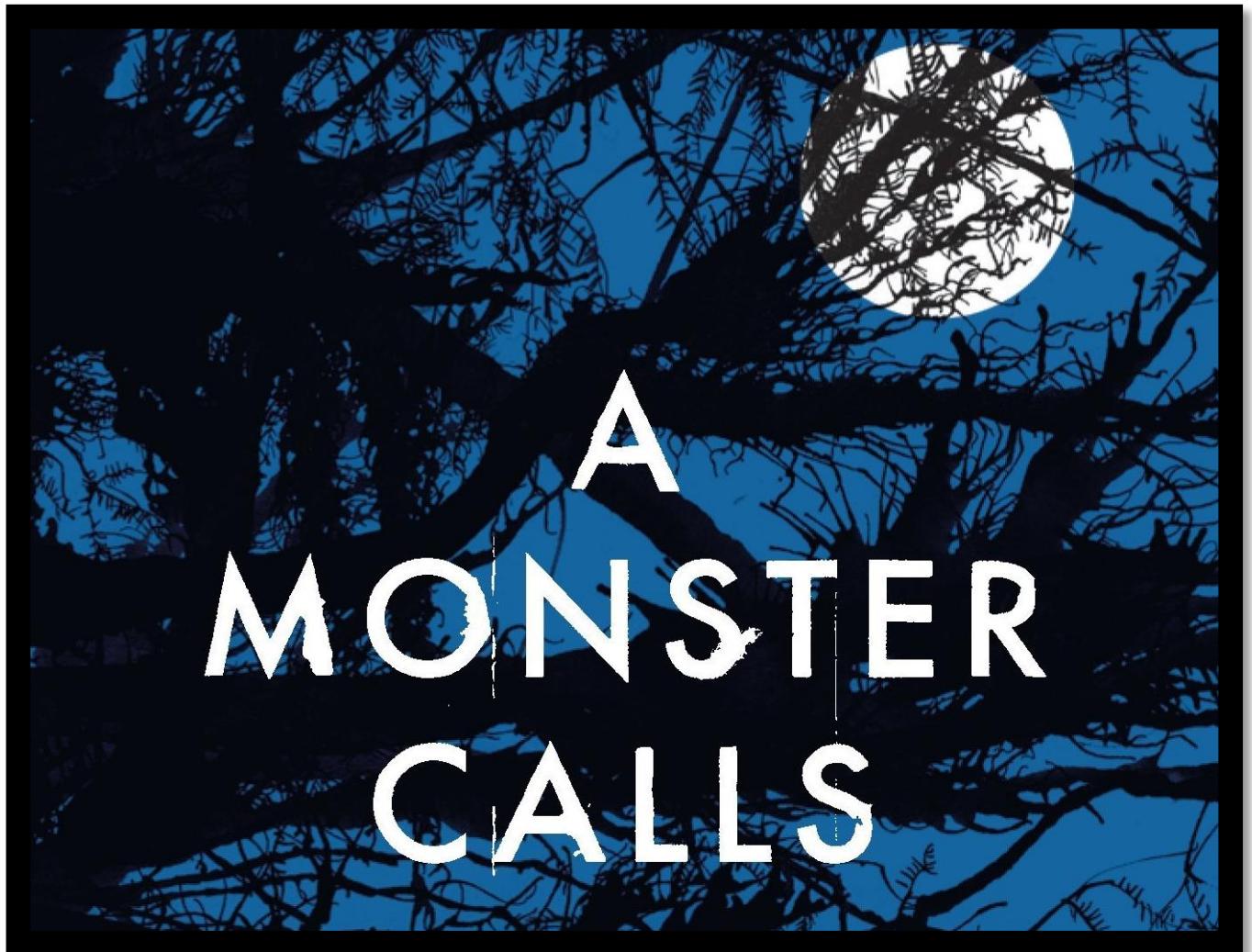


# COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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FOR



BY

PATRICK NESS

*“Stories are wild creatures, the monster said. When you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak?”*

*A MONSTER CALLS*  
p.69

This work was created for educational purposes only as a comprehension companion guide

For the novel: *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness

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The May 2015 Walker Book UK imprint of *A Monster Calls*  
(ISBN: 978-1-4063-6180-3)  
was used as reference  
in the creation of this comprehension companion  
and can be purchased at <http://www.walker.co.uk> or at most major booksellers.



