troubled

<sup>14</sup> to tremble = to shake

<sup>15</sup> seam = a line where two pieces of cloth have been stitched together

"It's all up with me, Maria! Never no more can I go up on them there Downs, was it ever so!"

"Now don't you take on like that," said his wife, who was a VERY sensible woman: "but tell us all about it first, whatever it is as has given you this shake-up, and then me and you and the son here, between us, we ought to be able to get to the bottom of it!"

"It began some nights ago," said the shepherd. "You know that cave up there-I never liked it, somehow, and the sheep never liked it neither, and when sheep don't like a thing there's generally some reason for it. Well, for some time past there's been faint<sup>16</sup> noises coming from that cave-noises like heavy sighings<sup>17</sup>, with grunts<sup>18</sup> mixed up in them; and sometimes a snoring, far away down-REAL snoring, yet somehow not HONEST snoring (...). "I know," remarked the Boy, quietly.

"Of course I was terrible frightened," the shepherd went on; "yet somehow I couldn't keep away. So this very evening, before I come down, I took a cast round by the cave, quietly. And there – O Lord! there I saw him at last, as plain as I see you!"

"Saw WHO?" said his wife, beginning to share in her husband's nervous terror.

"Why HIM, I'm a telling you!" said the shepherd. "He was sticking half-way out of the cave, and seemed to be enjoying of the cool of the evening in a poetical sort of way. He was as big as four cart-horses, and all covered with shiny scales<sup>19</sup> - deep-blue scales at the top of him, shading off to a tender<sup>20</sup> sort of green below. As he breathed, there was that sort of flicker<sup>21</sup> over his nostrils that you see over our chalk roads on a baking windless day in summer. He had his chin on his paws, and I should say he was meditating about things. (...) I admit all that. And yet, what am I to do? SCALES, you know, and claws, and a tail for certain, though I didn't see that end of him - I ain't USED to 'em, and I don't HOLD with 'em, and that's a fact!"

The Boy, who had apparently been absorbed in his book during his father's recital, now closed the volume, yawned<sup>22</sup>, clapped<sup>23</sup> his hands behind his head, and said sleepily: "It's all right, father. Don't you worry. It's only a dragon."

"Only a dragon?" cried his father. "What do you mean, sitting there, you and your dragons? ONLY a dragon indeed! And what do YOU know about it?"

"Cos it IS, and 'cos I DO know," replied the Boy, quietly. "Look here, father, you know we've each of us got our line. YOU know about sheep, and weather, and things; I know about dragons. I always said, you know, that that cave up there was a dragon-cave. I always said it must have belonged to a dragon some time, and ought to belong to a dragon now, if rules count for anything. Well, now you tell me it HAS got a dragon, and so THAT'S all right. I'm not half as much surprised as when you told me it HADN'T got a dragon. Rules always come right if you wait quietly. Now, please, just leave this all to me. And I'll stroll<sup>24</sup> up to-morrow morning-no, in the morning I can't, I've got a whole heap<sup>25</sup> of things to do - well, perhaps in the evening, if I'm quite free, I'll go up and have a talk to him, and you'll find it'll be all right. Only, please, don't you go worrying round there without me. You don't understand 'em a bit, and they're very sensitive, you know!"

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<sup>16</sup> faint = (here) weak

<sup>17</sup> to sigh = to breathe in and out making a long sound, especially because you are bored

<sup>18</sup> grunt = a short low sound made deep in your throat like the sound a pig makes

<sup>19</sup> scales = (usually plural) one of the small flat pieces of skin that cover the bodies of fish, snakes

<sup>20</sup> tender = delicate or soft in quality or tone

<sup>21</sup> to flicker = to move irregularly

<sup>22</sup> to yawn = to open your mouth wide and breathe in deeply, usually because you are tired or bored

<sup>23</sup> to clasp = to hold something tightly, closing your fingers around them

<sup>24</sup> to stroll = to walk somewhere in a slow relaxed way

<sup>25</sup> heap = a large untidy pile of things

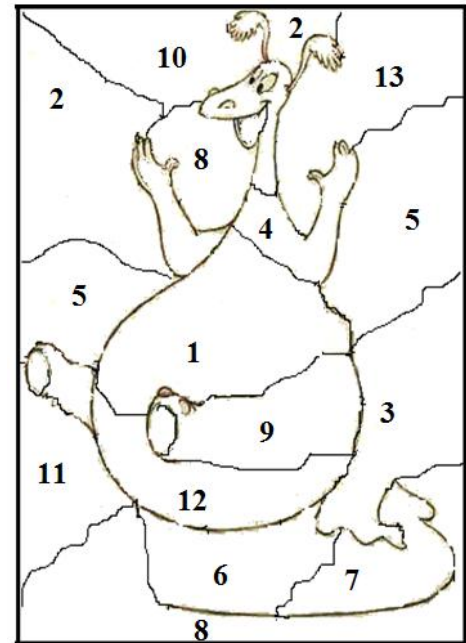




4. Find the correct answer. Circle it. Then colour with a black pencil the right numbers. What is it?

- a. The shepherd and his wife had a 1. *sun* ; 2. *son*.
- b. The boy used to read stories about 3. *knights* ; 4. *nights*.
- c. One night his 5. *father* ; 6. *feather* told him a story about a dragon.
- d. The dragon's 7. *tale* ; 8. *tail* had scales on it.
- e. The boy 9. *red* ; 10. *read* about dragons last year.
- f. The shepherd almost 11. *fainted* ; 12. *painted* when he saw the dragon.
- g. The dragon was out of 13. *sight* ; 14. *fight* after the battle.

| a | b | c | d | e | f | g |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |



5. Read the text again and answer the following questions:

1. What did the little boy's father do for a living?  
.....
2. How did the boy spend much of his time?  
.....
3. Did he like to read fairy tales?  
.....
4. What was the little boy reading one evening when his father came home?  
.....
5. Who else, besides the shepherd, did not like the cave?  
.....
6. Was the shepherd frightened by the sighings, grunts and snorings that were coming out from the cave?  
.....
7. What is the little boy's opinion about dragons?  
.....



