

My Family and Other Animals

This very funny story is about an English family who go to live on the Greek island of Corfu. Gerald, the youngest boy, loves animals and insects. He brings scorpions, spiders, birds, snakes and other animals to the house, and they get him into lots of trouble.

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Series Editors: Andy Hopkins and Jocelyn Potter

Easystarts	200 headwords	
Level 1	300 headwords	<i>Beginner</i>
Level 2	600 headwords	<i>Elementary</i>
Level 3	1200 headwords	Pre-Intermediate
Level 4	1700 headwords	<i>Intermediate</i>
Level 5	2300 headwords	<i>Upper-Intermediate</i>
Level 6	3000 headwords	<i>Advanced</i>

Contemporary British English

Number of words (excluding activities): 6,679

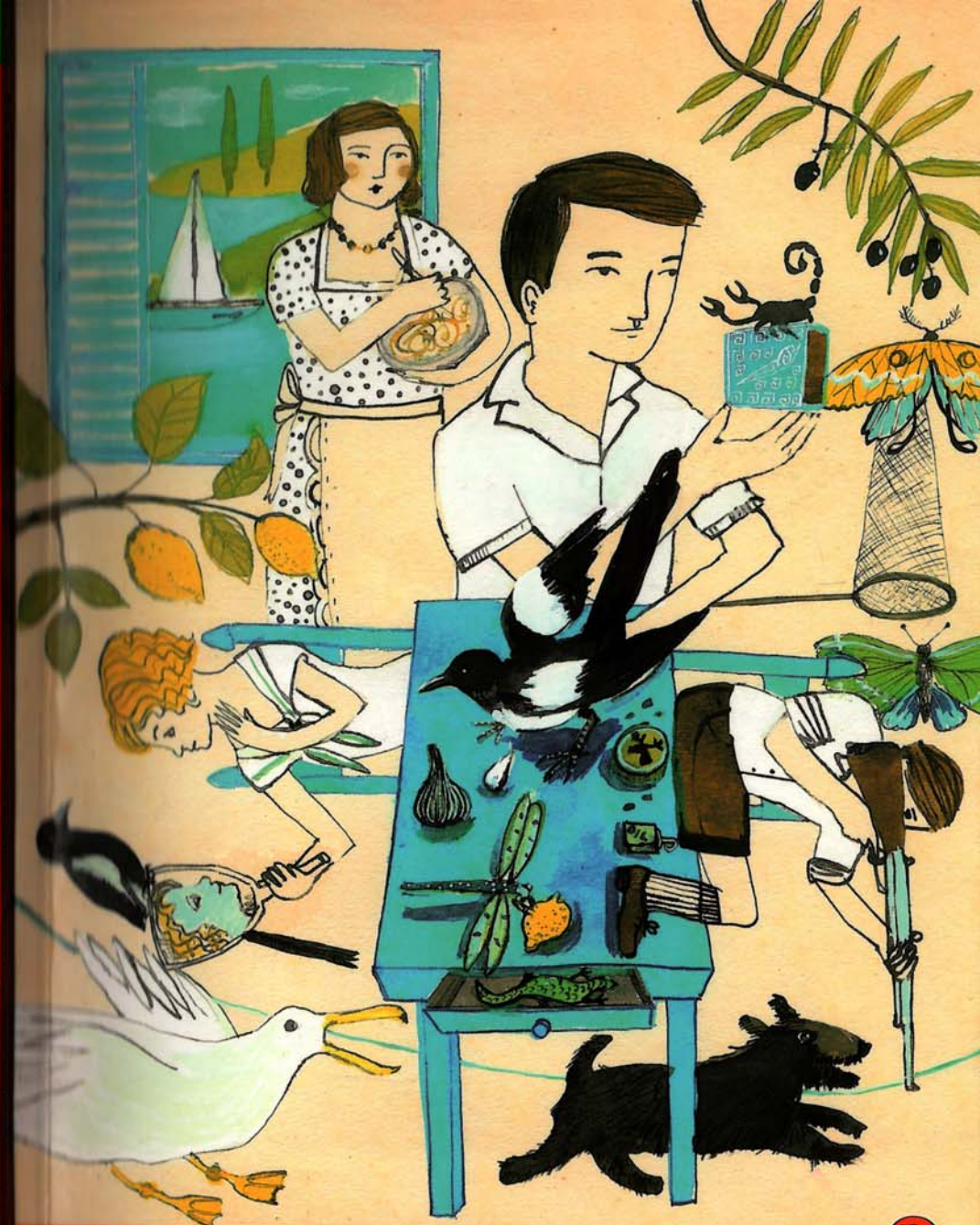
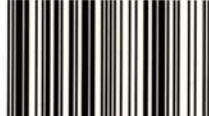
Cover illustration by Rebecca Bradley / www.eyecandy.co.uk

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ISBN 978-1-4058-8196-8



PENGUIN READERS

My Family and Other Animals

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GERALD DURRELL

Level 3

Retold by Jocelyn Potter and Andy Hopkins
Series Editors: Andy Hopkins and Jocelyn Potter

Pearson Education Limited
Edinburgh Gate, Harlow,
Essex CM20 2JE, England
and Associated Companies throughout the world.

ISBN: 978-1-4058-8196-8

First published 1956
This adaptation first published by Penguin Books Ltd 1995
Published by Addison Wesley Longman Ltd and Penguin Books Ltd 1998
New edition first published 1999
This edition first published 2008

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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Typeset by Graphicraft Ltd, Hong Kong
Set in 11/14pt Bembo
Printed in China
SWTC/01

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Published by Pearson Education Ltd in association with
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Introduction

'We need sunshine . . . a country where we can grow . . . George says Corfu's wonderful. Why don't we go there?'

So we sold the house and ran from the English summer.

We travelled by train with our clothes and our most important belongings: Mother's cook books, Leslie's gun, something for Margo's spots, Larry's books, my favourite insects and Roger, my dog.

The Durrells, an English family, go to live on the Greek island of Corfu. Gerald, the youngest son, is about ten years old. He is interested in plants and animals – all sorts of animals.

'There are animals in every corner of the house,' says his brother Larry. 'There's danger at any time of the day or night.'

The Durrells go to Greece for their health and the sun, and they meet a lot of interesting people. They find that life there is very different from life in England. Each person in the family has different ideas and, like any family, they often disagree.