## Calling all Monsters!

In our stories we love monsters. In almost every story you can identify the monster. Sometimes it's easy, Frankenstein, Grendel, Sauron, the big-bad wolf, zombies, werewolves, Voldemort and so on. Although sometimes it may not be that easy or simple as they can manifest in our stories in many forms. Think of stories like *Hamlet*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Call Me By Your Name* or *Into the Wild*. Stories wherein the "monster" takes the forms of: **inaction** (in the case of *Hamlet*); **cancer** (in *The Fault in Our Stars*); **time** (in *Call Me By Your Name*); and **nature** (in the story of *Into the Wild*). Juxtaposed against the main characters of the story, the monsters force the actions of these characters by presenting them with challenges. The characters then act accordingly in either a good or bad way, showing the very humanity in which our stories are designed to illustrate. Simply put, monsters bring out the good or the bad in the characters they confront.

Our monsters are fantastic, well-imagined and yet seemingly incredibly real. The creation of the monster in stories requires the full extent of the imagination of the author, and later the reader. A simple look at literature, fairy tales or movies and you'll see many examples of complex, bizarre and incredibly well detailed monsters. Even more so than their heroic counterparts. The creation of our monsters requires great effort of imagination.

Here, in *A Monster Calls* we have a wonderfully well created and imagined monster. A monster as old as time that can take many forms when he comes walking. But in this story, he takes the form of a curative yew tree. Yet this monster is different almost "meta". We as the readers, see a monster created in the imagination of the author as literary tool forcing the actions of the main character. But where *A Monster Calls* is unique, is that here the main character, Conor, has created the monster in his own imagination to help him react and deal with a tragic situation in which he is placed. This monster then tells Conor three stories wherein the monsters defy stereotypes thereby showing Conor that a monster is not always what it seems. After the monster's stories, Conor is then required to tell his own story, wherein we and Conor are finally exposed to the *real* monster. Quite "meta" don't you think.

## Why Study *A Monster Calls*?

Because Monsters! . Monsters are everywhere, not just in our stories, but also in our daily lives and interactions with the broader world. For example, how many times have you been confronted with someone who has forced you to act in a way that you weren't happy with? Maybe you hated yourself afterward, or, at the very least you thought of a hundred different ways you could have handled the situation. Or maybe you've been confronted with a situation where you are proud of how you handled it. You beat that monster! Or perhaps, like with Conor, you're facing a difficult situation in your life, and it seems that monsters are everywhere. And to make matters worse, finding the real monster can be difficult and painful, as we again see with Conor. But find them we must because monsters are real, as real as we perceive them to be. And here, Conor's monster is very real, as real as he created him to be. So as it goes for Conor it goes with us in our struggle to find the right monster in our lives.

## How to proceed:

Read each chapter in the book for as thorough an understanding as possible (paying special attention to vocabulary, expressions, slang and grammar along the way.) Then once you've completed the chapter answer the corresponding questions in the booklet. Answering the questions should be easy, but if you find questions that are difficult, simply go back to the page to which the question refers and reread wherever necessary so that you can easily complete the question. All answers are in the book and the page numbers at the end of each question. Remember this is not a test. Seek to understand and let the book teach you.

You may write your responses in this booklet, or you may want to copy them into your own notebook. There are many blank writing journals available for sale ranging from simple to fancy. If you would like to study the vocabulary presented in this guide, you'll find two distinct activities on Quizlet.com For the specific vocabulary go to: <https://quizlet.com/5yu7ui>. Both of these links will bring to you multiple multimedia activities designed to help you augment your current English vocabulary in fun ways. At the end of the booklet you'll find a single question that will help you make a deeper connection with the story by allowing you to explore and to express your thoughts, feelings and observations.

## The most important!

The most important thing is to enjoy what you read. If the story fascinates you and piques your imagination, then learning becomes innate.

