



Kenneth Grahame

16, Durham Villas, Campden Hill, W.
21 June 1907.

My dearest Mouse

No doubt you will be interested to hear the further adventures of Mr Toad, after he galloped away across country on the bargee's horse, with the bargee shouting after him in vain. Well presently, the horse got tired of galloping so fast, and broke from a gallop into a trot, and then from a trot into a walk, then he stopped altogether & began to nibble grass, and the toad looked round about him and found he was on a large common. On the common stood a gipsy tent, and a gipsy man was sitting beside it, on a bucket turned upside down, smoking. In front of the tent a fire of sticks was burning, & over the fire hung an iron pot, and out of the pot came steam, and bubblings, and the most beautiful good smell that ever you smell.

One of Kenneth Grahame's original letters to 'Mouse'

Once Upon A Time...

How bedtime stories became a book

Kenneth Grahame was born on a cold Edinburgh morning in 1859, the third child and second son of Cunningham and Bessie Grahame. His mother died young of scarlet fever in 1864. Kenneth was also ill and it was his grandmother who nursed him back to health and kept up a steady stream of stories which were destined to influence her grandson throughout his life.

Cunningham Grahame was unable to cope with his four young children and they were sent to live with relatives at a rambling old house with large grounds in Berkshire. Adults rarely came into their lives and the most important influence on Kenneth was the natural world. He was always, like Mole, 'bewitched, entranced, fascinated' by the wonders of nature, and it is these two idyllic years of his childhood which he recreates in his later books *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, both written from the child's point of view. Later, he was to admit, 'The queer thing is, I can remember everything I felt then, the part of my brain I used from four till about seven can never have altered'.

By the early 1890s, Kenneth Grahame was already a famous writer, but he still kept his job at the Bank of

England, preferring to remain an 'amateur' writer. It was at the Bank of England that he met Elspeth Thomson in 1897 when she was thirty-five and he thirty-eight. Their relationship developed through letters and baby talk and they eventually married in July 1899.

Despite the fact that the marriage was not a great success, the couple had a son, Alastair, who was born prematurely in May 1900; he was small and delicate and his father immediately nicknamed him 'Mouse'. At the age of eighteen months, it was confirmed that Mouse was partially sighted, but neither of his parents ever really came to terms with this; his mother never thought of him as less than perfect and Kenneth Grahame was not a strict father, so Mouse became rather precocious and spoilt.

When his son was still very young, probably about four, Kenneth Grahame began to tell him bedtime stories about the adventures of a toad. These continued for about three years or more then, in the summer of 1907, Mouse went on holiday with his governess for seven weeks whilst his parents went to the West Country. Grahame made up for his absence by carrying on Toad's adventures in a series of fifteen letters which he wrote to his young son.

However, it needed someone else to gently push Kenneth Grahame into formalising the bedtime stories and letters into something like a book. Constance Smedley, who lived close to the Grahames, was the European representative of the American magazine *Everybody's* and her editor wrote asking her to try and persuade Kenneth Grahame to write a new book.

She got on well with Grahame and noticed the special relationship he had with his son:

He [Alastair] had about him something of his father's remoteness and was perpetually playing games with himself. Every evening Mr Grahame told Mouse an unending story, dealing with the adventures of the little animals whom they met in their river journeys. This story was known to him and Mouse alone and was related in a bed-time visit of extreme secrecy. Mouse's own tendency to exult in his exploits was gently satirised in Mr Toad, a favourite character who gave the juvenile audience occasion for some slightly self-conscious laughter.

Miss Smedley made Grahame at least talk about the story and exerted all her influence to persuade him to write it down, which of course he did.

Toad's character owed much to the personality of Alastair Grahame, but what about the others? There is a lot of Kenneth Grahame himself in the characters of both Mole and Badger. Like his creator, Mole is diplomatic and a little naïve, content to go along as Ratty's sidekick, but unable to resist when he is overcome by a violent nostalgia for his old home and his past. Similarly, it is easy to see that both Badger and Kenneth Grahame feel awkward and out of place in society, and Grahame, like Badger, was likely to become 'rather low and despondent when he's wanting his victuals'. Both characters liked the protection of their homes and one of Badger's most attractive features for Grahame was his underground home, comforting and protective, safe from the dangers of the Wild Wood above it.

