



## Comprehension activity

# CORALINE

By Neil Gaiman

Coraline was woken by the mid-morning sun, full on her face.

For a moment she felt utterly dislocated. She did not know where she was; she was not entirely sure who she was. It was astonishing how fragile that can be.

Sometimes Coraline would forget who she was while she was daydreaming that she was exploring the Arctic, or the Amazon rainforest, or darkest Africa, and it was not until someone tapped her on the shoulder or said her name that Coraline would come back from a million miles away with a start, and all in a fraction of a second have to remember who she was, and what her name was, and that she was even there at all.

Now there was the sun on her face, and she was Coraline Jones. Yes. And the green and pinkness of the room she was in, and the rustling of a large painted butterfly as it fluttered and beat its way about the ceiling, told her where she had woken up.

She climbed out of the bed. She could not wear her pyjamas, dressing gown and slippers during the day, she decided, even if it meant wearing the other Coraline's clothes. (Was there another Coraline? No, she decided, there wasn't. There was just her.) There were no proper clothes in the cupboard, though. They were more like dressing-up clothes or (she thought) the kind of clothes she would love to have hanging in her own wardrobe at home: there was a raggedy witch costume with little digital lights on it that glittered and blinked; a slinky evening dress all covered in feathers and mirrors. Finally, in a drawer, she found a pair of black jeans that seemed to be made of velvet night, and a grey sweater the colour of thick smoke with faint and tiny stars in the fabric which twinkled.

She pulled on the jeans and the sweater. Then she put on a pair of bright-orange boots she found at the bottom of the cupboard.

She took her last apple out of the pocket of her dressing gown, and then, from the same pocket, the stone with the hole in it.

She put the stone into the pocket of her jeans, and it was as if her head had cleared a little. As if she had come out of some sort of fog.

She went into the kitchen, but it was deserted.

Still, she was sure that there was someone in the flat. She walked down the hall until she reached her father's study, and discovered that it was occupied.

'Where's the other mother?' she asked the other father. He was sitting in the study, at a desk which looked just like her father's, but he was not doing anything at all, not even reading gardening catalogues as her own father did when he was only pretending to be working.

'Out,' he told her. 'Fixing the doors. There are some vermin problems.' He seemed pleased to have somebody to talk to.

'The rats, you mean?'

'No the rats are our friends. This is the other kind, big black fellow, with his tail high.'

'The cat, you mean?'

'That's the one,' said her other father.

He looked less like her true father today. There was something slightly vague about his face - like bread dough that had begun to rise, smoothing out the bumps and cracks and depressions.

'Really, I mustn't talk to you when she's not here,' he said. 'But don't worry. She won't be gone often. I shall demonstrate our tender hospitality to you, such that you will not even think about going back.' He closed his mouth and folded his hands in his lap.

'So what am I to do now?' asked Coraline.



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The father pointed to his lips. *Silence.*

'If you won't even talk to me,' said Coraline, 'I am going exploring.'

'No point,' said the other father. 'There isn't anywhere but here. This is all she made: the house, the grounds, and the people in the house. She made it and she waited.' Then he looked embarrassed and he put one finger to his lips again, as if he had just said too much.

Coraline walked out of his study. She went into the drawing room, over to the old door, and she pulled it, rattled and shook it. No, it was locked fast, and the other mother had the key.

She looked around the room. It was so familiar - that was what made it feel truly strange. Everything was exactly the same as she remembered: there was all her grandmother's strange-smelling furniture, there was the painting of the bowl of fruit (a bunch of grapes, two plums, a peach and an apple) hanging on the wall, there was the low wooden table with the lion's feet, and the empty fireplace which seemed to suck heat from the room.

But there was something else, something she did not remember seeing before. A ball of glass, up on the mantelpiece.

She went over to the fire place, went up on tiptoes, and lifted it down. It was a snow-globe, with two little people in it. Coraline shook it and set the snow flying, white snow that glittered as it tumbled through the water.

Then she put the snow-globe back on the mantelpiece, and carried on looking for her true parents and for a way out.

She went out the flat. Past the flashing-lights door, behind which the other Misses Spink and Forcible performed their show for ever, and set off into the woods.

Where Coraline came from, once you were through the patch of trees, you saw nothing but the meadow and the old tennis court. In this place, the woods went on further, the trees becoming cruder and less tree-like the further you went.

Pretty soon they seemed approximate, like the idea of trees: a greyish-brown trunk below, a greenish splurge of something that might have been leaves above.

Coraline wondered if the other mother wasn't interested in trees, or if she just hadn't bothered with this bit properly because nobody was expected to come out this far.

She kept walking.

And then the mist began.

It was not damp, like a normal fog or mist. It was not cold and it was not warm. It felt to Coraline like she was walking into nothing.

*I'm an explorer, though Coraline to herself. And I need all the ways out of here that I can get. So I shall keep walking.*

The world she was walking through was pale nothingness, like a blank sheet of paper or an enormous, empty white room. It had no temperature, no smell, no texture and no taste.

*It certainly isn't mist,* thought Coraline, although she did not know what it was. For a moment she wondered if she might have gone blind. But no, she could see herself, plain as day. There was no ground beneath her feet, just misty, milky whiteness.

'And what do you think you're doing?' said a shape to one side of her.

It took a few moments for her eyes to focus on it properly. She thought it might be some kind of lion, at first, some distance away from her; and then she thought it might be a mouse, close beside her. And then she knew what it was.

'I'm exploring,' Coraline told the cat.

Its fur stood straight out from its body and its eyes were wide, while its tail was down between its legs. It did not look a happy cat.

'Bad place,' said the cat. 'If you want to call it a place, which I don't. What are you doing here?'

'I'm exploring.'

'Nothing to find here,' said the cat. 'This is just the outside, the part of the place *she* hasn't bothered to create.'

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1. Why does Coraline feel disoriented at the beginning of the text?

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2. Describe the clothes Coraline decides to wear during the day in the other world.

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3. What unusual items does Coraline find in the cupboard that passes for a wardrobe?

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4. What does Coraline find in her dressing gown's pocket, and what effect does it have on her?

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5. Where does Coraline go in search of her true parents in the other world?

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6. Why is the other father not working in the study, and what problem does he mention?

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7. What does the other father reveal about the nature of the world Coraline is in?

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8. Why does Coraline decide to explore despite the other father's suggestion that there's nowhere to go?

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9. What does Coraline find on the mantelpiece in the drawing room?

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10. How does Coraline describe the mist she encounters while exploring the woods?

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Answers:

1. In the text it describes Coraline as feeling disoriented because she woke up in an unfamiliar place and momentarily forgot where she was and who she was.
2. Coraline puts on a pair of black velvet jeans, a grey sweater with faint stars, and bright-orange boots.
3. She finds dressing-up clothes, including a raggedy witch costume with digital lights and a slinky evening dress covered in feathers and mirrors.
4. Coraline finds her last apple and a stone with a hole in it in her pocket. Putting the stone in her jeans pocket helps clear her head.
5. Coraline goes to the kitchen, then to her father's study, where she finds the other father.
6. The other father is not working because the other mother is out fixing doors due to a vermin problem, specifically a big black cat.
7. The other father explains that the other mother created the entire place, including the house, grounds, and people, and she waits for something.
8. She wants to explore because she is an explorer and believes in finding all possible ways out of the world she's in.
9. Coraline finds a snow-globe with two little people inside it on the mantelpiece.
10. Coraline describes the mist as not damp, cold, or warm, feeling like she's walking into nothing. It lacks temperature, smell, texture, and taste.