**For more information visit <http://www.englishcaddy.org/amonstercalls.htm>**

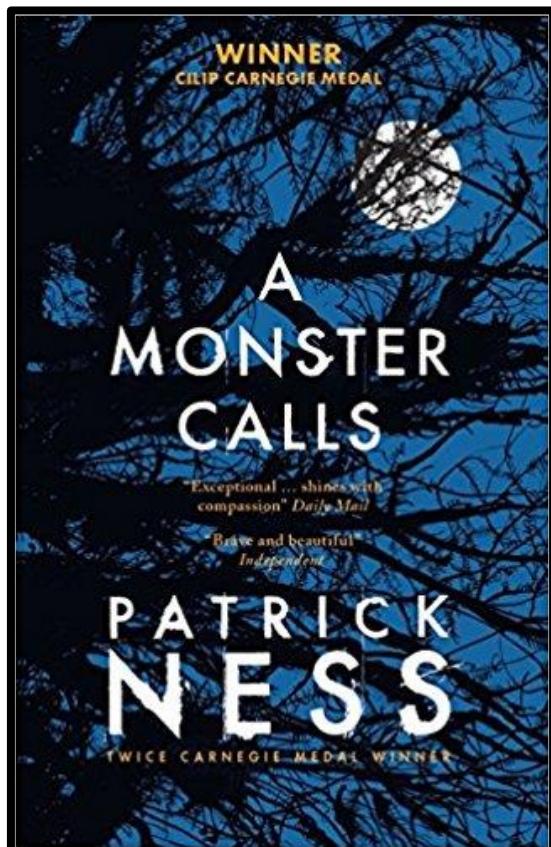




Comprehension Questions for *A MONSTER CALLS*  
BY PATRICK NESS

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## LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS

CONOR O'MALLEY  
THE MONSTER  
MOTHER  
GRANDMOTHER  
FATHER  
LILY

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## A MONSTER CALLS

**Vocabulary:**

*Skipping* (p. 15)

*Grasp* (p. 15)

*Fortnightly* (p. 16)

*Groggily* (p. 16)

*Strain* (p. 16)

*Guts* (p. 17)

*Yew tree* (p. 18)

*Graveyard* (p. 18)

*Billow* (p. 19)

*Peer* (p. 20)

*Frightened* (p. 21)

1. How often does Conor's father call him on the telephone? (p.15)
2. How old is Conor? (p. 17)
3. On this page, what is a synonym for the word 'wild'? (p. 18)
4. What are some words used to describe the yew tree? (pp. 18 – 20)
5. In what surprising way does Conor react to the monster? (pp. 21 – 23)

And why does he not react as the monster wanted? (p. 22)

## BREAKFAST

**Vocabulary:**

*Startle* (p. 24)

*Rubbish* (p. 26)

*Wheelie bin* (p. 27)

*Load* (p. 27)

*Scalp* (p. 28)

*To manage to do* (p. 30)

*Wig* (p. 30)

1. Why did Conor have to make his own breakfast? (p. 25)

How often does he have to do this?

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2. What evidence was there that the monster was real? (p. 26)
3. How did Conor rationalize the existence of this “evidence”? (p. 26)
4. Why is Conor’s grandmother coming, and how does he feel about it? (pp. 29-30)
5. What is a wig, and why is Conor’s grandmother bringing them with her when she comes to visit? (p. 5)

## SCHOOL

**Vocabulary:**

*Spit* (v.) (p. 32)  
*Cronies* (p. 32)

*Teachers’ pet* (p.33)

*Doom* (p. 35)  
*Shrubbery* (p. 35)

*Unruffled* (p. 37)

1. Describe Harry. (pp. 32-34)

What does he do to Conor?

2. Who is Lily? (pp. 35-36)

What does she do for Conor?

3. What does Conor tell Miss Kwan happened outside the school? (p. 37)

Comprehension Questions for *A MONSTER CALLS*  
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**LIFE WRITING**

**Vocabulary:**

Dread (p. 38)

Giggle (p. 40)

Free and clear (p. 43)

Burden (p. 38)

Butt in (p. 41)

Steeple (p. 42)

Sick to death (p. 40)

Detention (p. 41)

1. What ideas did Conor have for the subject of his *life writing* assignment for English class? (p. 39)
2. On page 41, Conor says “It’s your fault. It’s *all* your fault.” to Lily. What is he blaming her for? (pp. 42-43)
3. Why was Conor’s father no longer in the house? (p. 43)

## THREE STORIES

**Vocabulary:**

Throw up (p. 46)

Ghastly (p. 47)

Clench (p. 51)

Lain (past of ‘Lie’) (p. 46)

Gnarled (p. 47)

Rib cage (p. 28)

Chomp (p. 49)

Squish (p. 53)

1. How does the monster respond to Conor’s question: “*What do you want from me?*”. (pp. 47-48)
2. What is the reason the monster “*has come walking...*” for Conor? (p. 27)
3. What scares Conor about the truth that the monster wants Conor to tell him in the fourth story? (What does he fear it might be?) (p. 52)

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## GRANDMA

**Vocabulary:**

Draw blood (p. 55)

Crinkly (p. 56)

Fuming (p. 57)

Cheek(y) (p. 59)

Husky (p. 60)

1. According to Conor, what should a grandmother be like? (p. 56)
2. How does Conor's grandmother feel about Conor's school, and why does this anger Conor? (pp. 57-58)
3. How do Conor and his grandmother differ in their views about Conor's mother's treatments? (pp. 60-61)
4. Why do you think that Conor will have to live with his grandmother?

