

## Deepening Understanding

### YR4 Classic Fiction Text

#### An extract from *The Magic City* by Edith Nesbit



Philip stood in the shadow of the dark arch and looked out. He saw before him a great square surrounded by tall irregular buildings. In the middle was a fountain whose waters, silver in the moonlight, rose and fell with gentle splashing sound. A tall tree, close to the archway, cast the shadow of its trunk across the path. He listened, listened, listened, but there was nothing to listen to, except the deep night silence and the changing soft sound the fountain made. His eyes, growing accustomed to the dimness, showed him that he was under a heavy domed roof supported on large square pillars - to the right and left stood dark doors, shut fast.

'I will explore these doors by daylight,' he said. He did not feel exactly frightened. But he did not feel exactly brave either. But he wished and intended to be brave, so he said, 'I will explore these doors. At least I think I will,' he added, for one must not only be brave but truthful.

And then suddenly he felt very sleepy. He leaned against the wall, and presently it seemed that sitting down would be less trouble,

and then that lying down would be more truly comfortable. A bell from very very far away sounded the hour, twelve. Philip counted up to nine, but he missed the tenth bell-beat, and the eleventh and the twelfth as well, because he was fast asleep cuddled up warmly in his own little bed in his own little room in his own little house. He could see the sunlight through his closed eyelids and then he awoke, and he was not in his soft bed at home but on the hard floor of a big, strange gate-house, and a tall man in a red coat was shaking him; and the light that dazzled his eyes was not from the sun at all, but from a horn lantern which the man was holding close to his face.

'What's the matter?' said Philip sleepily.

'That's the question,' said the man in red. 'Come along to the guard-room and give an account of yourself, you young shaver.' He took Philip's ear gently but firmly between a very hard finger and thumb.

'Leave go,' said Philip, 'I'm not going to run away.' And he stood up feeling very brave.

The man shifted his hold from ear to shoulder and led Philip through one of those doors which he had thought of exploring by daylight. It was not daylight yet, and the room, large and bare, with an arch at each end and narrow little windows at the sides, was lighted by horn lanterns and tall tapers in pewter candlesticks. It seemed to Philip that the room was full of soldiers. Their captain, with a good deal of gold about him and a very smart black moustache, got up from a bench.

'Look what I've caught, sir,' said the man who owned the hand on

Philip's shoulder.

'Humph,' said the captain, 'so it's really happened at last.'

'What has?' said Philip.

'Why, you have,' said the captain. 'Don't be frightened, little man.'

'I'm not frightened,' said Philip, and added politely, 'I should be so much obliged if you'd tell me what you mean. I'm quite a stranger here.'



A jolly roar of laughter went up from the red-coats.

'It isn't manners to laugh at strangers,' said Philip.

'Mind your own manners,' said the captain sharply; 'in this country little boys speak when they're spoken to. Stranger, eh? Well, we knew that!'

Philip, though he felt snubbed, yet felt grand too. Here he was in the middle of an adventure with grown-up soldiers. He threw out his chest and tried to look manly.

The captain sat down in a chair at the end of a long table, drew a black book to him - a black book covered with dust - and began to rub a rusty pen-nib on his sword, which was not rusty.

'Come now,' he said, opening the book, 'tell me how you came here. And mind you speak the truth.'

'I always speak the truth,' said Philip proudly.

All the soldiers rose and saluted him with looks of deep surprise and respect.

'Well, nearly always,' said Philip, hot to the ears, and the soldiers clattered stiffly down again on to the benches, laughing once more. Philip had imagined there to be more discipline in the army.

'How did you come here?' said the captain.

'Up the great bridge staircase,' said Philip.

The captain wrote busily in the book.

'What did you come for?'

'I didn't know what else to do. There was nothing but illimitable Prairie and so I came up.'

'You are a very bold boy,' said the captain.

'Thank you,' said Philip. 'I do want to be.'

'What was your purpose in coming?'

'I didn't do it on purpose - I just happened to come.'

The captain wrote that down too. And then he and Philip and the soldiers looked at each other in silence.

'Well?' said the boy.

'Well?' said the captain.

'I do wish,' said the boy, 'you'd tell me what you meant by my really happening after all. And then I wish you'd tell me the way home.'



'Where do you want to get to?' asked the captain.

'The address,' said Philip, 'is The Grange, Ravelsham, Sussex.'

'Don't know it,' said the captain briefly, 'and anyhow you can't go back there now. Didn't you read the notice at the top of the ladder? Trespassers will be prosecuted. You've got to be prosecuted before you can go back anywhere.'

'I'd rather be persecuted than go down that ladder again,' he said.

'I suppose it won't be very bad - being persecuted, I mean?'

His idea of persecution was derived from books. He thought it to be something vaguely unpleasant from which one escaped in disguise- adventurous and always successful.

'That's for the judges to decide,' said the captain, 'it's a serious thing trespassing in our city. This guard is put here expressly to prevent it.'

'Do you have many trespassers?' Philip asked. The captain seemed kind, and Philip had a great-uncle who was a judge, so the word judges made him think of tips and good advice, rather than of justice and punishment.

'Many trespassers indeed?!' the captain almost snorted his answer.

'That's just it. There's never been one before. You're the first.'