Gerald Durrell was born in 1925. His family went to Corfu in 1935 and stayed until the start of World War II in 1939. After the war, Durrell got his dream job – working in a zoo. Later he travelled to many parts of the world to find animals and to make films about them. In 1959 he started his own zoo on the British island of Jersey. It is called Durrell Wildlife and you can still visit it today. Its main work is to protect kinds of animals that may die out.

Durrell wrote two more books about his family's stay in Corfu: *Birds, Beasts and Relatives* and *The Garden of the Gods*. He wrote a lot of books about his work with animals. His brother Lawrence Durrell (Larry in this story) was also a famous writer. Gerald died in 1995.

Larry's Idea

After July came the cold winds and the grey skies of August. My family had all their usual illnesses. My mother and I had bad colds. My brother Leslie had a problem with his ears. My sister Margo's spots were worse than ever. Only my oldest brother, Larry, was healthy, but he found the rest of us very difficult to live with.

'Why do we stay in England in this weather?' he asked Mother. '*They're* ill and *you're* looking older every day.'

'I'm not,' Mother replied. She was reading at the time.

'You *are*,' Larry said. 'We need sunshine... a country where we can grow.'

'Yes dear, that's a good idea,' Mother answered, not really listening.

'George says Corfu's wonderful. Why don't we go there?'

'If you like, dear.' It was important to keep Larry happy.

'When?' asked Larry with surprise.

Mother realized her mistake and put down her book. 'Perhaps you can go first and look at the place,' she said cleverly. 'If it's nice, we can all follow.'

Larry looked at her. 'You said that last time. I waited in Spain for two months and you didn't come. No – if we're going to Greece, let's go together.'

'But I've only just bought this house!' Mother answered.

'Sell it again then!'

'That's stupid, dear,' said Mother. 'I can't do that.'

So we sold the house and ran from the English summer.

We travelled by train with our clothes and our most important belongings: Mother's cook books, Leslie's guns, something for

Margo's spots, Larry's books, my favourite insects and Roger, my dog.

From Italy we caught a boat. We slept when the boat left and then, very early the next morning, we watched for Corfu. The sea turned blue, then purple, and suddenly there was the sleeping island in front of us. We sailed nearer and, above the noise of the ship, we could hear the high, clear sounds of the insects.

PART 1 THE PINK VILLA

Chapter 1 We Meet Spiro

We left the ship and walked towards the town. Larry found two cabs, put the bags in one and sat in the second. Then he looked round angrily. 'Well?' he said. 'What are we waiting for?'

'We're waiting for Mother,' Leslie explained. 'Roger's found a streetlamp.'

'Dear God!' said Larry, and then shouted, 'Come on, Mother, come on. Can't the dog wait?'

'We waited an hour in Naples for *you*,' said Margo.

'I had a stomach problem,' Larry explained coldly.

'Well, *he's* probably got one too,' Margo replied.

Then Mother arrived and the next problem was getting Roger into the cab. He didn't like the horses, and he didn't want to climb in behind them. In the end we had to lift him up and throw him in while he cried like a baby. The horses were frightened and started moving, and we found ourselves on the floor of the cab with Roger underneath us.

'Really!' said Larry, as we sat up again. 'Everyone's *looking* at us!'

'Stay calm, dear,' said Mother. 'The hotel isn't far.'

Roger put his head over the side of the cab and saw four dirty dogs lying in the sun. The dogs saw him and ran after us. More dogs heard the noise and came to play. When we arrived at the hotel, there were twenty-four animals in the road and Larry was hitting them with his umbrella. He hit Leslie too.

'What are you doing?' Leslie shouted.

'It was an accident,' said Larry. He tried again and knocked Mother's hat to the ground.

We ran into the hotel – the *Pension Suisse* – with Roger in our arms, and shut the door behind us. The dogs continued to make a terrible noise outside. The man behind the hotel desk looked at us. Mother walked towards him, with her hat on the side of her head and carrying my insects. 'Our name's Durrell,' she said calmly. 'I think you have some rooms for us.'

'Yes, Madame,' said the man, watching Roger carefully, 'they're on the first floor.'

'Then we'll rest before lunch,' she said, and we all went upstairs.

The next morning we started looking for a house with Mr Beeler from the hotel. We drove round the island and looked at villas in all sizes and colours. At each one Mother shook her head.

'Madame Durrell,' Mr Beeler said at last. 'What is the problem with all these houses?'

'Didn't you *notice*?' she asked. 'None of them had a bathroom.'

'But Madame,' Mr Beeler replied, 'why do you want a bathroom? Have you not got the sea?'

The next morning we went out without him. Taxi-drivers fought to drive us, and Mother was soon quite

frightened by the crowd. We could not understand a word of Greek.

'Can't you *do* something, Larry?' she asked, pushing away the arms of a large driver.

Then we heard a loud voice above the noise. 'Hoy!' shouted the voice. 'Why's don'ts yous have someones who can talks your own language?'

We turned and saw an old American car. Behind the wheel was a short, fat man with a big brown face. He lifted himself out of the car and walked towards us. 'You wants someones who can talks your own language,' he repeated, 'nots these criminals. Just a minutes.'

He shouted loudly in Greek until the other drivers went back to their cars, waving their arms and clearly unhappy. Then he turned to us again. 'Wheres yous wants to gos?' he asked.

'We are looking,' Mother said, 'for a villa with a bathroom.'

The man thought for a minute. 'Bathrooms? You wants a bathrooms? Get into the car.'

We climbed in. While we drove dangerously fast through the narrow streets, our driver talked to us. 'Yous English? English always wants bathrooms... I gets a bathrooms in my house... Spiro's my name - they alls calls me Spiro Americano because I lives in America... eight years in Chicago... That's where I learnt my goods English... Went there for good moneys... Then after eight years I says: "Spiro," I says, "you haves enough moneys now." Sos I comes backs to Greece... brings this car - best ons the island...'

We drove along a little white road through the fields and the trees to the top of a hill, and Spiro suddenly stopped the car. 'Theres you ares,' he said, pointing with a fat finger.



The man thought for a minute. 'Bathrooms? You wants a bathrooms? Get into the car.'

Mother opened her eyes for the first time since the beginning of the journey and looked. Spiro was pointing at the side of a hill that came up from the shining blue sea. Half-way up the hill was a small pink villa.

