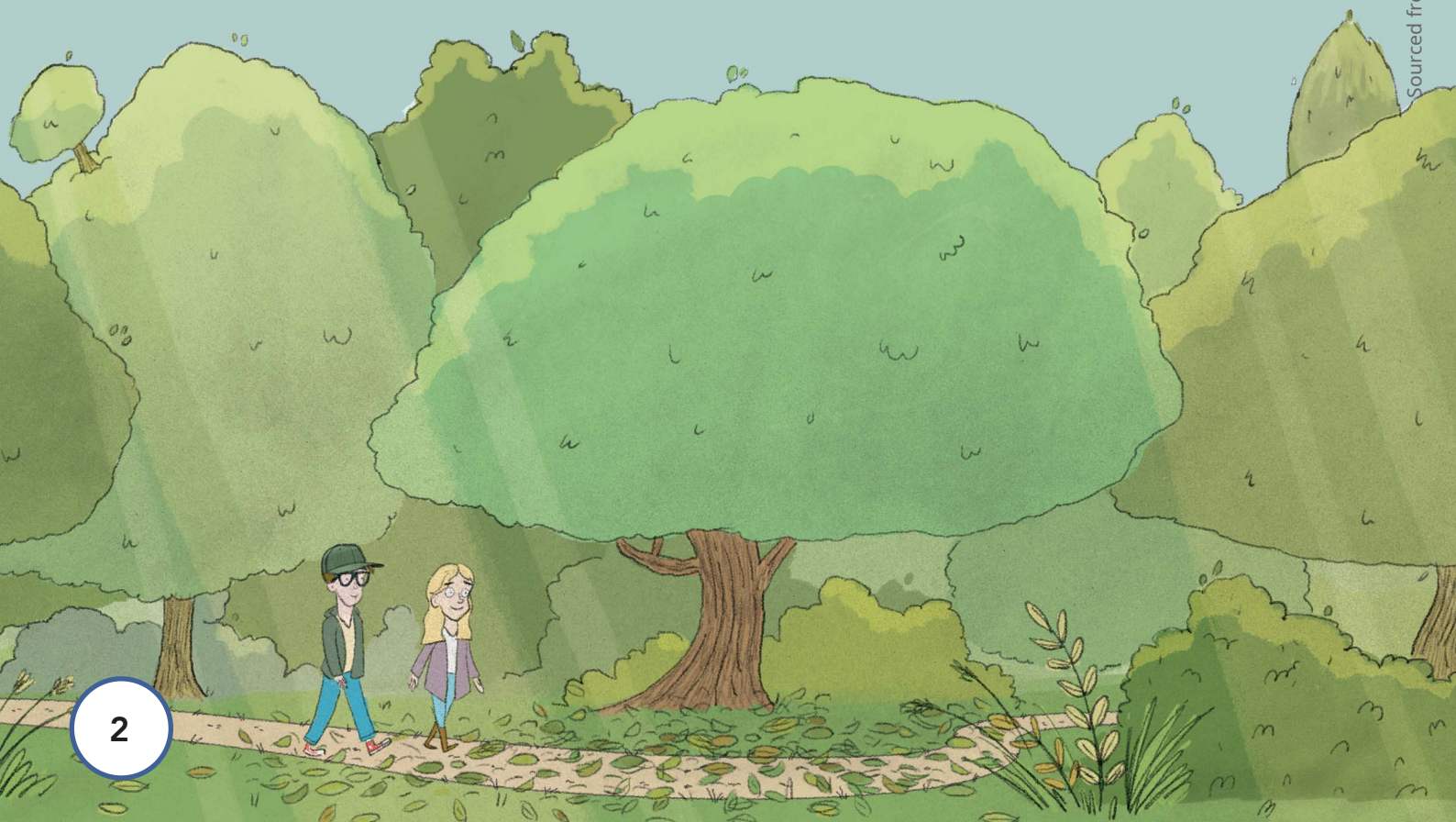
Owl in Danger

Matilda's Invention

Amelia Earhart

Reading Booklet

2026 key stage 2 English reading booklet



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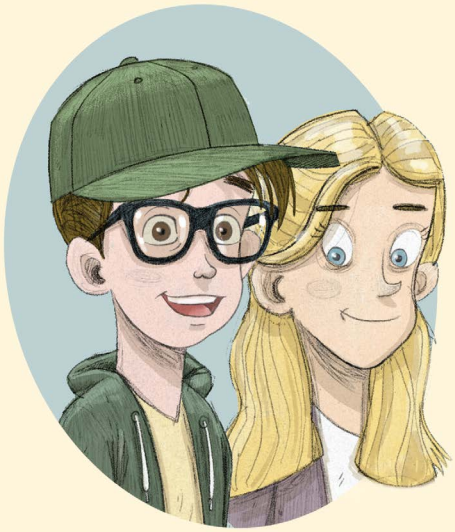
This is a story about two friends who make a surprising discovery.