## THE WILDNESS OF STORIES

**Vocabulary:**

Drift off (p. 63)

Squint (p. 64)

Topple (p. 68)

Slay (p. 68)

Havoc (p. 69))

1. What was keeping Conor awake? (p. 63)
2. How is Conor sarcastic in his attitude toward the monster? (p. 66)

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3. For what reason did Conor think/hope the monster came? (p. 68)
  
4. How does the monster feel about stories? (pp. 68-69)

## THE FIRST TALE

**Vocabulary:**

Hardship (p. 71)  
Heir (p. 71)  
Succumb (p. 71)

Grief (p. 71)  
Lurk (p. 72)  
Upside down (p. 73)  
Slump (p. 75)

Treachery (p. 76)  
Mob (p. 77)

1. In this, the monster's first tale, who is the king's only heir? (p. 71)
  
2. Who ruled the kingdom after the king's death? (p. 73)
  
3. What does Conor find "disgusting" in the tale? (p. 74)
  
4. Of whom did the prince ask for help when he found his love murdered? (pp. 76-77)
  
5. What does Conor ask of the monster at the end of this chapter? (pp. 77-78)

## Comprehension Questions for *A MONSTER CALLS*

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### THE REST OF THE FIRST TALE

#### Vocabulary:

Overthrow (p. 79)  
Mist (p. 80)

Hindquarters (p. 80)

Topple (p. 82)

Cheat (noun) (p. 84)

Sapling (p. 85)

Sprout (p. 85)

***"Sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all."***

1. Why did the prince say that he murdered his love? (p. 82)
2. What was the fate of the prince? (p. 82)
3. Was the queen a witch? (p. 83)
4. In your opinion why is a true story different than a fairy tale?

### UNDERSTANDING

#### Vocabulary:

Twist (noun) (p. 86)  
Barely (p. 86 & 87)  
Poodle (p. 86 & 91)

Make allowances (p. 87)

Go through s.t. (p. 88)

Afresh (p. 89)

Fist (p. 90)

Sewing (p. 90)

Flinch (p. 92)

Trudge (p. 93)

Sigh (p. 95)

1. What does Lily offer Conor, and how does he accept it? (pp. 86-88)
2. In the previous school-year, how did Conor's classmates treat him? (pp. 88-90)

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3. Why did he blame this treatment on Lily? (pp. 88-90)
4. How did Conor react to Harry's threat of punching him after Harry knocked him down? (p. 92)
5. Do you think that Miss Kwan believes Harry's story about why the boys were late returning to classes? (pp. 93-94)

What evidence from the book can you cite?

## LITTLE TALK

**Vocabulary:** Prey (p. 96)

1. What news did Conor learn from his grandmother when he returned from school? (pp. 96-98) (3 possible things)
2. What's wrong with Conor's mother's latest treatment, and what does she tell him to reassure him? (p. 101)

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## GRANDMA'S HOUSE

**Vocabulary:**

Crammed (p. 103)  
Gawping (p. 103)  
Pigsty (p. 104)

Bothered (p. 105)  
Hoover (verb) (p. 105)  
Bossy (p. 106)  
Overstay (p. 106)

Smudge (p. 108)  
Curlicues (p. 108)

1. Why did Conor think that his grandmother had no need of a cleaning lady? (pp. 104-105)
2. What was not allowed in his grandmother's house? (p. 107)
3. How did Conor feel about seeing his father? (p. 109)

## CHAMP

**Vocabulary:**

Ushered (p. 112)

Holding up (p. 112)  
Gasp (p. 116)

1. What does Conor confess or confide to his father that he has never told anyone else? (p. 113)
2. What reasons does Conor give for not wanting to live at his grandmother's? (pp. 114-115)
3. What reasons does Conor's father give for Conor not living with him in America? (p. 115)

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**AMERICANS DON'T GET MUCH HOLIDAY**

**Vocabulary:**

Duck (verb) (p. 119)  
Scratch (p. 119)

Glide (p. 120)

Gathering (p. 121)