6. The little boy said: "If I'm quite free, I'll go up and have a talk to him". Continue the sequence by adding 5 (five) more If Clauses type I.

1. If I have to talk to him, .....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....



7. Work out the link between the first two words and then find a similar link to finish the sentence:

1. *Man* is to *woman* as *husband* is to.....  
a. mother-in-law    b. wife
2. *Man* is to *men* as *woman* is to.....  
a. children          b. women
3. *Stars* are to *sky* as *day* is to.....  
a. morning          b. night
4. *Head* is to *tail* as *shepherd* is to.....  
a. sheep            b. cows
5. *Books* are to *libraries* as *fairies* are to.....  
a. natural history    b. fairy-tales
6. *City* is to *skyscrapers* as *village* is to.....  
a. villagers          b. cottages
7. *Nose* is to *nostrils* as *weather* is to.....  
a. wind              b. summer
8. *Thread* is to *seam* as *books* are to.....  
a. characters        b. volumes



8. Use your imagination. The reluctant dragon is wanted by the villagers. You are the only one who has got some pictures of him. Describe him and the things he likes doing as accurately as you can.





## TEACHER'S GUIDE

Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932) was a Scottish writer, who published in 1898 a collection of children's fiction called *Dream Days* that originally included the classic story *The Reluctant Dragon*. The story is about a poetry-loving dragon who refuses to leave the outskirts of a village, and even refuses to fight St. George when he is asked to. Eventually they plot a fake battle which restores the everyday calm among the villagers. The whole story is told to a young girl, Charlotte, who happened to find some giant footprints in the snow.

The book served as the key element to the 1941 feature film with the same name from Walt Disney Productions. It has also been adapted to music and Tv programmes.

### Key

1. How many words can you make out of the word **RELUCTANT**?

Possible answers:

an, ant, cut, cat, at, tan, rule, rent, rat, car, nut, ale, run, ran, ten, tune, lent, tact, real, cent, aunt, uncle, central, are, tent, let, talent, tale, tart, cute, lace, lane, tear, cane, crane, can, nature, tea, utter, near, cure, cart, nectar, trace, nun, treat, nuclear, true, cruel, antler, turtle, turn, clear.

Note: 1. the teacher can ask for a specific number of words within a time limit;

2. the teacher can ask for words made up of 2, 3, 4 or more letters

3. the teacher can ask for nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.

2. Read the clues carefully and build a word pyramid. The last two letters should be the same in each word.

Guess the word at the bottom of the pyramid.

ON - preposition of place (not *in*, *at*)

GON(E) - past participle of the verb "to go", without the final "e"

AGON(Y) - very severe pain, without the final "y"

~~WAGON~~ - wagon that lost its "w" and it was replaced by "r"

**DRAGON**(FLY) - a brightly coloured insect with a long, thin, often coloured body and transparent wings without a "fly"

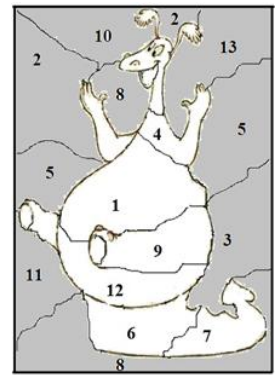
3. Unscramble the words and match them to their definitions.

1. COTTAGE; 2. TREMBLE; 3. HEAP; 4. DISTURBED; 5. YAWN; 6. FAINT; 7. LABOUR; 8. TENDER; 9. SCALES;  
10. RELUCTANT

|    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |     |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|-----|
| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9 | 10. |
| e  | h  | f  | g  | j  | a  | b  | i  | c | d   |

4. Find the correct answer. Circle it. Then colour with a black pencil the right numbers. What is it?

|     |         |        |      |      |         |       |
|-----|---------|--------|------|------|---------|-------|
| a   | b       | c      | d    | e    | f       | g     |
| 2   | 3       | 5      | 8    | 10   | 11      | 13    |
| son | knights | father | tail | read | fainted | sight |



5. Read the text again and answer the following questions:

- The little boy's father / he was a shepherd.
- The boy spent much of his time buried in big volumes / reading.
- Yes, he did.
- One evening, when his father came home, the little boy / he was reading the adventures of the Giant with no Heart in his Body.
- The sheep did not like the cave.
- Yes, he was.
- The little boy / he thinks that dragons / they are very sensitive.

6. The little boy said: "If I'm quite free, I'll go up and have a talk to him". Continue the sequence by adding 5 (five) more If Clauses type I.

Note: Students are supposed to use the correct tenses in If Clauses type I; extra credits are given to imagination and vocabulary used from the given text.

7. Work out the link between the first two words and then find a similar link to finish the sentence:

|      |       |       |       |             |           |      |         |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|-----------|------|---------|
| 1    | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5           | 6         | 7    | 8       |
| b    | b     | b     | a     | b           | a         | a    | b       |
| wife | women | night | sheep | fairy-tales | villagers | wind | volumes |

8. Use your imagination. The reluctant dragon is wanted by the villagers. You are the only one who has got some pictures of him. Describe him and the things he likes doing as accurately as you can.

Note: students are asked to write 12 lines using the given images and their imagination. Present tense and LIKES / DISLIKES + ing verbs are expected to be used.