

The Sweet Shop

This extract is taken from Roald Dahl's autobiography: "BOY. Tales of Childhood".

The sweet-shop in Llandaff in the year 1923 was the very centre of our lives. Without it, there would have been very little to live for. But it had one terrible drawback, this sweet-shop. The woman who owned it was a horror. We hated her and we had good reason for doing so.

Her name was Mrs Pratchett. She was a small skinny old hag with a moustache on her upper lip and a mouth as sour as a green gooseberry. She never smiled. She never welcomed us when we went in, and they only times she spoke were when she said things like, "I'm watchin' you so keep yer thievin' fingers off them chocolates!" Or "I don't want you in 'ere just to look around! Either you *forks* out or you *gets* out!"

But by far the most loathsome thing about Mrs Pratchett was the filth that clung around her. Her apron was grey and greasy. Her blouse had bits of breakfast all over it, toast-crumbs and tea stains and splotches of dried egg-yolk. It was her hands, however, that disturbed us most. They were disgusting. They were black with dirt and grime. They looked as though they had been putting lumps of coal on the fire all day long. And do not forget please that it was these very hands and fingers that she plunged into the sweet jars when we asked for a pennyworth of Treacle Toffee or Wine Gums or Nut Clusters or whatever. The mere sight of her grimy right hand, with its black fingernails, digging an ounce of Chocolate Fudge out of a jar would have caused a starving tramp to go running from the shop. But not us. Sweets were our life-blood. We would have put up with far worse than that to get them. So we simply stood and watched in sullen silence while this disgusting old woman stirred around inside the jars with her foul fingers.

The other thing we hated Mrs Pratchett for was her meanness. Unless you spent a whole sixpence in one go, she wouldn't give you a bag. Instead you got your sweets twisted up in a small piece of newspaper which she tore off a pile of old Daily Mirrors lying on the counter.

So you can well understand that we had it in for Mrs Pratchett in a big way, but we didn't quite know what to do about it. Many schemes were put forwards but none of them was any good. None of them, that is, until suddenly, one memorable afternoon, we found the dead mouse.

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1. Where was the sweet-shop? (1 mark)

2. Find and copy a group of words from the text which shows how important the sweet-shop was to Dahl and his friends. (1 mark)

3. What does Mrs Pratchett mean by "*Either you forks out or you gets out!*" (1 mark)

4. Explain what Dahl means when he says sweets were the boys "*life-blood*". (1 mark)

5. Using information from the text, tick one box to show whether each statement is true or false.

(2 marks)

	True	False
Mrs Pratchett was small and very thin.		
Mrs Pratchett's blouse was stained with tea.		
The sweet-shop sold liquorice.		
Sweets were always wrapped in newspaper.		

6. How does Mrs Pratchett treat Dahl and his friends when they visit her sweet-shop? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. (2 marks)

7. "*We simply stood and watched in **sullen** silence...*" The word *sullen* is closest in meaning to:
(1 mark)

Gloomy Quiet Bored Content

8. How does Dahl make you want to read the next chapter? (1 mark)
