



## Cat's Eye by Margaret Atwood

### Before reading

- 1 Students work in pairs or small groups to speculate what the 'cat's eye' of the title could refer to. It refers to a kind of marble that the narrator wins from her brother and keeps in a purse. She later uses a cat's eye as a motif in her paintings (she is an artist).
- 2 Students read the list of qualities and tick the ones they consider important when making new friends. Discuss ideas but point out that there are no right or wrong answers.
- 3 Students read *About the story* and *About the author* and identify similarities between the author and the protagonist.

### Answer

They both travelled a lot and both had a father who was an entomologist. They also both have arts-based jobs (painter/author).

- 4 Students read *About the story* again and think about what Elaine is like and how she might be different to the girls in Toronto. They work in pairs to discuss their ideas. Encourage them to think about Elaine's life pre-Toronto and the kinds of places she might have lived because of her father's job and about the games she would have played.

### While reading

- 1 Students read the text and tick the things that are mentioned.

### Answers

(ticked) 2, 4, 5, 7

- 2 Students read the text again and answer the questions. Elicit which part of the text gave each answer. Ask students if anything they discussed in *Before reading* exercise 4 is mentioned in the answer to question 5.

### Answers

- 1 No. She doesn't like the pretend game (*it's like real school, but worse*). She finds the second game tiring because of all the possessions and objects involved in it (*I find this game tiring*).
  - 2 In her previous life it was used as toilet paper, but here it's used for cutting things out of. It shows that her old life was less sophisticated and refined than her life now.
  - 3 No, they aren't. (*Their voices are wheedling and false*)
  - 4 She used to play more physical fighting and running games with boys (*run as fast, aim as well, make loud explosive noises, decode messages, die on cue*)
  - 5 She has moved more often than them; they have only ever lived in one house (*Carol and Grace have never moved anywhere*). She is used to playing physical games.
- 3 Students answer the questions, in pairs if necessary. If they need help with the first question, direct them to the narrator's use of modal verbs *have to* and *can't*. In the second question, encourage them to focus on how the games now could be easier for Elaine in terms of physical and possibly mental effort. For the third question, encourage them to focus on the theme of 'fitting in'.

### CULTURAL INFORMATION

*Cat's Eye* is set in Canada between World War II and the mid-1980s. It covers a number of very important historical events, including the death of King George VI (king of the UK), Canada's move towards becoming an independent nation, and several movements in the visual arts (the narrator is a painter). The book also deals with the issue of gender roles, something that began to change in the 1980s when women started to achieve high-ranking positions in the professional world (again, relating to the narrator's position as a respected painter).

### Answers

- 1 It tells us that Grace is quite bossy and dominant and that she dictates the games that the girls play (the author uses *have to* and *can't*, implying that the other girls are always told what to do).
- 2 It shows that she doesn't care much for possessions (and maybe doesn't have many) and doesn't place much value on having to take care of things, presumably because she has moved around so much. The author conveys this by using the words *accumulation* and also the word *stuffed*, which implies a lack of care.
- 3 The games now are easier physically and mentally – she doesn't have to do anything physical and just needs to say things to fit in; however, she finds the games now more boring compared to the games in the past. But she says the games now are a relief as they require less effort than the games she used to play.
- 4 You have to say the other person's scrapbook is better than yours in order to fit in. If you don't say it, you might be teased, or not fit in with the others.

### After reading

- 1 Read the quote aloud and ask students to work in groups to discuss the questions.

### Answers

- 1 It is saying that our past is always here and is linked to the present, but may be buried deep in our minds. Sometimes we remember it and at other times we don't. It shapes our identity throughout our lives as it is always there.
  - 2 In the extract the author remembers the past games she plays very clearly. She also describes the outhouse with extreme clarity.
  - 3 She describes the outhouse as it contrasts quite sharply with her life now (the stench and the buzzing of the flies are very different to her life in suburban Toronto). She also describes the games she played with her brother and the games she plays now. They are significant because they affect how she deals with the new things in her life now.
- 2 Students work alone to think of a past event that has shaped their life in some way. It should be an event that they are happy to describe.
  - 3 Students write a letter to a friend, describing the event. Encourage them to be as descriptive as possible.