But Ratty too has plenty of Kenneth Grahame in his personality. Both practical and a dreamer, he corresponds to Grahame's own emotional extremes. Rat is a highly competent and experienced sailor, but also a poet and, when he hears the 'call of the South' and is drawn towards it in a trance, he is brought back to himself by creative writing – perhaps Ratty is closest of all to his creator?

Of course there are many other elements which Kenneth Grahame took from his own childhood and ideas and from the strange qualities of human beings other than his son and himself, but there is no doubt that it all started with those bedtime stories about Mr Toad.

Elaine Peake
© John Good



Private Collection

*"Crossing the hall, they passed down one of the principal tunnels".
Badger and Mole on their way to rescue Toad. Illustration by Arthur Rackham in the
1939 edition of *The Wind in the Willows*.*

≡ The Real ≡ Woodland Creatures

Kenneth Grahame knew and loved the English countryside well. As a boy, he spent most of his free time exploring the woods, fields and waterways near to his grandmother's home and learned about the creatures who lived there.

The countryside isn't as peaceful now as it was last century when Grahame was growing up, but it's still possible to find the places he describes and the animals he used in his story of *The Wind in the Willows*.

WATER RATS

Water rat isn't the right name for the small rodents which can often be heard plopping into the water during riverside walks. They are really water voles, a close relative of the field vole and, like them, vegetarians. They burrow into the riverbank, creating a complex system of tunnels with well-hidden entrances above and below the water line. Water voles have a fixed territory which they patrol regularly, swimming or on foot. When above ground, the vole can sometimes be seen grazing on what looks like a patch of "lawn" near to its burrow.



OTTERS

Otters are an extremely rare sight on English rivers now, having been brought almost to extinction by disease, pollution from pesticides and the trend for riverside development which has destroyed the long, quiet, overgrown stretches of water they need to cover to hunt for food and find a mate. Even in wildlife sanctuaries, observation isn't easy. Otters are mainly nocturnal and very shy. Patient watchers will be rewarded, though, by the chance to witness the otter's tremendous prowess as a swimmer and the sheer joy of their water games, played by adults and young. Otters are still found in the wild in Scotland and Wales and efforts are being made to boost numbers throughout the country.



TOADS

Toads belong to the category of creatures known as "amphibians", which roughly means that they have "a double life". Amphibians are so-called because they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Like their near relatives, the frogs, toads grow from spawn. During the mating season, they generally return to traditional ponds — the ancestral home, as it were — to breed, but at other times of the year they will range over quite large distances. All adult toads are carnivorous and have big appetites. They also have a loud croak which, in the quiet of the countryside, can be heard a long way off. Nowadays, toads often risk being squashed by traffic. In the summer, conservationists sometimes mount toad patrols around breeding grounds.



MOLES

Moles are among the most industrious of Britain's small mammals. They have big front paws which make them excellent tunnellers and which help them to keep their extensive network of tunnels tidy. Molehills are thrown up when they are clearing new tunnels beneath the surface. Moles work to a regular four-hours-on, four-hours-off pattern, patrolling their underground runs for worms and insects to eat, then sleeping off the meal. Because they spend so much time underground, their eyesight is poor, which used to make them easy prey for trappers who killed them for their black, velvet-like skins.



BADGERS

Badgers are keep-themselves-to-themselves sort of creatures who live in setts, often close to woodlands. They eat a mixed diet, using their powerful claws to dig for roots and bulbs, and they're not above snacking on worms or even killing baby rabbits. Most of their hunting is done at night. They are creatures of habit and stick closely to their own "territory", using the same pathways again and again. Although they are quiet animals, almost shy, badgers are ferocious fighters when cornered.



STOATS AND WEASELS

Stoats and weasels are vicious killers that prey on many small creatures. With their long, thin bodies, they present a sinister, snake-like appearance as they go out in search of their victims. They live in burrows, sometimes taking over ones abandoned by rabbits. They will travel long distances to hunt for food — often taking and smashing eggs from the nest or attacking shrews, voles, mice, moles and their young with their sharp teeth. Most people can't tell a stoat from a weasel, but if anyone asks your opinion, just remember this old English saying: "It's weasily seen that the other one's stoatally different!"



Willows Wordsearch!

Can you find all the words listed at the bottom of the page in the wordsquare? The hidden words may run backwards, forwards, up, down and even diagonally!

