



# The dark thing

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## Focus phonics

ar as in arm, dark, park, hard, shark

th as in there, then, the, that, they, this

th as in panther, panthers, thing, think, with, teeth, thinks, things

## Tricky words

all, are, as, be, by, do, go, has, have, he, his, I, into, is, me, my, no, of, oh, old, one, out, said, she, so, the, there, they, to, was, you, your

## Book summary

Two friends have heard about a mysterious dark creature in the local park. They are convinced it is a dark panther with long legs and big teeth. Eventually they discover it is the afternoon sun playing tricks with them by throwing long shadows of a pet cat in an oak tree.

## Learning intention

**Phonics:** To decode words in the book with the focus phonemes of /ar/ and /th/ and to extend to other known words containing them.

### Comprehension:

- Retrieve information
- Explain the meaning of words
- Make connections
- Ask and answer questions

### Fluency:

- Read at a natural speaking pace with minimal sounding out
- Pay attention to punctuation when reading, pausing and changing tone as appropriate

## Before reading

**Story discussion:** Look at and discuss the cover illustration and read the title together. Ask: What do you think the title means? What is happening in the illustration? Compare with the title page illustration. Ask: Can you see a dark thing anywhere? What could the dark thing be? What do you think might happen in the story? Read and discuss the back cover blurb together. Flick through the book to get an idea of the story from the illustrations.

**Quick phonics warm-up:** Use Elkonin boxes to demonstrate the three sounds in the word *dark* /d/ /ar/ /k/. Mention how the /ar/ sound is one of the r-controlled vowels which means the r (sometimes called bossy r) controls the a to make /ar/. When you say /ar/, the r sound is quite dominant. Ask students to find words in the book with the /ar/ sound as you flip through it. Do the same for the /or/ sound demonstrating the word *corn* in the Elkonin boxes.

Move on to /th/ as in *the* and /th/ as in *thing*, practising the two different sounds of the consonant digraph. Practise saying words with these sounds on the inside front cover. Students can feel their breath coming from their mouth as they say words with /th/ as in *thing*.

**Vocabulary check:**

panther p 9 a large black wild cat similar to a leopard

oak p 5 a large tree that grows from an acorn

**Morphology:** The suffix -ed makes a verb into the past tense, e.g. *need* becomes *needed*, *look* becomes *looked*. Find more past tense verbs ending in -ed in the story, e.g. waited, seemed.

**Etymology:** *Hoax* meaning trick; 1808 (n.), probably an alteration of *hocus*.

**Tricky word practice:** Display the tricky words *l*, *to*, *into*. Ask: What are the tricky parts of these words? (*l* makes the /igh/ sound in *l*; *o* makes the /oo/ sound as in *moon* in *to* and *into*). Practise reading and spelling *l*, *to*, *into*.

## During reading

**Read the story:** This book may not fit into a single reading session. The end of p 15 is a good point to break the reading. Students can finish the book in a second group session or for homework. Reading could follow one or more of the following approaches:

- Start by reading the text to students, then invite them to take over the reading. Ask: Who had the idea of a dark think first? (Chen) Why did Jack need to go through the park? (to get corn from the shop for his mum) How did Mum ask Jack to go? ("Be as quick as you can") What other phrase could the author have used to say the same thing? (e.g. be as quick as a fox/the wind/a racing car) Why did Jack take a long time to get to the shop? (he was looking for the dark thing)
- Students read silently at their own pace; listen to each student in turn as they read a brief passage aloud.

**Phonics support:** Remind students to sound out and blend the letters as necessary to read any unfamiliar words, but encourage them to read words with familiar letters and sounds fluently on sight if they can, without sounding out. If students get stuck on a word, model how to sound out and blend the sounds in the word. Encourage students to help each other with sounding out and blending and praise good use of this strategy especially with words containing the focus sounds of /ar/ and /th/. Look for compound words in the story and explain their meaning, e.g. sunlight, cannot.

**Comprehension support:** Pause occasionally to talk about the book and encourage students to find and retrieve key details from the text. For example, on p 8 what features does Jack think a dark panther would have? (dark fur, long legs, big teeth and a long tail) What made Chen think it wasn't a panther? (p 14, the zoo said none had escaped) What made Jack think it wasn't a panther? (p 22, the dark thing was too big)

## After reading

**Apply learning:** Discuss the book. Ask: What are shadows? How could a pet cat look like a panther? What is your favourite part of the book? Ask: How did Jack feel at the end of the story? How did you feel?

**Comprehension:** What was the dark thing that tricked the boys? (a shadow of a cat) Why did they think it was a real animal? (Jack thought he heard it hiss) Could it have been Jack's cat? (Can

they spot the cat in the illustrations on p 2, 3 and 22?) What other animals did the boys think of when Jack's Dad said it could be lots of things? (pp 18-19, fox, goat, hen, shark, cow) Ask: Were the boys serious with their suggestions? What makes you say this? (no, they were laughing and the animals probably couldn't climb a tree or were the wrong shape) Ask: What problem did the author write about and how was it solved? On p 22 there are two words with apostrophes. Discuss what *Let's* and *Jack's* mean. (*let's* is a contraction – short for let us; *Jack's* means something (room) belongs to Jack)

Discuss the questions on the inside back cover.

**Fluency:** Choose a page from the book and model how to read it fluently with appropriate emphasis and intonation to convey the meaning of the story (especially with the word *has* in bold print on p 24). Students read the same passage, copying your reading. Students then choose another brief passage and read it at a natural speaking pace fluently with minimal sounding out to their partner. They practise speed-reading the list of focus words from the inside front cover to encourage automaticity.

**Spelling and writing through dictation:** Read out the following passage for students to write. It uses words and sentences from the text as these are decodable. The focus is on encoding (spelling) rather than creating content.

(pages 23-24)

At the park, Chen said. "Jack, I think the sun has been fooling us."

Jack said, "How?"

"Things can look odd in the sunlight," Chen said. "Look in the oak!"

Jack looked. "Wow!" he said. "I see it now, too!"

"The sun has fooled us," Jack said. "The sun turned a pet cat into a long, dark panther! It was one big hoax!"

Chen said, "That old sun had fun with us!"

Jack let out a sad sigh. "Yes, but I do so wish it was a panther. A big, dark panther thing in the park."

## Follow-up activities

Students complete the follow-up activities:

### **Worksheet 1: Phonics**

Make new words with /ar/.

Practise /th/ words.

### **Worksheet 2: Comprehension**

Answer questions about the story.

### **Worksheet 3: Science**

Do a shadow experiment.

### **Worksheet 4: Art**

Make spooky tree silhouettes.