



The Arctic Fox

Guided by the moonlight, she drifted over the snow like a silent ghost. It had been three days now. Three days and countless miles in almost continuous darkness but still she hadn't found them. She had checked the entire territory, scampering across frozen tundra and powdered snow, sniffing at fresh trails and burrows, but so far nothing.

She couldn't find her cubs.

The blizzard had been particularly bad. It had blown in from the east and had lasted longer than any storm she could remember. Once it had calmed, the land had changed. The snow was thicker, burying familiar trails and hiding scents, making it difficult for her to find her way home. By the time she returned to the burrow, the cubs were long gone.



But Arctic foxes were hardy animals. Built to live in polar conditions. Their small ears, thickly insulated fur and bushy tails were designed to keep them alive in temperatures well below -40 degrees. The cubs were probably hungry, lost and scared but they wouldn't be cold, even in these wintry conditions.

During the winter it was nearly always night-time. The sun only rose for an hour or so a day; it's golden glow spilling low over the land like the briefest of sunsets. She could tell by the purple haze in one corner of the sky that the sun would be rising soon. She just hoped it would stay long enough to help find her children.



Q1: Who was the Arctic fox looking for?

Q2: Why do you think the author describes the fox as 'like a silent ghost'?



Q3: '*She had checked the entire territory...*'

What do you think the word *territory* means in this sentence?



She held her nose to the air. A new scent on the icy breeze. Familiar yet unusual, drifting in from the south. The scent led her to a forest. Wolves howled as she silently scampered between trees and bushes. She was a good hunter, able to stalk all kinds of prey, but she was also a good hider; able to stick to the shadows when avoiding danger.

After a while, a beam of sunlight poked its way through the trees, giving the forest a golden-white glint. The fox stopped and sniffed the ground. The scent was getting stronger and she noticed paw prints in the snow. Small paw prints leading further into the woodland.

Suddenly, she heard twigs breaking and she spun around. From the depths of the forest, a huge bear appeared. It was waddling casually as if it hadn't seen her. The small fox froze, crouching low as the bear got closer, hoping that her pure white coat would keep her hidden amongst the snow. The beast stopped, then sniffed the ground. The fox stayed deadly still, her little heart racing. The bear could smell her, but it couldn't see her. Or had it picked up on her cubs' scent? She knew there wasn't much time before the sun faded away again. It had been three days since she last saw her babies, she desperately needed to find them. Bear or no bear, she had no time for this. Almost without thinking, the fiercest sound she had ever made erupted from her lungs. It was a warning, a threat, a 'don't mess with me or my children' kind of scream; high pitched and terrifying. The bear squealed and jumped backwards, its fur shivering with fright. The little fox was camouflaged in the snow. From the bear's point of view, it may as well have been a ghost shrieking at him. It padded backwards, its huge head waving from side to side, desperately trying to make sense of what had happened. The fox screamed again and the bear turned tail and fled, whimpering as he disappeared into the darkness of the forest.



Q4: Why do you think that the fox 'held her nose to the air'?

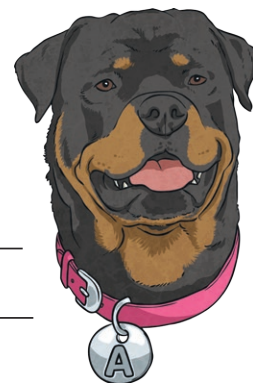


Q5: Find and copy two things that the mother fox was good at.

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Q6: *'It was waddling casually as if it hadn't seen her.'*

Why do you think the author chose to use the word 'waddling' instead of 'walking'?





Q7: How did the fox feel as she hid from the bear? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.

Q8: The Arctic fox's white fur lets it blend into the snow and seem invisible. Discuss one other animal that can blend into its environment and say how it does so.



Soon, the little fox came to a woodland clearing. There, in the centre of the clearing, was a strange object made mainly of tree trunks. It was massive, larger than ten bears, and it had fire-smoke drifting from a rectangular pipe at the top. She had seen these sorts of things before and she had learnt to stay well away. It was a human den.

She heard a familiar cry and hurried to other side of the den. There, playing in the snow beside an enormous sleigh and a group of reindeer, were her cubs! She yelped excitedly but remained hidden in the shadows. The little fox's instincts were to run towards her babies; to whisk them away to safety but she knew how dangerous humans could be.