When you have found all the words, there will be nineteen letters left over, which will spell out the name of a famous book!

K T R H E C I M D L E I F
B N E A L L A H D A O T W
W O A S T R E A M H O L E
I I A B N T E J U D G E S
L D I T R N Y L T O H S D
L B A D G E R T O E W A N
O L I A J I V D O M L E E
W D O O W D L I W A L W I
S S T A O T S O R W D S R
J A L O P Y S E A R A T F



JALOPY

WEASEL

BADGER

RATTY

MOLE

TOAD

WILLOWS

RIVERBANK

JUDGE

JAIL

STREAM

WILD WOOD

TOAD HALL

STOATS

SEA RAT

FIELDMICE

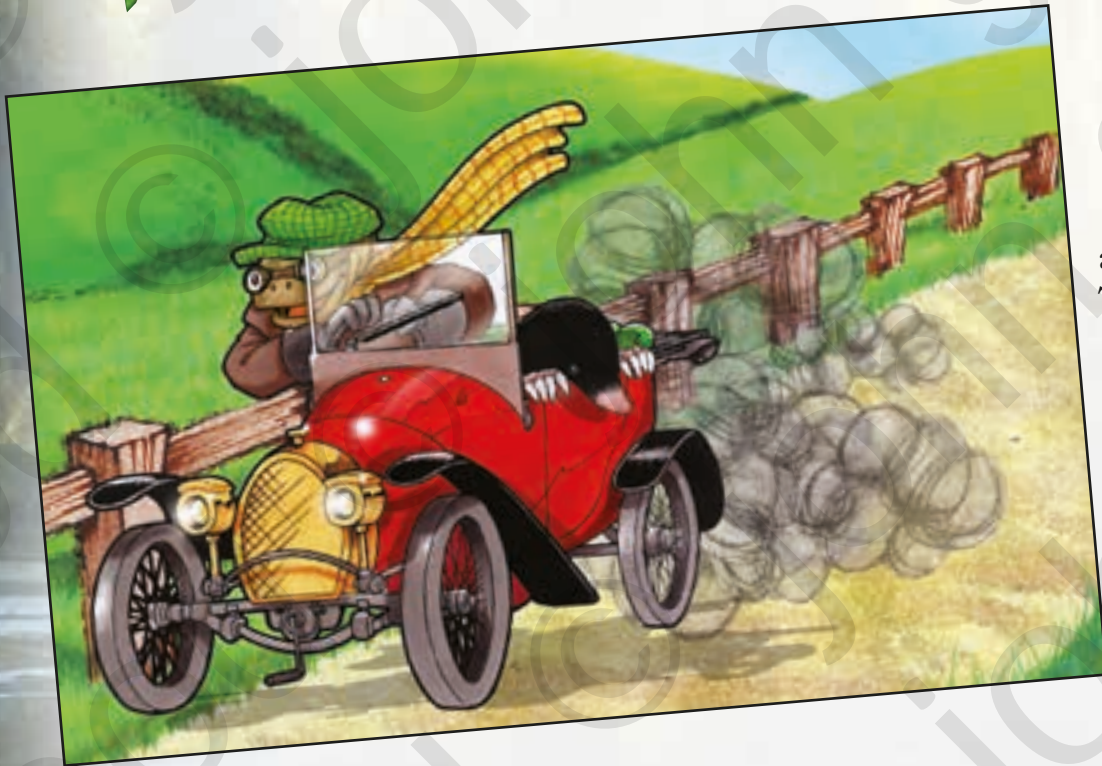
FRIENDS

HOLE

BOAT

GOOD

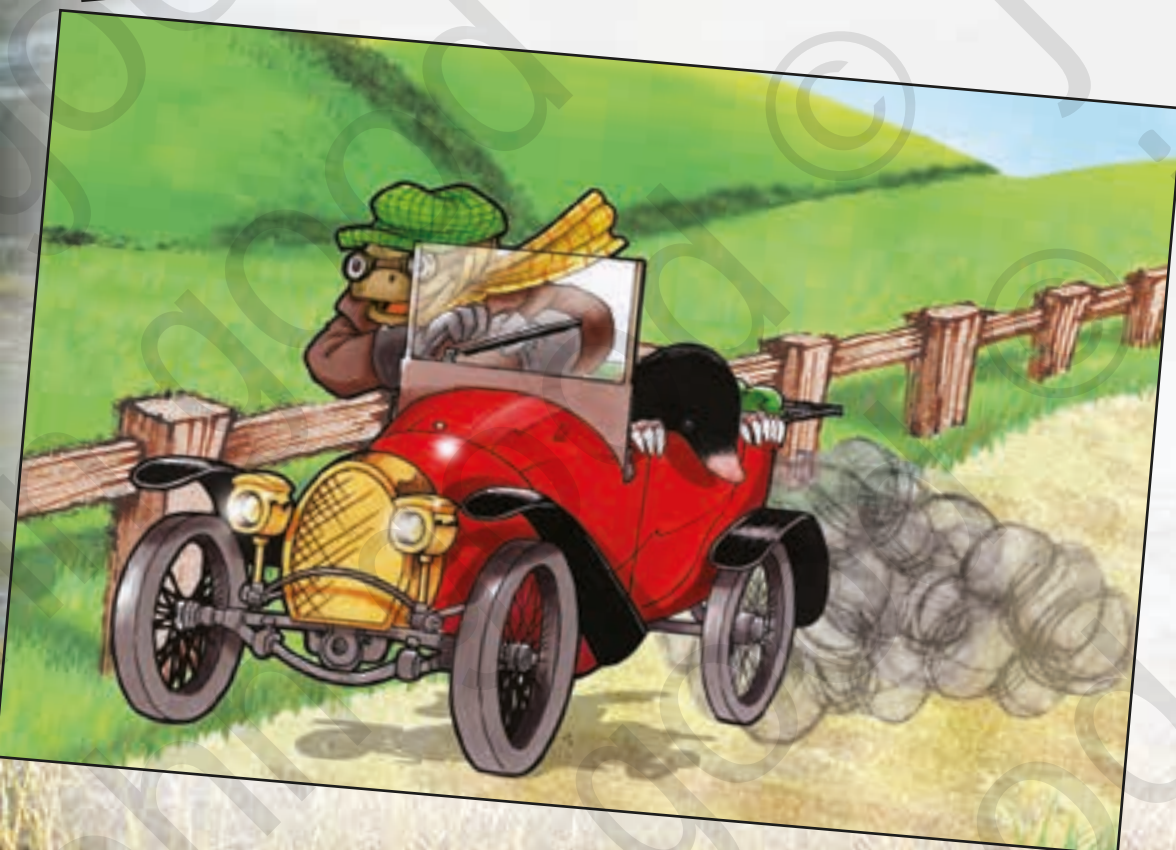
Spot the Difference!



Here are two pictures of Toad and Mole having a rather bumpy ride in Toad's car.

Although the two pictures look the same, there are in fact TWELVE differences between them!

Can you find all the differences?





RABBIT



WATER VOLE



DREY



MOLE



HARVEST MOUSE



OTTER



BADGER



OWL



SQUIRREL



TOAD

NEST

My Kind of Home

Each of these creatures has a particular home of its own, whether in the wood or on the riverbank. Do you know which one lives where?

NEST

WARREN

SETT

© John Good

FORTRESS

HOLE

HOLT

BURROW

Woodland Animal Quiz



British woodlands are among the most important and interesting wildlife habitats in the country. Many of our most popular and successful animals and birds either live in woodlands or pass through them on a regular basis. Can you answer the following questions about woodland animals?

1. Both the largest and smallest British mammals can both be found living in woodland habitats. What are they?

Hint: the largest has hooves and modified horns, whilst the smallest is smaller than a mouse!



stag beetle

2. The weasel is a common woodland animal, but what is its larger relative which also has a black tip to its tail?

3. What woodland animal can be found in:

- a) a sett?
- b) a drey?
- c) aholt?

small tortoiseshell butterfly

5. Which well-known woodland mammals are related to domestic dogs?

4. Which woodland bird is also known as a 'yaffle' because its song sounds like eerie laughter?



6. Which other large, meat-eating and much feared dog-like animals used to be found in British woods until they were hunted to extinction hundreds of years ago?

