

Memory and Silence Mystery & Horror

Footsteps in the Library

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The library was the quietest room in the house.

Even during the day, it seemed to absorb sound rather than reflect it. Tall shelves stretched from floor to ceiling, packed tightly with books that smelled of dust and age. The single window near the ceiling allowed in only a thin strip of light, leaving the corners of the room dim and indistinct. When Noah's family first toured the house, his parents called the library "charming" and moved on quickly, as if the room required no further attention.

After they moved in, the library remained mostly unused.

Noah noticed the footsteps late one night during his first week there. He was lying awake in bed, listening to the familiar noises of an old house settling—the occasional creak, the soft sigh of wood adjusting to temperature. Then he heard something different. The sound was measured and deliberate, moving slowly across the ceiling above him.

It stopped.

Noah held his breath, waiting for the sound to resume. It did not. The silence that followed felt heavier than before, as if the room above him had gone still on purpose.

The next morning, Noah checked the library.

He stood in the doorway, listening. The room was silent. Nothing appeared disturbed. He walked across the floor, noting how his footsteps sounded dull and muted, as though the carpet absorbed them. He told himself what he had heard the night before was nothing more than imagination.

But the footsteps returned.

They came every few nights, always after midnight. The pattern never changed: a few slow steps, a pause, then silence. The sound never crossed the entire room, never reached the shelves or the door. It always stopped in the same place, directly above Noah's bed.

As the nights passed, Noah began to dread the quiet more than the noise itself. He started leaving his door open, hoping the sounds of the rest of the house might break the silence. They did not. The library seemed sealed off, holding its own stillness separate from everything else.



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One afternoon, Noah decided to spend time in the library during the day.

Sunlight filtered weakly through the high window as he wandered between the shelves. Many of the books looked untouched, their spines stiff and unbroken. Others were worn smooth, as though handled repeatedly. The contrast unsettled him. Someone had spent a great deal of time here, yet had chosen carefully what to return to and what to leave behind.

Near the back of the room, Noah found a desk positioned beneath the shelves. Its surface was bare, coated in a thin layer of dust. When he tried to open one of the drawers, it resisted. He pulled harder, and it slid open with a faint sound.

Inside was a folded piece of paper.

The paper contained a list of book titles written in precise, careful handwriting. Some titles were crossed out. Others were left untouched. At the bottom of the list was a single sentence, written more firmly than the rest: Do not return these.

Noah folded the paper and placed it back where he found it.

That night, the footsteps sounded closer than ever.

They did not stop after a few steps. Instead, they continued slowly across the room above him. Noah counted each one, his chest tightening with every movement. The sound reached the far wall and lingered there before fading completely.

The silence that followed felt deliberate.

The next day, Noah showed the list to his father. His father read it carefully, then sat down without speaking. After a long pause, he explained that the library had belonged to the previous owner of the house, a man who rarely spoke and spent most of his time reading. When Noah asked about the list, his father said only that some stories were not meant to be revisited.

That evening, Noah returned to the library one last time.

The room was still. He placed the list back into the drawer and closed it gently. As he turned to leave, the silence settled around him again, heavy and complete. The footsteps never returned.

But Noah knew the quiet was not empty. It was preserved—holding memories that had been deliberately left unread.

Name : Class: Date:

Memory and Silence Mystery & Horror Questions

Footsteps in the Library

1. What details in the passage suggest that the footsteps are not caused by ordinary house noises?

2. What central theme is developed in this passage, and how do the library and the list of books support it?

3. How does Noah's reaction to the footsteps change over the course of the story?

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4. How does the author's description of sound and silence contribute to the mood of the library?

5. How does the structure of the passage build suspense before the meaning of the footsteps is revealed?

6. What evidence suggests that the previous owner deliberately avoided revisiting certain stories?

7. From what point of view is the story told, and how does this perspective shape the reader's understanding?

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8. What might the footsteps and the list of books symbolize in relation to memory and silence?

9. How does Noah's father's explanation influence the meaning of the events in the passage?

10. What is the central conflict in the passage, and how is it shaped by unspoken choices?

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Common Core-Aligned Reading Comprehension Questions and Answers

Footsteps in the Library

Standards Addressed:

RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.4, RL.9-10.5, RL.9-10.6

1. Question Type: Text Evidence

Standard: RL.9-10.1

Answer:

The footsteps follow a consistent pattern, stop deliberately, and occur repeatedly in the same location, suggesting purposeful movement rather than random house noises.

2. Question Type: Theme / Central Idea

Standard: RL.9-10.2

Answer:

A central theme is that silence can be used to avoid revisiting difficult memories. The unused library and the crossed-out book list reinforce this idea.

3. Question Type: Character Analysis

Standard: RL.9-10.3

Answer:

Noah shifts from confusion and doubt to cautious understanding as he realizes the footsteps are connected to deliberate silence rather than danger.

4. Question Type: Word Choice / Mood / Tone

Standard: RL.9-10.4

Answer:

Descriptions of absorbed sound, heavy silence, and dim light create a restrained, uneasy mood within the library.

5. Question Type: Structure / Suspense

Standard: RL.9-10.5

Answer:

The author delays explanation by repeating the footsteps across multiple nights before introducing the book list, gradually increasing tension.

6. Question Type: Evidence-Based Inference

Standard: RL.9-10.1

Answer:

The crossed-out titles and the warning “Do not return these” suggest intentional avoidance of certain memories or stories.

7. Question Type: Point of View / Perspective

Standard: RL.9-10.6

Answer:

The story is told from Noah’s perspective, allowing readers to share his uncertainty and discovery.

8. Question Type: Symbolism

Standard: RL.9-10.2

Answer:

The footsteps symbolize lingering memories, while the book list represents stories deliberately left unread.

9. Question Type: Character Reaction / Meaning

Standard: RL.9-10.3

Answer:

Noah’s father reframes the mystery as a conscious choice, shifting the meaning from fear to quiet restraint.

10. Question Type: Conflict / Overall Meaning

Standard: RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2

Answer:

The central conflict is Noah’s curiosity versus the decision to preserve silence and avoid reopening the past.

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Teacher Notes

Footsteps in the Library

Grade Level:

9th–10th Grade

Suggested Time:

45–60 minutes

Purpose:

This passage explores how silence can function as a deliberate choice connected to memory and avoidance.

Skills Focus:

- Text evidence and inference
- Theme and central idea
- Character response
- Mood and tone
- Structure and symbolism

Standards Alignment:

RL.9–10.1–RL.9–10.6