Chapter 2 Our New Home

The villa was small and square in its little garden. The flowers in the garden smelt beautiful and we could hear the sound of insects singing together. As soon as we saw it, we wanted to live there.

Spiro now looked after us. 'Don'ts you worrys yourselfs about anythings, Mrs Durrells,' he said. 'Leaves everythings to me.'

He took us shopping and laughed at the prices until they came down. He spoke to someone at the bank when our money was late from England. He paid the hotel bill, put our bags in the car and drove us to the house. But Spiro was not just our taxi-driver. He was also our friend. He watched us like a kind uncle, and he loved Mother. 'Be carefults,' he often said. 'We don'ts wants to worrys your mothers.'

'Why not?' Larry always answered. 'She's never done anything for us . . . why should we think about how *she* feels?'

'Master Larrys, that's not *funny!*'

'He's right, Spiro,' Leslie said seriously. 'She's not a very good mother.'

'Don'ts says that!' Spiro shouted. 'With a mothers likes yours, you musts kisses her feets.'

Now the house was our home, we all started to do the things we were interested in. Margo put on a very small swim-suit and sat in the sun. Larry spent the day in his room,

writing; he only came out for meals. Leslie took out his guns and practised shooting at tins in the garden. After one very noisy morning, Larry ran out of his room. 'I can't work like this!' he cried.

'But I've got to practise,' Leslie replied.

'Why don't you take the bullets out of the gun, dear?' Mother asked.

'That's not possible,' Leslie explained, looking at her with surprise. 'I'm trying to hit the tins!'

In the end Leslie moved his tins away from the house.

Mother spent a lot of time in the kitchen with her pots. She talked to herself while she cooked, and the house was always full of beautiful smells. When she was able to leave the kitchen, she worked in the garden.

I also enjoyed the garden, a land of plants and insects. I spent hour after hour on my stomach, watching the secret lives of small animals and learning from them. Roger sat next to me on the grass, clearly bored.

Each day was calm and timeless, and we did not want it to end. But after the night there was a new day, as colourful and unreal as the one before.

Chapter 3 The Rose-Beetle Man

We ate breakfast every morning under the trees. After the coffee, bread and eggs, the family started to talk about their plans for the day. I was not interested in these conversations because I knew what I wanted to do, and I had to finish eating as soon as possible.

'Eat slowly, dear,' Mother said quietly. 'You don't need to hurry.'

Didn't I? Roger and a world of other animals were waiting for

me. Together, Roger and I walked and played. He was a perfect friend for an adventure. He watched when I fell and laughed when I stood up again. He sat quietly while I watched a new insect. If I spent too long in one place, he lay down in the shadows and slept.

Roger and I met a lot of people. One of the strangest and most interesting was the Rose-beetle Man. I first saw him on a high, empty road, carrying bags of vegetables and boxes of chickens on his back. With one hand he played a pipe and in the other he held pieces of string. On the end of each piece of string was a rose-beetle, gold and green in the sun. These beetles flew noisily round his hat, trying to escape from the strings.

When he saw us, the Rose-beetle Man stopped with a jump and lifted his hat. He smiled, touched his pockets and then moved a finger and thumb together. I realized that he wanted money and that he could not speak. So, in the middle of the road, I talked and he used his face and his body to reply. I asked about the beetles. He pointed at the sky and held his arms out. Aeroplane, of course. He pointed at the beetles, then at me to show 'children', and waved the beetles round his head.

The man sat down at the side of the road and opened one of his bags. Inside were six small tortoises. My favourite was quite small with bright eyes and a beautiful colour. I asked about the price. The Rose-beetle Man showed me ten fingers, but I knew Greek country ways now and I showed him two. He showed me nine fingers; I showed three. He thought with closed eyes and then showed me six. I offered five. Roger looked bored. The man thought for a minute. Then he gave me the tortoise.

We named the tortoise Achilles. After a few weeks we put him out in the garden, but he always came to us when we



When he saw us, the Rose-beetle Man stopped with a jump and lifted his hat.

called his name. He ate from our hands. Achilles liked people. When we sat or lay down in the garden, he usually fell asleep at our feet. Sometimes he decided to practise climbing on bodies lying in the sun, and then I had to lock him inside.

One day Achilles was not in the garden. We all walked through the trees, calling his name. Finally we found him, dead, at the bottom of a deep hole.

Not long after that I bought a young pigeon from the Rose-beetle Man. He was fat and yellow, and Larry gave him the name of Quasimodo. Because he had no parents to teach him, Quasimodo decided that he was not a bird. He walked everywhere, and when we went for walks he ran behind us. He also loved music. If we played songs, he sang; if we played dance music, he danced.

He slept in the sitting-room, and one day we found a white pigeon's egg on the sofa. It was a surprise for us, but it was a surprise to Quasimodo too. He – or she – became wild and difficult and moved into the garden. From time to time we saw her with a good-looking male pigeon.

Chapter 4 Theodore

Mother decided that I needed a teacher. This was a problem on a Greek island.

'He's all right,' said Leslie, 'He can read, can't he? And I can teach him to shoot.'

'He really must learn to dance,' Margo said.

'Yes, dear,' Mother replied, 'but first he needs French... and handwriting – that sort of thing.'

'The child is only interested in one subject,' said Larry. 'Every time I open a matchbox, an insect flies out. George could teach him.'

'That's a very good idea,' Mother said happily.

George was a friend of Larry's. He was a very tall, thin man with a deep voice, and he taught me a lot of different subjects. He also showed me how to write down everything I noticed while I was watching animals. I realized that I could learn much more when I wrote things down and studied them.

One afternoon Roger and I went for a long walk in the hills. When we got tired, I lay on the grass and watched the insects. I suddenly noticed small circles in the grass. I touched one, and the circle lifted. It was a door over a hole that went down into the ground. It was beautiful, but what kind of animal made homes like this? I had to know. I called Roger and ran to George's house. When I arrived, there was another man in his sitting-room. I stopped at the door, feeling uncomfortable.

'Good evening,' George said, laughing. 'Do you want more lessons?'

I told George about the little circles in the grass.

'Ah,' George replied. 'Gerry, this is Theodore Stephanides. I think he can help you. Like you, he is a lover of plants and animals. Theodore, this is Gerry Durrell.'