7. What kind of animal can be roe, fallow or muntjac?

8. Which are you more likely to find in a wood, a rabbit or a hare?

9. What are the two types of squirrel that can be found in British woodlands?

10. Only one of these is actually native to this country, the other having been introduced from America. Which is which?

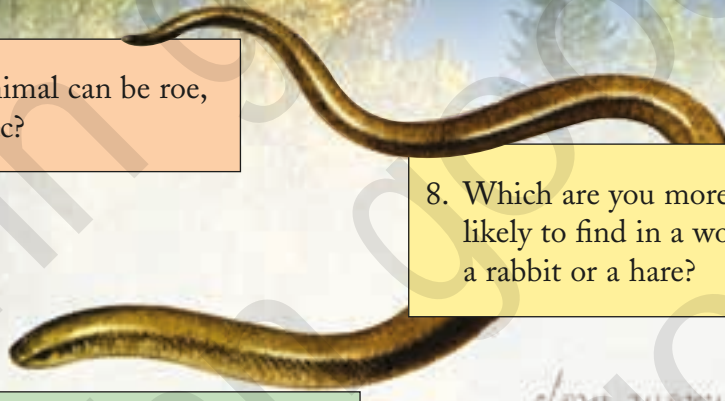
11. Which type of animal, sometimes found in woodlands, has no legs?

12. If you pass by a woodland stream and see a flash of blue dart into the water, what bird are you likely to have spotted?

14. What do you call:
a) a female fox?
b) a male badger?
c) a male Red Deer?

15. Which of the following woodland animals hibernate?

Badgers	Hedgehogs
Squirrels	Foxes
Bats	



slow-worm



badger pawprint

white water lily



blackberries

13. Which species of owl often lives in woods and makes the well known 'to-wit-to-woo' call?



The Stoats are up to their usual tricks - hiding around Toad Hall, waiting to cause trouble! How many can you see in this picture?

The place names are also mixed up.

See if you can unscramble all seven of them!

The Empty Countryside

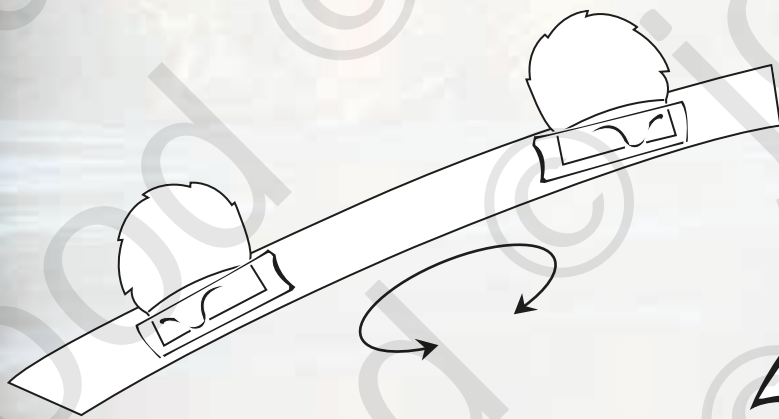
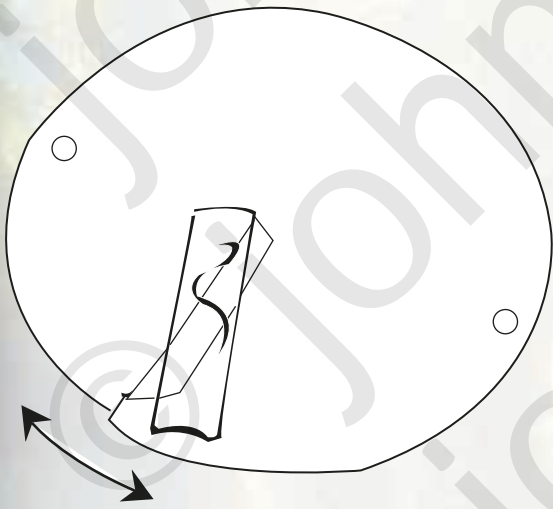