Suddenly, she heard a jingly noise and a large human in a red and white coat stepped out of the den and onto the golden snow. He had white fur on his face and a dangly red hat that jangled as he walked. There was something about the man that put the little fox immediately at ease.

“Ho! Ho! Ho!” the man chuckled to the cubs. “I think there’s someone here to see you!” He turned his head towards the little fox. Without thinking, she sprinted over, yelping with delight. The cubs couldn’t quite believe what they were seeing and dived all over their mother, squeaking and yapping with pure joy. Three days it had been. Three days of worry and endless searching and now it was over. She licked them lovingly as they flicked and jumped in and out of one another.



She looked up to the man and tilted her head as if to say, ‘thank you’. “Merry Christmas, little Arctic foxes!” he said, as if replying. “Merrrrry Christmas!”

Q9: What do you think the man-made object in the clearing was? Explain your answer.

Q10: Who was the man who stepped out of the den? Explain how you know.



Q11: What do you think the fox and her cubs did next?



Q12: Sum up the key points of this story in two short sentences.





The Arctic Fox Answers

Q1: Who was the Arctic fox looking for?

Accept any answer which states that the Arctic fox was looking for her children, her cubs or her offspring.

Q2: Why do you think the author describes the fox as 'like a silent ghost'?

Accept answers which discuss either or both of the following points:

- **It was as silent as a ghost because the fox was not making any sound.**
- **The fox blended into the snow (camouflage) so no one could see who was there, making it like a ghost.**

Q3: *'She had checked the entire territory...'*

What do you think the word territory means in this sentence?

Accept any answer which equates the meaning of the word 'territory' to land, area, region or enclave.

Q4: Why do you think that the fox 'held her nose to the air'?

Accept answers which infer that the mother fox was trying to catch a scent on the air which could lead her to her babies, e.g.

- **She held her nose to the air to see if she could smell where her babies were.**

Q5: Find and copy two things that the mother fox was good at.

Accept the answers 'hunting' and 'hiding' only.

Q6: *'It was waddling casually as if it hadn't seen her.'*

Why do you think the author chose to use the word 'waddling' instead of 'walking'?

Accept answers which discuss that the author chose the word 'waddling' to give the reader an image in their mind of how the bear was walking, e.g.

- **The word 'waddling' allows the reader to imagine how the bear was moving more than the word 'walking' does.**

Q7: How did the fox feel as she hid from the bear? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.

Accept answers which infer that the fox felt scared, fearful, anxious, brave, confrontational or defensive, quoting one of the following extracts from the text as evidence:

- **The fox stayed deadly still**
 - **Her little heart racing**
 - **The fiercest sound she had ever made erupted from her lungs**
 - **It was a warning, a threat.**

Q8: The Arctic fox's white fur lets it blend into the snow and seem invisible. Discuss one other animal that can blend into its environment and say how it does so.

Accept any answer which names one other animal which camouflages with its environment, provided that a brief explanation of how it does so is given in support, e.g.

- **Some types of owl can blend into trees because their feathers are the same colour as the wood.**
- **Chameleons can change colour so that they are almost invisible no matter where they are.**
- **A stick insect can't be seen when it is near trees because its body is the same as the branches.**

Q9: What do you think the man-made object in the clearing was? Explain your answer.

Accept answers which infer that it was a house, cabin or hut, providing that relevant evidence from the text is provided as support, such as:

- **I think it was a house because the text says it had 'smoke drifting from a pipe' and that could be a chimney.**
- **It must be some sort of cabin because it was massive and made from tree trunks.**
- **The fox knows it is a human den so it could have been a hut.**

Q10: Who was the man who stepped out of the den? Explain how you know.

Accept answers which infer that the man was Father Christmas (or any other name used for the same person) and quotes one of the following extracts from the text in support:

- **She heard a jingly noise**
- **A large human in a red and white coat**
- **White fur on his face**
- **A dangly red hat that jangled as he walked**
- **"Ho! Ho! Ho!" the man chuckled.**

Q11: What do you think the fox and her cubs did next?

Accept any reasonable prediction based on the events of the story so far, such as the following:

- **The fox and her cubs returned home together.**
- **The fox made a new home with her cubs beside Santa's cabin in the woods.**
- **The fox played with her cubs in the snow to celebrating finding them.**
- **Santa gave the foxes a small Christmas present of something to eat.**

Q12: Sum up the key points of this story in two short sentences.

Accept any brief summary of the key points of the story in two sentences, such as: 'A fox mother fought off a bear to find her cubs. She found them next to Santa's house.'