To my surprise, the man stood up, crossed the room and shook hands with me. 'I am very pleased to meet you,' he said. 'Now...er...there is a kind of spider in Corfu that...er... builds homes like that... Of course, it is possible that I am wrong...'

'Perhaps you would like to come and see?' I said hopefully. 'I mean, if it isn't too much trouble.'

'Why not?' Theodore answered. 'I can walk with you now. Thank you, George, for a wonderful tea.' He shook George's hand and put his hat on.

I took Theodore to the place and showed him the little doors.

'Ah ha,' he said, 'yes...um...yes.' He lifted the door with a small pocket-knife, looked inside and then let the door fall. 'Yes, this is a spider's home, but it's empty. The spider usually hides inside and holds the door with her legs. When an insect walks past, the spider opens the door and catches it.'

We walked silently down the hill, then Theodore shook my hand and said goodbye. He was, to me, a very important person. He knew a lot, and when he spoke to me I did not feel like a child. I liked him for that.

I ran to tell my family about my conversation. I wanted to see Theodore again and to ask him other questions, but I was not hopeful. I was wrong, because two days later Leslie brought a small packet back from town. 'I met your friend,' he said. 'This is for you.'

I looked at the packet in surprise and then I opened it quickly. Inside was a box and a letter.

My dear Gerry Durrell,

I think this pocket microscope will be useful for your studies. It is not a very good microscope, but it will help you with your field work.

Yours,

Theo. Stephanides

P.S. If you have nothing better to do on Thursday, perhaps you would like to come to tea.

So, for the rest of that summer and the warm, wet winter that followed, Spiro drove me into town every week and I had tea with Theodore.



He lifted the door with a small pocket-knife, looked inside and then let the door fall.

Chapter 5 Larry Has Another Idea

As soon as we felt at home, Larry wrote to all his friends.

'I've asked a few people to stay for a week or two,' he told Mother one morning. 'We need some intelligent conversation.'

'That's nice, dear,' said Mother, without thinking, 'but I hope they're not *too* intelligent. I can't talk about books and paintings all the time.'

'You don't have to talk about painting,' said Larry. 'But perhaps you can hide some of those terrible detective stories that you read.'

'They're very *good* stories,' said Mother. 'I borrowed them from Theodore. But you must tell the *Pension Suisse* when your friends are coming.'

'Why?' asked Larry with surprise.

'Because they will need rooms, of course,' Mother answered.

'But they're coming here . . .'

'No, Larry, where are they going to *sleep*? There just isn't room here, dear. You must tell your friends not to come.'

'But they're on the way,' Larry said. 'There's an easy answer: let's move to a bigger house.'

'And when they go? What do we do with a larger house?'

'Ask more people,' said Larry, surprised that Mother was so slow.

Mother looked at him. 'Really, Larry,' she said, 'you make me very angry. We are *not* going to move to another house.' She walked out of the room.

PART 2 THE YELLOW VILLA

Chapter 6 Scorpions!

The new villa was very large – a tall, square house with yellow walls, green windows and a red roof. It stood on a hill near the coast. Spiro, of course, found the house and moved everything for us. Larry's friends – writers and painters – came and went.

An old man worked in the gardens and Mother brought his wife into the house to work for us there. Her name was Luga-retzia and she was really only interested in her health. She carefully described every problem that she had. When she arrived, it was her stomach; later, the problem was her feet. She cried when she walked and she cried more loudly when she saw one of us. Larry started eating breakfast in his room after Luga-retzia took off her shoes in the dining-room to show us her toes.

The old wall round part of our garden was a good place for animal-watching. There were day and night workers. The shyest were the most dangerous; when you took away a small piece of the wall, you found a little black scorpion.

One day I found a female scorpion with a lot of little babies on her back. I was excited by this new family and I decided to take them to my bedroom and watch them growing up. I put them carefully into a matchbox and hurried to the villa. Lunch was ready, so I left the matchbox on a table in the sitting-room and went into the dining-room for a meal.

Larry finished eating and went to find his cigarettes. I watched him without thinking while he opened the matchbox. With

her babies still on her back, the female scorpion climbed out and walked on to Larry's hand.

Larry felt a movement and looked down. Then he screamed. Lugaretzia dropped a plate and Roger ran out from under the table. Larry shook his hand and the scorpion landed on the table between Margo and Leslie. The babies fell off as she landed, and they went everywhere. The scorpion was now angry and ran towards Leslie. He jumped up, knocked his chair over, and the scorpion ran the other way towards Margo. She screamed. While Mother put on her glasses to see what the problem was, Margo threw a glass of water at the scorpion. The water hit Mother. By this time the scorpion was under Leslie's plate and the babies were running everywhere.

'It's that boy again!' shouted Larry.

'Be careful. They're coming!' screamed Margo.

'We need a book,' cried Leslie. 'Hit them with a book!'

'What's happening?' asked Mother.

'One's coming towards me...'

Roger thought that we were in danger. Since Lugaretzia was the only stranger in the room, he bit her on the leg. That did not help much.

When everyone was a little calmer again, all the babies were hiding under plates, knives and spoons. Since Mother agreed with me that they must not die, the family left the room. I spent half an hour with a spoon, picking them up one by one and carrying them back to the garden wall.

After this, Larry carefully opened all matchboxes with a handkerchief round his hand. Lugaretzia showed us her leg every morning, and Mother decided that I had to start lessons again. George was not on the island at the time and it was not easy to find another teacher, so she asked a Belgian to teach me French. He was a nice man with a small beard and a wonderful moustache. I did not learn any French, but at the end of the morning I



Larry felt a movement and looked down. Then he screamed.

was very bored so I enjoyed my afternoons in the country more than before.

Chapter 7 My Birthday

Spring turned into long, hot summer and the fields turned brown. There was juicy fruit on the trees. The sea was calm and dark and you could see the coast of Albania across the water.

Peter came from Oxford to teach me. He was a tall, good-looking young man with serious ideas about studying. This was a problem for me at first but after a few weeks in the sun he became warmer and less serious. He wanted me to write something every day to practise my English. I decided to write a book. Every morning I spent an hour on my story. It was about a journey round the world with my family, and we met every possible kind of animal. One day a big cat jumped down on Mother; the next day Larry fought a dangerous snake. Sometimes it was difficult to save every person in my family at the end of the hour.