CANARY COTTAGE
MOLE'S HOUSE
NEW IRON BRIDGE
OLD FORD

OTTER'S HOUSE
RAT'S HOUSE
TOAD HALL

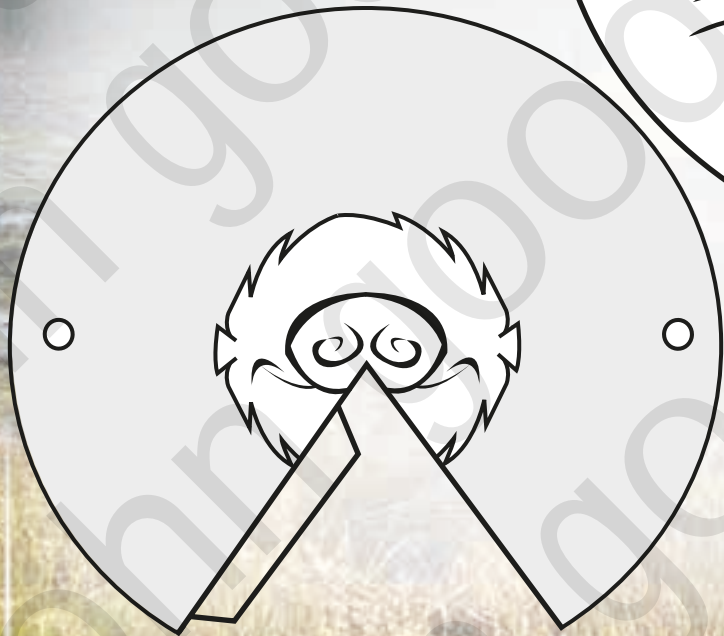
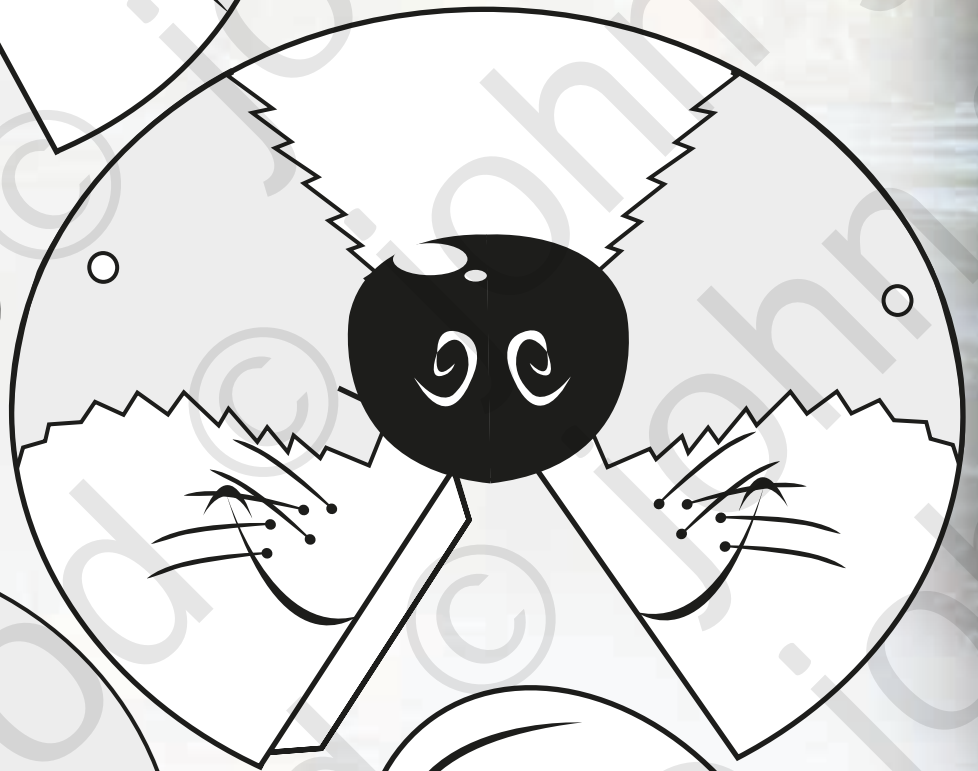