1. How long is Conor's father staying in England, and when does he say he'll be back? (pp. 117-118)
2. How does Conor feel about visiting his father at Christmas? (p. 118)
3. What is the monster's opinion about Conor breaking/destroying his grandmother's clock? (pp. 122-123)

## THE SECOND TALE

**Vocabulary:**

Sour (p. 126)  
Brew (p. 126)  
Sprawling (p. 127)

Rashes (p. 127)

Greedy (p. 127)  
Lawn (p. 127)  
Riverbed (p. 128)

Trunk (p. 128)

Sap (p. 129)  
Git (p. 132)

1. How has the country changed since the first tale? (p. 125)
2. What is a modern synonym for the words: "apothecary" and "chemist"? (p. 126)
3. Why was the Apothecary disliked by the villagers? (p. 127)
4. Why did the Apothecary want the yew tree and who prevented him from having it? (p. 129)

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5. What did the parson offer the Apothecary if he would help heal his daughters? (p. 131)
  
  
  
  
  
6. Whose house did the monster destroy after the parson's daughters died? (p. 132)

## THE REST OF THE SECOND TALE

**Vocabulary:**

Dell (p. 133)  
Aside (p. 134)  
Healer (p. 134)

Seething (p. 135)  
Blurring (p. 136)  
Lash out (p. 136)  
Frenzy (p. 137)

Hoarse (p. 137)  
Wreckage (p. 138)  
Panting (p. 138)

1. What did the monster say he expected the parson to do for the Apothecary? Why? (p. 134)
  
  
  
  
  
2. According to the monster, why was the parson the bad guy and not the Apothecary? (pp. 134-135)
  
  
  
  
  
3. What did the monster and Conor actually destroy? (p. 138)

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## DESTRUCTION

**Vocabulary:**

Shattered (p. 139)  
Hurled (p. 139)

Mid-air (p. 141)

Groan (p. 142)

Stumble (p. 143)

Upright (p. 143)

Moan (p. 144)

Dawn (p. 144)

Weep (p. 145)

***“Destruction is very satisfying.”***

1. Why does Conor think that his father would not want him to live with him in America? (p. 141)
2. How did Conor's grandmother react to Conor's destruction of the sitting room? (pp. 143-144)
3. What did Conor do during the night after he destroyed the sitting room? (pp. 144-145)

What did his grandmother do?

## INVISIBLE

**Vocabulary:**

Scrambled eggs (p. 147)

Taken a turn (for the worst)

(p. 148)

Thump (p. 149)

Pace (noun) (p. 150)

Sniggering (p. 150)

1. “*Your mum's taken a turn,...*” What does this tell us about Conor's mum's condition? (p. 148)
2. What will be the consequences of Conor destroying his grandmother's living room? (p. 149)

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3. Did Conor get what he expected from Harry? (pp. 151-152)

What was he expecting?

## YEW TREES

**Vocabulary:**

Vending machine (p. 153)

Bruises (p. 154)

Look a fright (p. 154)

Ebb (p. 156)

Chipper (p. 156)

1. What is the new treatment for Conor's mum made of, and why didn't they use it earlier? (pp. 154-156)

## COULD IT BE

**Vocabulary:**

Sneaking (p. 161)

Last ditch effort (p. 161)

1. "Could it be? Could it really be?" Explain what Conor is thinking about. (pp. 158-159)

2. Why is Conor's father returning to America early? (p. 160)

3. How does Conor's father feel about Conor's mother's new treatment? (p. 161)

4. What is 'denial' in relation to the 5 stages of grief? (research on the internet)

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## NO TALE

<b>Vocabulary:</b>	Sag (p. 166)	Nevertheless (p. 168)
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1. What does the monster say will happen after the third story? (pp. 167-168)
2. Conor continues to say that stories are stupid. How does the monster defend their purpose? (p. 168)

## I NO LONGER SEE YOU

<b>Vocabulary:</b>	Tersely (p. 170)	Cracking up (p. 172)
	Lap (p. 172)	

1. On the ride to school, which question did Conor's grandmother not answer for him? (pp. 170-171)

Why do you think that she didn't answer?

2. What does Harry "do" to Conor in the lunchroom at 12:06? (p. 174)

## THE THIRD TALE

<b>Vocabulary:</b>	Aghast (p. 177)
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1. To whom besides Harry is Connor unseen/invisible and what has Connor done that they have ignored?