Owl in Danger

'Quick – over here!' Mandy shouted to her friend, James. She knelt down in a pile of last autumn's fallen leaves, gently brushing some aside.

Mandy and James were out walking in Monkton Spinney near Welford, the Yorkshire village where they lived. Mandy had spotted something in the carpet of leaves beneath one of the oak trees.

'What have you found?' James ran over and skidded to a halt beside her. His trainers sent up a spray of leaves. He pushed his glasses back up his nose and looked down at the little hollow Mandy had made in the leaves.

Mandy cupped her hands together and lifted something very carefully from the ground. She held what looked like a bundle of bedraggled feathers. Two round, dark eyes stared up at James. A sharp, hooked beak opened and a kind of creaky noise came out. It sounded like a gate that needed oiling. Mandy drew in her breath. She gazed up at James with shining eyes.

'Oh! Look, it's a baby owl.'

James touched the tiny creature gently with his fingertip. 'What kind of owl is it?'

'A tawny owl, I think,' said Mandy. 'Oh, the poor thing!' She had thought it might be an owl when she first spied the bundle of grey-brown flecked feathers lying among the leaves. Although she'd seen pictures of baby owls, she had never actually seen a live one. It felt soft and beautiful and very fragile.

'Wow!' exclaimed James. His eyes were wide behind his glasses. 'Where did it come from, Mandy?'

Mandy looked up into the huge oak tree, its great branches reaching up to the sky.

'Up there somewhere,' she said, frowning. 'You can never really see owls' nests; they're too well hidden. It's probably where two of those big branches meet.'

Mandy's heart jolted with pity. 'Poor thing,' she murmured again.

James squinted upwards, pushing back the peak of his cap to get a better view. 'Maybe we could climb up and put it back in its nest,' he suggested hopefully.

Mandy knew it would be the best solution. The owl wouldn't survive for long out in the open, that was for sure. But how on earth were they to reach the nest?

'We'd need a ladder.' Mandy tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. Her brows knitted together over her eyes in a thoughtful frown. 'Or maybe I could climb up?' she said, not sounding at all sure. She was pretty good at climbing trees, but this one had a tall, straight trunk with no footholds at all.

'No way,' said James with a shake of his head. 'The first branch is miles up. Don't you think we should just leave it where it is?'

Mandy stared at him in horror. 'We can't do that! It'll get eaten by a fox or something!'

James shrugged. 'I read somewhere you should leave baby birds alone. Sometimes their parents come down to feed them.'

Mandy shook her head. 'Owls mostly come out at night,' she said. 'It could be too late by the time they find him.' She heaved a sigh. There was only one thing to do then. They would have to take the baby owl home. Her mum and dad were both vets. They would know what to do.

'We'll have to take it back with us,' she said to James.

This is an extract from a book about a character named Matilda, who loves science and dreams of becoming a famous inventor.

Matilda's Invention

You're meant to describe yourself in books, so here goes: I'm short for my age. I have light brown shoulder-length hair that I never brush because I have more important things on my mind like, 'What shall I create today?' to be worrying about how I look. I always wear blue dungarees because they have the most pockets, and I have a pencil tucked behind my ear, a tape measure clipped to my belt and a sketchbook in my rucksack.
I AM READY TO INVENT AT ALL TIMES!

A famous guy called Thomas Edison once said,
To invent, you need a good imagination, and a pile of junk.
He was the man who invented the light bulb, so he was very bright.

I have both – a good imagination and lots of *stuff*.

My idols in life are:

ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL. He built huge bridges, like the Clifton Suspension Bridge, huge ships, like the steam ship Great Britain, huge train stations, like London Paddington, and probably also some stuff that was small, like maybe a loo-roll holder. (I don't know that for certain.)

MARY ANDERSON. You know when it's raining and an adult's driving and puts the windscreen wipers on? Thank you, Mary Anderson. (She invented the wipers.)