While I wrote, Peter and Margo walked in the garden together and looked at the flowers. From time to time Peter felt bad about this and tried to talk to me about numbers, but this did not happen often because Margo got more and more interested in flowers.

As summer continued, we used our little boat to visit a lot of small islands near the coast. But while I fished and studied the sea plants and animals, the family soon got bored. My birthday was near and I decided that I wanted a boat. I waited for a good time to speak to Leslie.

'What would you like to give me for my birthday?' I asked.



I decided to write a book. Every morning I spent an hour on my story.

'I don't know,' he said, happy after a morning of shooting. 'You choose.'

'Well, I really want a boat,' I said.

Leslie immediately realized his mistake. A boat was too big, he said, and too expensive.

'But you asked me! You don't have to buy one; you can make one. Of course, if it's too difficult . . .'

'It's not difficult,' Leslie said quickly, 'but I'll need a lot of time.' He looked at my face. 'Oh, all right.'

For the next two weeks loud noises and screams came from the back of the house.

The day before my birthday, the family drove into town to buy enough food for a party. We decided to ask ten people, but then each of us asked ten. The problem was that these were not the same ten (but we all asked Theodore), so we needed a lot of food and wine. Mother also wanted to take Lugaretzia to the dentist; she was having a lot of problems with her teeth and they all had to come out.

When we returned that evening, the car was full of shopping and Lugaretzia could not stop crying. She could not help with the cooking for the party, but Spiro had the answer.

'Don't you worry,' he said. 'Leaves everything to me.'

The next day I opened my presents and then I followed Leslie to the back of the house. There was the most beautiful boat that anyone could want. It was bright green and almost round (because of the size of the wood, Leslie said).

We all carried the boat down the hill to the beach. We had a small bottle of wine. I named the boat *Bootle* and threw the bottle. The bottle landed on the side of the boat and the white wine landed on Larry's head.

Spiro arrived after lunch with a man who, he explained, once worked for the King of Greece. He was there to help with the party.

Visitors began to arrive and the rooms were soon full of people. Spiro's friend carried food and drinks to them. In the kitchen Spiro drank glass after glass of wine while he cooked. Lugaretzia was not much help, but from time to time she stopped to talk to some of the visitors and to show them the inside of her mouth.

More people came and everyone had a good time. Spiro's friend started the dancing and the party continued until morning. It was a wonderful birthday.

Chapter 8 Shooting Is Easy

At the end of the summer I was again without a teacher. Mother was not happy about Margo's feelings for Peter or his interest in Margo. Leslie wanted to shoot Peter; Larry thought about sending the lovers to Athens until they were bored with spending all their time together. Mother did not like either idea and in the end she asked Peter to leave. Margo cried and said that she was ready to die. Spiro's friends watched the coast; Peter must not come back. We all enjoyed ourselves.

Winter came slowly. The shooting season started and Leslie often returned home with bags of dead animals and birds. One day he was telling us about killing one of the birds.

'It was very difficult,' he said at the end.

'Why?' said Larry. 'Shooting is easy.'

'Oh, so you can hit a bird when it's flying, can you?' Leslie asked angrily.

'You just keep your arm still,' said Larry. 'That's all.'

'Right,' said Leslie. 'I want to see *you* shoot something. Tomorrow?'

'Fine.'

The next morning we all went to watch Larry. It was cold and

the ground was wet, and Larry said that words were enough; he did not have to *do* anything. We did not listen to him. Larry carried Leslie's gun, and he lifted it and shot at the first bird he saw.

'It's a good idea to put a bullet in the gun,' said Leslie with a smile.

'I thought *you* did that,' Larry answered. He put bullets into the gun.

Larry was walking near a shallow pool when another bird flew out. He shot at it and the gun hit his shoulder. He fell back into the pool, and the bird flew away. It took half an hour to pull him out because the mud at the bottom of the pool came up to his shoulders.

'Are you all right?' asked Margo.

'I'm fine,' said Larry. 'I'm really enjoying myself. My back hurts, my shoulder hurts, I'm getting a cold, and my shoes are at the bottom of that mud.'

When we arrived home, Larry told Lugaretzia to make a big fire in his room and he went to bed with three bottles of wine. After a few hours he was singing happily.

'He's had too much to drink,' said Margo after a visit to his room.

Mother went upstairs. Larry looked at her. 'Who are you?' he asked, and fell asleep.

Early the next morning Margo ran into Mother's room. 'The house is on fire,' she shouted.

Mother jumped out of bed. 'Wake Gerry up!'

Leslie and I ran out of our rooms. 'What's happening?' Leslie asked.

'Fire! Larry's on fire!' Margo shouted in his ear.

Larry was asleep in a room full of smoke. Mother shook him. 'Wake up, Larry! Wake up!'

Larry sat up. 'What's the problem?'



Larry carried Leslie's gun, and he lifted it and shot at the first bird he saw.

'The room's on fire, dear.'

'Well, put water on it,' Larry said helpfully. 'Margo, you find a large pot...'

Larry stayed in bed and gave us orders. When the fire was out, the room was full of smoke, burnt wood, water and empty bottles.

'There you are,' said Larry. 'Easy. Can someone bring me a cup of tea? I've got a bad headache.'

Chapter 9 Larry's Next Idea

Spring came again. The family ate, slept, read and talked. Once a week Spiro brought our post to us and we read our letters to the others.

'Aunt Hermione wants to come here,' Mother said. 'She thinks that the warm weather will be good for her health.'

'No, no!' cried Larry. 'Not Lugaretzia's mouth *and* Aunt Hermione! Tell her that there's no room here.'

'But I told her that we had a big villa, dear,' said Mother.

'We've got to move,' said Larry. 'It's the only answer.'

'Move where?' asked Mother.

'To a smaller villa. Then she can't come.'

'But we can't change villas all the time.'

'It's a good idea,' said Leslie.

'It's very sensible,' Margo agreed.

So we moved house again.



When the fire was out, the room was full of smoke, burnt wood, water and empty bottles.

PART 3 THE WHITE VILLA

Chapter 10 The Magenpies

The new villa was as white as snow. I had new gardens to play in and different animals to make friends with.

One afternoon I climbed a tree and found four soft, fat baby magpies. I put the largest and the smallest inside my shirt and climbed carefully down again. When I arrived home, I showed the birds to the family and asked them for names.

'Aren't they *sweet*?' said Margo.

'What do they eat?' asked Mother.