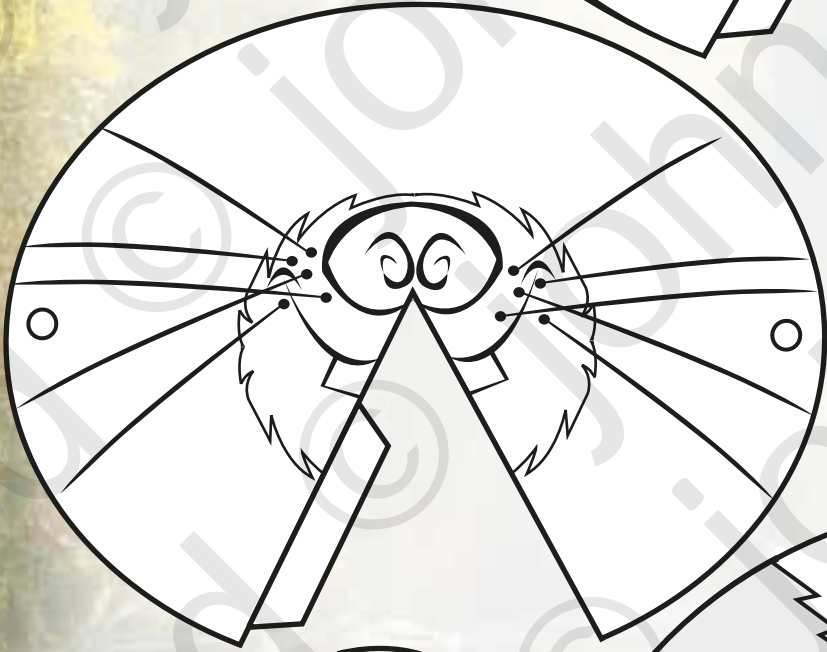
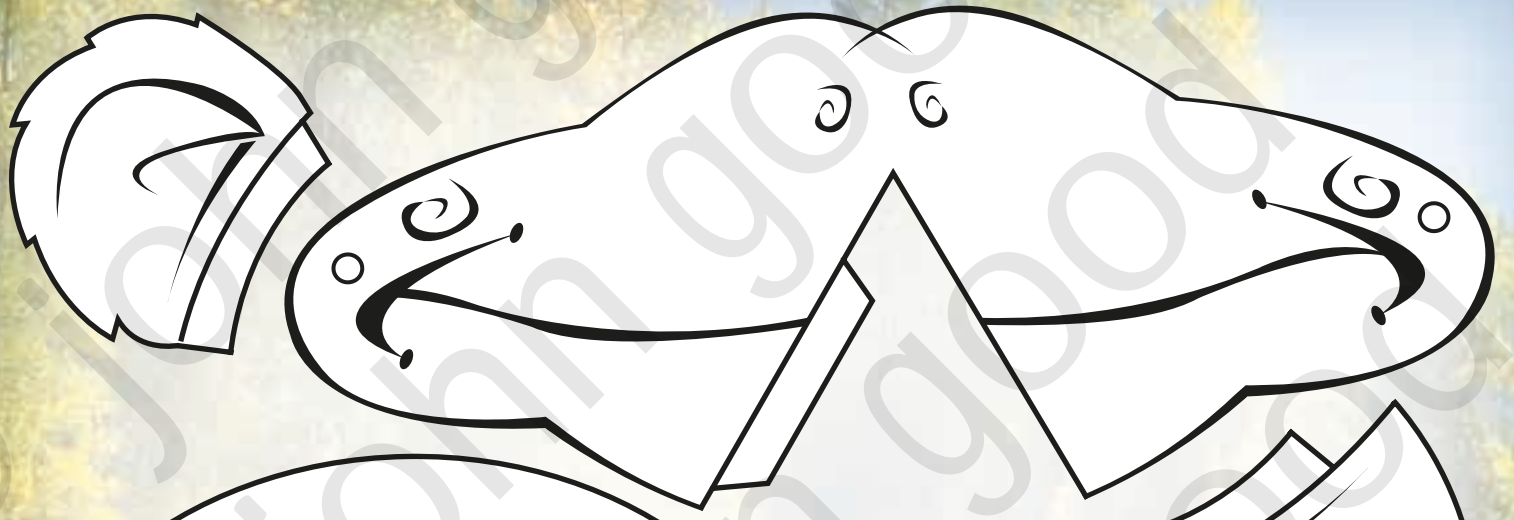
How to Make Your Own 'Wind in the Willows' Masks!