I've wanted to be an inventor for as long as I can remember.

My Grandad Wilf was my mentor. Once a week, my parents and I would visit him and Granny Joss for Sunday lunch. I knew that Granny Joss had been a scientist herself, years and years ago, but she didn't talk about it at all and I wasn't allowed to ask her about it. Grandad Wilf was a vet before he retired, but was an inventor in his spare time, so he and I would leave my parents and Granny Joss drinking boring cups of tea and disappear into his workshop at the bottom of the garden and invent like mad. It was my favourite hour of the week.

The reason I love inventing so much? *Because anything is possible!* You start with a blank page and no clue what you're going to sketch. And then an idea pops into your mind and you think, 'Ooh, what if I could invent a way to scoop toast out of the toaster *without* totally burning my fingers?' and you outline a diagram, work out how to build it, cut or sand wood and build, build, build, and then you have the finished product that *you have totally made from your imagination!*

Grandad Wilf also taught me the saying: *Necessity is the mother of invention*. It means that most inventions are created to fix a problem.

Which brings us to my greatest invention yet: The Handy-Handy-Hand.

Grandad Wilf's hands didn't work as well as they used to and he found it difficult to hold his tools. I knew how much this got him down, and so, it's my great pleasure to introduce you to The Handy-Handy-Hand!

A wooden glove, with metal fingers that would do the work Grandad Wilf's hands couldn't. Grandad Wilf loved it.

One day, not long ago, my school announced a science competition, with a Grand Prize for the best invention or scientific display. There was a poster put up on the noticeboard:

Science Competition

Think you're the next Albert Einstein?

Got an invention that's better than sliced bread?

Want to win a GRAND PRIZE?

Arnos Yarm School's Science Competition is the chance to show the world what you're made of!

Ask your teacher for details.

Well, I would! I would ask my teacher for details! Because I knew exactly what invention I was going to enter.

Amelia Earhart

A 1930s aeroplane

Early air travel

Before the aeroplane was invented, travelling over long distances was very difficult and took much longer than it does today. It wasn't until 1903 that the first successful plane was invented. Later, the period between 1918 and 1939 was considered a golden age of flying. This was because of the achievements of brave, pioneering pilots who flew in some of the first powered planes.

In those days, travelling by plane wasn't comfortable or easy. As flying became popular as a form of travel, there were lots of improvements to the way in which planes were built. There were also many opportunities for pilots to take part in extraordinary displays of their flying skills to capture the public's imagination. As well as performing at popular air shows, aviators began planning longer and longer flights, trying to fly to different continents, which previously could only be reached by long sea voyages. Flying had opened up a new era of adventure and exploration.

Amelia's first flights

Pushing the limits of aircraft and setting aviation records became the goal of a select few, among them a young American woman called Amelia Earhart. Amelia had her first flight in 1920 when she was 23. By the time the plane was a few hundred feet off the ground, she was determined to learn to fly by herself. She was a strong-willed and unconventional young woman and, even though most pilots were men at that time, she did not change her mind. When she earned her pilot's licence in 1923, she was only the sixteenth woman in the world to do so.

In June 1928, only one year after Charles Lindbergh completed the first solo flight across the Atlantic, Amelia was invited to accompany pilots Wilmer Stultz and Louis Gordon on a flight in their plane called '*Friendship*'. They flew from Newfoundland in Canada to Wales, and so she became the first woman to travel across the Atlantic in a plane. The three became instant celebrities and, although Amelia had played no part in flying the plane, her book about the flight became a bestseller.

Amelia Earhart in front of the 'Friendship' in 1928

Amelia's fame

As she became well known as a successful modern woman, companies paid Amelia to promote and advertise their products. This meant that she was able to earn enough money to fund her flying career. She gained a reputation for her own flying skill and set a number of records, completing flights by herself. She made the first solo flight by a woman across the American continent and back. Amelia competed in women's air races and established a world altitude record by taking a plane up to 5,613 metres. In 1932, she flew solo across the Atlantic, the first woman to do so, and was showered with honours. Amelia Earhart was a household name: an outspoken supporter of women's rights and a successful aviator.