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## PUNISHMENT

**Vocabulary:**

Sue (p. 180)

Winced (p. 181)

Bullying (p. 181)

Droop (p. 185)

1. Are Harry's parents going to file legal charges against Conor for what he did to their son? According to Miss Kwan, why? (pp. 180-181)
2. List some of the injuries sustained by Harry and who inflicted them, the monster or Conor? (pp. 180-183)
3. What punishment was Conor happy to get from the Headmistress? What did he receive and what was the reason given? (pp. 185-186)
4. What did Conor learn about being visible versus invisible? (pp. 186-187)

## A NOTE

**Vocabulary:**

Wandering (p. 189)

X-ray (p. 189)

Slyly (p. 190)

Make fun of (p. 190)

Praise (p. 192)

Lump (p. 190)

1. Describe Conor's existence/life since his attack on Harry. (pp. 188-189)
2. What did Lily's note to Conor say and why didn't he respond? (pp. 191-192)

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## 100 YEARS

<b>Vocabulary:</b>	Set off (p. 196)	Wheezy (p. 199)
	Faint (adv.) (p. 196)	

1. What does Conor's mother tell him in "*the talk*" about the yew tree treatment and why does his mother say that she didn't lie? (pp. 196-198)
2. What did Conor's mother say (in general) about being angry? (pp. 198-199)
3. And more specifically, what did Conor's mother say about being angry at her? (pp. 198-199)

*"There was nothing more to say."*

## WHAT'S THE USE OF YOU

<b>Vocabulary:</b>	Stale (p. 202)	Tombstone (p. 203)
	Barbed wire (p. 202)	Loom (v.) (p. 203)

1. Where does Conor's grandmother take him, and why doesn't she stay with him? (pp. 201-202)
2. What do we learn of the monster's true purpose of visiting Conor? (pp. 204-205)

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## THE FOURTH TALE

**Vocabulary:**

Seeping (p. 207)

Booming (p. 210)

Stalking (p. 208)

Slip (p. 212)

1. What is the fourth tale, (or) where does it take place? (pp. 207-209)
2. Describe the situation Conor's mother is in in the fourth tale. (pp. 208-211)
3. Describe or draw a picture of the *real* monster. (pp. 211-212)
4. What was the fate of Conor's mother in the fourth tale? (p. 214)

## THE REST OF THE FOURTH TALE

**Vocabulary:**

Abyss (p. 215)

Binding (p. 218)

Tendrils (p. 216)

Ablaze (p. 220)

1. The monster says that the only way to leave this nightmare is to do what? (p. 217)
2. What is killing Conor? (p. 219)

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3. Why did Conor let his mother fall, and how is this allegorical to his real nightmarish situation?
  
  
  
  
  
4. What had Conor received that he had been looking for all along? (p. 220)

## LIFE AFTER DEATH

**Vocabulary:**

Clamp (p. 223)

Catch your breath (p. 225)

Saviour (p. 224)

Nest (p.226)

1. What emotion is Conor experiencing that would cause him to say, "I deserve the worst"? (p. 221)
  
  
  
  
2. According to the monster, what does Conor say that is *not* the truth? (p. 222)
  
  
  
  
3. Why did Conor *let his mum go*? (p. 223)
  
  
  
  
4. List the three paradoxes illustrated in each of the monster's stories. Then write down the paradox that Conor is experiencing at this moment in the story. (pp. 223-224)
  
  
  
  
5. Again, according to the monster, what do painful truths cause our minds to do? (p. 224)

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6. Conor felt guilty because of his thoughts. But what does the monster tell him about that in relation to his actions? (p. 225)
  
7. Why do you think the monster always comes at 12:07?

## SOMETHING IN COMMON

<b>Vocabulary:</b>	Frantic (p. 228)	Tyres (p. 229)
	Sprinted (p. 228)	

1. What problem does Conor's grandmother point out concerning her and Conor's relationship? (pp. 230-231)

What does she suggest as the "solution"?

## THE TRUTH

<b>Vocabulary:</b>	Truth (pp. 1-237)	Dim (p. 234)
	Slurred (p. 233)	

1. Who never lied to Conor?
  
2. What was Conor's final truth? (p. 236)
  
3. How do you think things will be for Conor after "*this moment*"?

# **GOOD JOB!**

*You have successfully completed all of the questions.*

*One final question!*

*In this book the monster says that we, as humans, tell stories because they contain truths. What truth or truths did you find in A Monster Calls, and what makes it, or them, the truth to you?*