'They're ugly!' said Larry.

'Not *more* animals!' said Leslie. 'What are they?'

'They're baby magpies,' I replied. 'And I want ideas for names, not what you think about them.'

'The things Master Gerrys *finds*!' cried Spiro. 'Whats you calls those birds?'

'Magpies, Spiro,' Mother said slowly and clearly.

'Magenpies,' Spiro repeated.

'Magpies,' Margo told him.

'That's what I says,' said Spiro, getting angry. 'Magenpies.'

So we called the birds the Magenpies. I built a cage for them outside. They were welcome in my bedroom and not in any of the other rooms, but the room that they were really interested in was Larry's. If they came near it, he threw things at them. They decided that he had something to hide.

One day Larry found me in the garden and pulled me upstairs to his bedroom. There were papers all over the floor and holes in many of them. Pens and pencils were everywhere.

'Do something about those birds or I'm going to kill them!' he screamed at me.

I explained that the Magenpies were just interested in things; they didn't know that they were doing anything wrong.

'Lock them in their cage or I'll kill them,' Larry repeated.

The rest of the family heard his shouts and came upstairs.

'Larry, what have you *done*?' Mother asked, looking through his door.

'I am not going to answer stupid questions,' said Larry.

'The Magenpies?' asked Leslie.

'Your papers are very untidy. Did they do that?' asked Mother.

Larry looked at her. 'You really are a very intelligent woman,' he said.

Chapter 11 Alecko

Below the villa was a line of fields. I was lying in the fields one day when I noticed a stranger watching me.

'Where are you from?' the man asked.

'I'm English and my family live in a villa in the hills. Where are you going?' I asked.

'To the sea, to my boat,' he answered. 'And you?'

I wanted to go down to the sea too, so we walked together. 'Where are you from?' I asked as we walked.

'I come from here . . . from the hills,' he said, 'but I am now at Vido.'

This was strange. Vido was a small island near the town of Corfu. Only prisoners lived there, I thought. I told him this.

'That's right,' he said, 'I'm a prisoner. If you're a good prisoner you can build a boat and sail home for the weekend. I must be back there on Monday morning.'



'Larry, what have you done?' Mother asked, looking through his door.

This seemed sensible. I knew that you could not leave an English prison for the weekend, but this was Corfu. I wanted to ask why he was in prison, but I could not think of a polite way to do it. Then we arrived at his boat. There was a very large bird on it. I touched it with my hand.

'Be careful, he bites,' the man said quickly, but the bird did nothing.

'He likes you!' the man said, surprised. 'You can have him if you want. He eats a lot and he bites the other prisoners.'

I did not think about my family. I took the bird.

'I call him Alecko,' the man said. 'Come back here tomorrow and we'll catch some fish for him.'

I said thank you and then I remembered something. I asked about his name and why he was in prison.

'My name's Kosti,' he said, 'Kosti Panopoulos. I killed my wife.' He pushed his boat into the water and climbed in. 'Until tomorrow!' he called.

It was a long walk home because Alecko was very heavy. Mother and Margo met me at the door. 'What's *that*?' asked Mother.

'It's very big,' said Margo.

The others came to see the new bird. Alecko looked at them and started moving his mouth.

'It's dangerous,' said Larry.

'Where are you going to keep him?' Mother asked.

I decided to make the Magenpies' cage into two. Mother thought that this was a good idea.

'Where did you get it?' Leslie asked.

I explained about my meeting with Kosti and, without thinking, about the prison on Vido. I told them about Kosti's weekend visits and our plan to go fishing.

'I don't like the idea, dear,' Mother said. 'You don't know what he did.'



'My name's Kosti,' he said, 'Kosti Panopoulos. I killed my wife.'

'Yes I do!' I said. 'He killed his wife.'

'A *murderer!*' Mother cried. 'And he walks round in the fields. Gerry, you mustn't go fishing with him.'

In the end she agreed that I could go if Leslie came and looked at the man first. So after the next day's fishing I had plenty of food for Alecko.

Chapter 12 Birds, Snakes and a Party

The house was busy. Farmers arrived with bags of fruit, vegetables and chickens. Margo lay on the dining-room floor and made large pictures on brown paper. Leslie stood in the middle of pieces of furniture, trying to decide where to put them. Mother cooked in the kitchen with the help of two local girls. I went from room to room and helped if I could. Upstairs in his bedroom Larry was asleep. The family was getting ready for a party.

When the day arrived, I found that some of my snakes in the pool outside were killing the fish. I moved the snakes to a large tin. A little later I noticed that the tin was in the sun and the snakes were lying on the top of the water without moving. They looked dead. I ran into the house with them. The only way to save them, I explained to Mother, was to put them in a cold bath. Mother agreed and the snakes soon looked better.

I left them there and went outside again to look at the tables. In the middle of a beautiful dish of food sat the Magenpies. There were knives and forks everywhere, and bottles of beer lay in pieces on the ground. One of the birds walked slowly towards me with a flower in his mouth and fell off the table. They were both full of beer.

Mother came out. After a few angry words she was calmer.

'You must close their cage, dear. Well, I can't really be angry with them if they've drunk too much. They don't know what they're doing.'

I took the Magenpies back to their cage and of course Alecko was not there either. I hoped that he was on the beach and that he planned to stay there.

The first visitors arrived. Leslie came out of the trees after a few hours of shooting and went into the house. Suddenly there was a shout.

'What's the matter with Leslie?' asked Mother.

He arrived in the garden wearing only a small towel. The visitors all looked at him.

'What's the matter, dear?' Mother asked.

'Snakes!' shouted Leslie. 'The bath is full of snakes.'

'Why don't you put some clothes on, dear...'

'Great big snakes...'

'I agreed that Gerry could put them there, dear. I'm sorry. They were very sick.' Mother turned to the visitors to explain.

'Really, Mother!' said Larry.

'Don't you start,' said Mother. 'Leslie was the one in the bath with the snakes, not you.'

'Am I going to have a bath or not?' Leslie asked.

'All right,' said Mother. 'Gerry, take the snakes out of the bath and put them in a pot or something.'

'Outside!' Leslie shouted.

'Don't shout, dear, don't shout!'

When I returned to the garden, Larry was explaining everything to the visitors. 'There are animals in every corner of the house,' he was saying. 'There are dangerous scorpions and wild magpies. There's danger at any time of the day or night...'