First of all, colour in the shapes, and stick the page onto thin card. Then, cut out the muzzle shapes of Badger, Mole, Ratty and Toad, as well as Badger and Ratty's ears. To make the muzzles, tape the tabs to the back of the muzzle with sticky tape (top diagram, left). You should get a shallow cone shape. Then, pierce the holes marked on each side of the mask and thread string (or better still, thin elastic) through the holes.



To make the ears cut a card strip about 5cm deep, and long enough to go around your head (see diagram, above). Cut this to size and stick together using tape. Next, stick the ear tabs to the inside of the card and colour as needed. You are now ready to be a character from *'The Wind in the Willows'*!





Answers!

Woodland Animal Quiz

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Deer and Shrew | 9. Red and Grey |
| 2. Stoat | 10. Red is native, Grey is American |
| 3. Badger, Squirrel, Otter | 11. Slow-worm |
| 4. Woodpecker | 12. Kingfisher |
| 5. Foxes | 13. Tawny Owl |
| 6. Wolf | 14. Vixen, Boar, Stag |
| 7. Deer | 15. Hedgehogs and Bats |
| 8. Rabbit | |

The Empty Countryside

CARTY CANE GOAT	CANARY COTTAGE
SEOUL SOME H	MOLE'S HOUSE
DOL DORF	OLD FORD
HETTO SURE SO	OTTER'S HOUSE
A TALL HOD	TOAD HALL
EATS HOURS	RAT'S HOUSE
BIG NIN RED WORE	NEW IRON BRIDGE

There are six stoats hiding in the countryside.

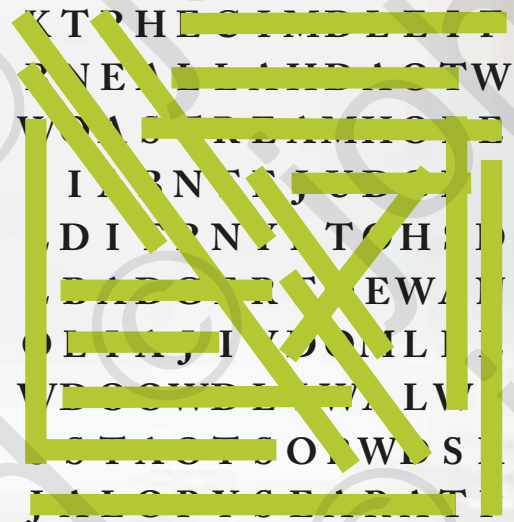
My Kind of Home

Rabbit	Warren
Water Vole	Burrow
Mole	Fortress
Harvest Mouse	Warren
Otter	Holt
Badger	Sett
Owl	Nest
Squirrel	Drey
Toad	Hole

Spot the Difference!



Willows Wordsearch!



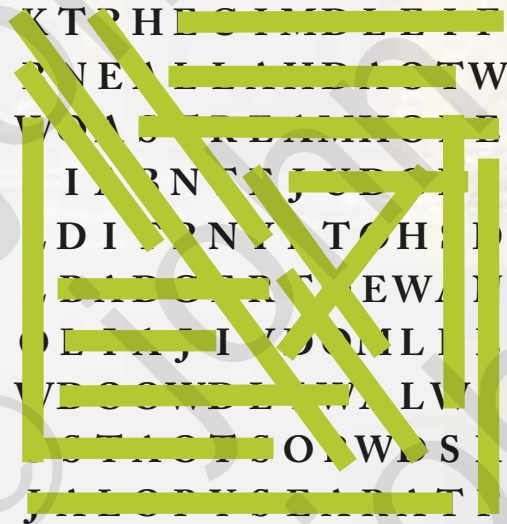
The famous book is *The Wind in the Willows*

Answers!

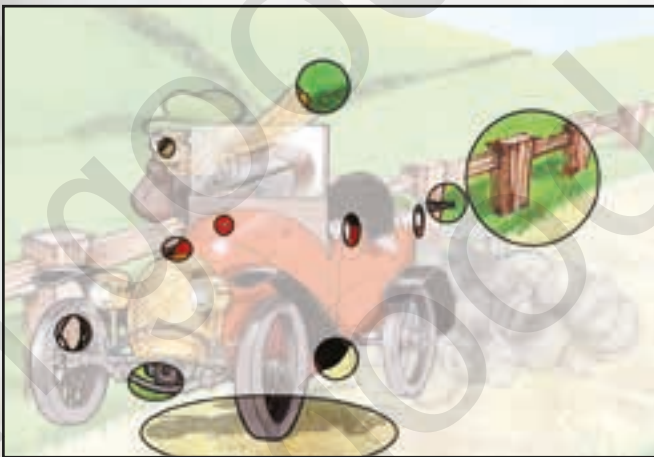
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Badger	Sett
Owl	Nest
Squirrel	Drey
Toad	Hole

Willows Wordsearch!



Spot the Difference!



The famous book is *The Wind in the Willows*