Amelia's next record attempt

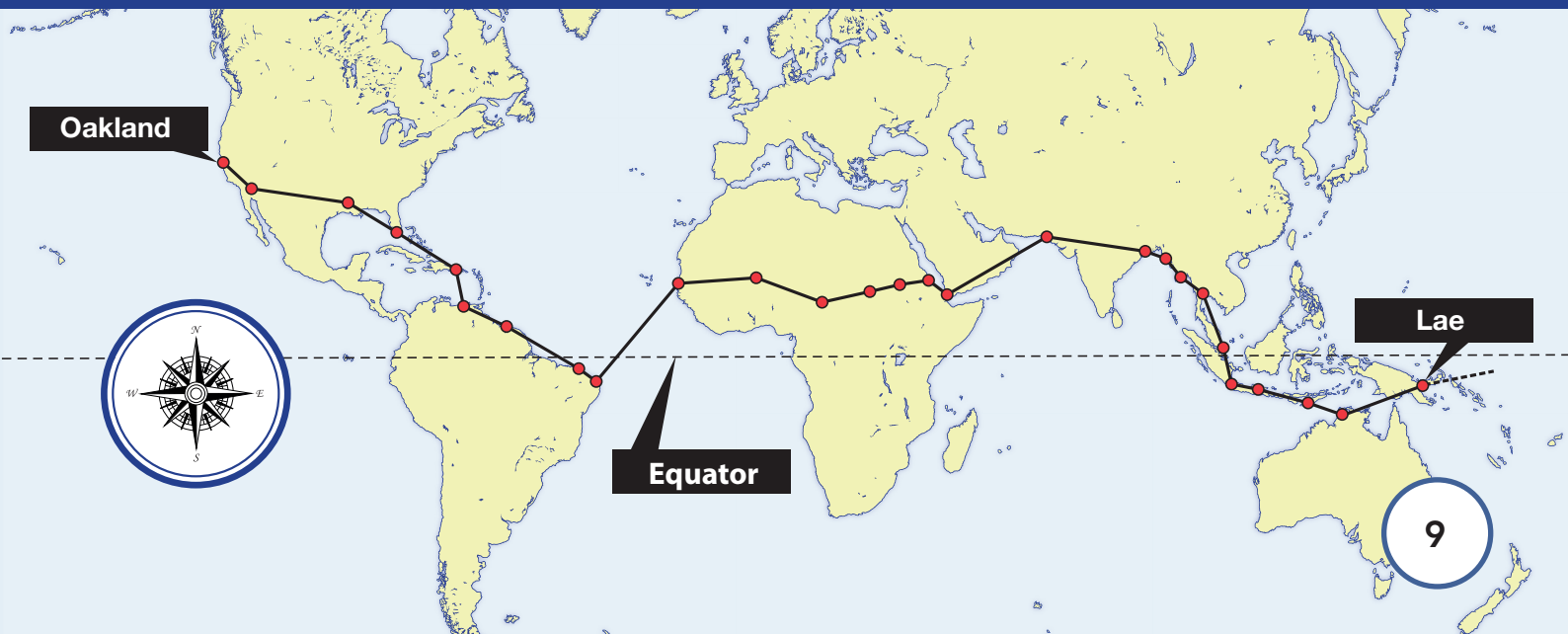
Amelia had a strong desire for yet another extraordinary flying achievement: to fly around the globe at its widest point, the equator. She had a plane built specifically for the attempt, with a greatly increased fuel capacity, which meant she could fly further without stopping to refuel. In 1937, Amelia set out from Oakland, California, intending to fly from east to west around the equator. An accident in Hawaii, however, resulted in major repairs being needed to the plane.

Amelia's last flight

It wasn't until three months later in June that she began her attempt again from Oakland, this time travelling from west to east. She reached New Guinea, north of Australia, 28 days later, having covered about 35,000 kilometres or two-thirds of the distance. The next leg of the journey was going to be a very difficult and dangerous one. She was planning to land on Howland Island, a remote island in the Pacific Ocean with only four miles of coastline. On the island, she would take on fuel from a US coastguard ship waiting to assist her with this risky part of her journey.

On 2nd July 1937, Amelia and her navigator left Lae in New Guinea to fly the 4,000 kilometres to Howland Island but were never seen again. What happened to Amelia Earhart is one of the most enduring mysteries of aviation. A massive and expensive search was carried out at the time, and no trace of her plane was found. There have been numerous investigations and rumours about her disappearance over the years. However, the mark she left on the world of aviation was, and still is, incredible.

The route of Amelia's last flight



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