'Well,' said Mother quickly, 'lunch is ready.'



'Snakes!' shouted Leslie. 'The bath is full of snakes.'

Everyone sat down happily. Then two of the visitors screamed and jumped out of their chairs.

'Oh dear, now what's happened?' Mother asked.

'It's probably scorpions again,' Larry said.

The only person who was brave enough to look under the table was Theodore. 'Ah!' he said. 'It seems to be a large black and white bird.'

'Gerry, catch that bird!' Larry ordered. 'The soup's getting cold.'

Alecko was not happy. I fought with him under the table, and when he was back in his cage I was hot and tired.

We ate and we drank. After that the visitors were too full to do anything but lie and rest in the garden. Tea was another wonderful meal, and then we all lay on the grass again and night fell. The sky was soft and black. The smell of the flowers was beautiful.

The Return

In the end Mother realized that I needed some real lessons. She decided to take us back to England. The family was not happy, but one day we said goodbye to our friends and left the villa.

When we arrived at the ship, Spiro shook our hands without speaking. Then he stood and looked at us. 'Wells, goodbyes,' he said, and he started to cry. 'I didn't want to cry,' he said, 'but you're like my familys.'

We climbed on to the ship and started across the sea. Corfu slowly disappeared and we were all very sad. We sat silently in the train while it crossed Italy and Switzerland. Above our heads the Magenpies talked and Alecko screamed. Roger lay at our feet.

When we left Switzerland, a man came to look at our passports. He gave them back to Mother with a piece of paper. Mother read it. 'Look at this!' she said angrily.

Larry looked at the paper and laughed. On the paper, under *Description of Passengers*, were the words: *One travelling zoo.*

The train continued towards England.

ACTIVITIES

Part 1 Chapters 1–2

Before you read

- 1 Look at the Word List at the back of the book. Choose the best answers.
 - a Which of these can fly?
spider pigeon beetle tortoise
 - b Which of these is used for killing?
villa microscope bullet spot
 - c Which of these can you travel in?
streetlamp cab microscope
 - d Which of these is an insect?
snake beetle spider magpie
 - e Which two of these are for animals?
cab villa zoo cage
- 2 Which of these are you afraid of?
beetles snakes scorpions spiders none of them
- 3 Read the Introduction to the book. Answer these questions.
 - a Who will shoot animals in Corfu?
 - b Who will worry about their skin?
 - c Who will bring animals home?
 - d Who will write in Corfu?
 - e What did Gerald and Larry both do when they grew up?
 - f When Gerald Durrell was young, his dream was to work in a zoo. Later, he started his own zoo. What's your dream job?

While you read

- 4 Circle the words that are wrong in these sentences. Write the right words in the spaces.
 - a The family goes to England to get away from the bad weather.
 - b Twenty-four dogs follow Roger into the hotel.
 - c Mrs Durrell wants a house with a dining room.

- d None of the taxi drivers wants to take the family around the island.
- e Mrs Durrell thinks Spiro is a very safe driver.
- f The Durrells love the pink villa after a few weeks.
- g Spiro doesn't like Mrs Durrell.
- h The Durrells spend their days all doing the same thing.
- i When Gerald is watching plants and insects, Roger watches too.

After you read

- 5 What mistake does Spiro often make when he speaks English? Correct his mistakes in these sentences.
- a 'Don'ts you worrys yourselfs about anythings, Mrs Durrells. Leaves everythings to me.'
 - b 'Be carefuls. We don'ts wants to worrys your mothers.'
 - c 'Don'ts says that! With a mothers likes yours, you musts kisses her feets.'
- 6 You are moving to a foreign country with your family for a year. What will you take? What will you leave behind? Write a list. Compare your ideas with other students.

Part 1 Chapters 3–5

Before you read

- 7 Who will make the most trouble for the family on the island, do you think? Who will want to go home first?
Margo Leslie Gerald Roger Larry

While you read

- 8 Are these sentences right (✓) or wrong (X)?
- a Gerald enjoys a long, slow breakfast each morning.
 - b The Rose-beetle Man has beetles on strings and tortoises in a bag.
 - c The Rose-beetle Man can't see or hear.
 - d Gerald pays five for the tortoise.

- e The pigeon learns to sing and dance.
- f Mrs Durrell wants Gerald to learn dancing and shooting.
- g George shows Gerald how to make careful notes about plants and animals.
- h Theodore knows more about the natural world than George.
- i Theodore talks to Gerald like an adult.
- j Mrs Durrell thinks Larry's friends can stay in a hotel.
- k Mrs Durrell wants to move to a bigger villa.

After you read

- 9 What happens to
a Achilles? b Quasimodo?
- 10 Work with another student. Discuss the best way to teach Gerry in Corfu.
Student A: You are Larry.
Student B: You are Margo.

Part 2 Chapters 6–7

Before you read

- 11 The next chapter is called 'Scorpions'. Look at the picture on page 17. What do you think is going to happen?

While you read

- 12 Tick (✓) the things that happen.
- a Larry's friends paint the new villa.
 - b Mrs Durrell employs a Greek husband and wife to work in the garden and house.
 - c Gerald puts the scorpions in the matchbox to frighten Larry.
 - d The scorpion and baby scorpions run all over the table.
 - e A scorpion bites Lugaretzia on the leg.
 - f Everyone leaves the dining-room while Gerald finds all the baby scorpions.
 - g Gerald learns a lot of French from a Belgian with a small beard.

- h Gerald's teacher Peter spends more time with Margo than with Gerald.
- i Leslie hurts himself while he is making Gerald's boat.
- j They ask about forty people to Gerald's birthday party.
- k The boat goes under the water immediately.
- l Gerald's birthday party goes on all night.

After you read

- 13** Talk to other students. You are guests at Gerald's birthday party. Talk about the Durrells, Spiro and Lugaretzia. Say some nice things and ask and answer questions about them.
- 14** Answer the questions.
- a Why does Larry start eating breakfast in his room?
 - b Why does Mrs Durrell decide to get a new teacher for Gerald after the story about the scorpions?
 - c What does Peter do while Gerald is writing his book?
 - d What does Leslie think when Gerald asks for a boat?
 - e Why does Spiro have to do all the cooking for the party?

Part 2 Chapters 8–9

Before you read

- 15** Larry thinks shooting is easy. He tries it in the next chapter. What do you think will happen? Write your ideas.

While you read

- 16** Draw lines between words on the left and words on the right to make correct sentences.
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| a Peter leaves | and starts a fire in his room. |
| b If Peter tries to come back, | and Aunt Hermione won't be able to visit. |
| c Larry tries to shoot the gun | Spiro's friends will stop him. |
| d Larry shoots the gun | and Margo wants to die. |
| e Larry drinks too much wine | and falls back into a muddy pool. |
| f They will move to a smaller house | without any bullets in. |

After you read

- 17** Complete this conversation.

Mrs Durrell: I'm **(a)** about Margo and Peter. I think she is in **(b)** with him. He **(c)** too much time with her. He isn't **(d)** any time teaching Gerry. They're much too **(e)** to get married.

Leslie: Let me **(f)** him, Mother.

Mrs Durrell: Don't be silly, dear.

Larry: I think we should **(g)** them to Athens together. Margo will soon get **(h)** if she has to spend all her **(i)** with him.

Mrs Durrell: Don't be silly, dear. No, I'll ask Peter to **(j)** tomorrow.

- 18** Discuss these questions.

- a How do you think the fire started in Larry's room?
- b Who makes the decisions in the Durrell family?
- c Do you think it's OK to shoot birds for sport?

Part 3 Chapters 10–11

Before you read

- 19** The next two chapters are called 'The Magenpies' and 'Alecko'. Do you think the Magenpies will be:
- insects • birds • a new family in the next villa?
- Do you think Alecko will be:
- Gerald's new teacher • a bird • Margo's new boyfriend?

While you read

- 20** Are the sentences true (T) or not true (NT)?
- a Gerald leaves two baby birds in the tree.
 - b Margo likes them but Larry doesn't.
 - c Spiro can say 'magpie' correctly.
 - d Larry throws his papers all over the floor.
 - e Larry thinks his mother is a very intelligent woman.
 - f Prisoners at Vido can build a boat and sail home for the weekend.
 - g Gerald's new friend is a murderer.
 - h Gerald doesn't want to go fishing with Kosti.
 - i Leslie looks at the man and thinks he's OK.

After you read

21 Work with two other students. You are Leslie, Margo and Larry. The Magenpies have just destroyed Larry's work. Say what you think about Gerry and his animals. Here are some ideas.

Student A: You are Leslie. You think it's a good thing to be interested in animals.

Student B: You are Margo. You think some of the animals are sweet but some are not nice. Gerry should keep some but not all of his animals.

Student C: You are Larry. You hate the animals. They make trouble all the time. Gerry should keep them in a zoo in the garden.

Part 3 Chapter 12 & The Return

Before you read

22 Discuss the questions.

- a There are birds, snakes and a party in the next chapter. What will happen at the party, do you think?
b The last chapter is called 'The Return'. Will the Durrells go back to England, do you think? Why will they go?

While you read

23 Who:

- a doesn't help to get ready for the party?
b has a bath after the first visitors arrive?
c worries about the needs of Gerald's animals?
d tells the visitors that the Durrell house is a dangerous place to live?
e finds Alecko under the table?
f cries when the Durrells leave Corfu?
g describes the Durrells as a 'travelling zoo'?

After you read

- 24 Can you remember? Which animal(s) ...
a slept in the shadows while Gerry watched insects?
b flew around angrily on the end of a piece of string?
c fell into a hole and died?
d went to live in the garden with a good-looking male bird?
e climbed out of a matchbox onto Larry's hand?
f destroyed Larry's papers?
g nearly died in a tin in the sun outside the white villa?
h went back to England?

Writing

- 25 The Durrell family go to Corfu to live. If you could take your family anywhere in the world, where would you choose? Why? Write your ideas.
26 Write a description of each of the Durrell children - Gerald, Margo, Larry and Leslie. What are they like? How do they spend their time?
27 You are Roger, the dog. Describe the time when Larry opens the matchbox and the scorpions climb out onto his hand. Use the first person 'I' to tell the story.
28 Margo writes a letter home to one of her friends. She says what she likes about Corfu and what she misses about England. Write her letter.
29 Write a funny story that you know about people and animals.
30 Imagine you are making a film of My Family and Other Animals. Which parts of the story will be difficult to film? Why? What may happen? Write some ideas.
31 Gerald doesn't go to an ordinary school. He learns at home. Write three good things and three bad things about having lessons at home and not school.
32 Find out about Corfu. Write a travel guide for someone who is going there on holiday. Write about the island and the climate and, for example, where to stay, what to do, what to eat, what clothes to take.

- 33** Choose an animal or insect that you like. Write notes about it. Write about these things: where does it live, what does it eat, how does it catch its food, does it come out at night or in the daytime, how big is it, what colour is it. Draw it too.
- 34** Gerald Durrell started a very famous zoo in 1959. Some people think zoos are bad places for wild animals. But Durrell's zoo protects many kinds of animals that may disappear in the wild. Write a list of good and bad things about zoos.

WORD LIST

- beetle** (n) an insect with a hard shiny back
- bullet** (n) a small piece of metal that shoots out of a gun
- cab** (n) a taxi
- cage** (n) a thing for keeping an animal or bird in
- insect** (n) a small living thing with six legs
- Madame** (n) The French word for *Mrs* or *Madam*
- magpie** (n) a black and white bird with a long tail
- microscope** (n) a thing that scientists use to look at very small things
- mud** (n) very wet earth
- pigeon** (n) a grey bird that often lives in cities
- rose-beetle** (n) a beetle that often eats the leaves of rose plants
- scorpion** (n) a small animal with eight legs and a dangerous sharp tail
- snake** (n) a long thin animal with no legs
- spider** (n) a small animal with eight legs that catches and eats insects
- spot** (n) a small red point on a person's skin
- streetlamp** (n) a tall metal thing with a light at the top for lighting a street
- string** (n) something that we use to tie around things
- tortoise** (n) a slow-moving animal that can put its head and legs inside its hard cover
- villa** (n) a house with a garden, often used for holidays
- zoo** (n) a place where wild animals are kept for people to see

Answers for the Activities in this book are available from the Penguin Readers website. A free Activity Worksheet is also available from the website. Activity Worksheets are part of the Penguin Teacher Support Programme, which also includes Progress Tests and Graded Reader Guidelines. For more information, please visit:
www.penguinreaders.com.