

The Secrets of the Gwent Levels





Dear Story Questers,

This Story Quest was written especially for you.

Today's adventure follows four friends – Molly, Dylan, Jamila and Luca – as they explore the Newport Wetlands, part of the Gwent Levels. Join them on their adventures as they find a strange item which leads them on a time travelling adventure through the wetlands. As you read the story, follow in their footsteps and complete the activities. Have fun, enjoy the fresh air and, most importantly, use your imagination!

Starting point: The entrance to the trail at Wetlands Reserve

Time needed: About one hour

Activity level: A gentle walk

Age range: Around 7–10 years old

Acknowledgements

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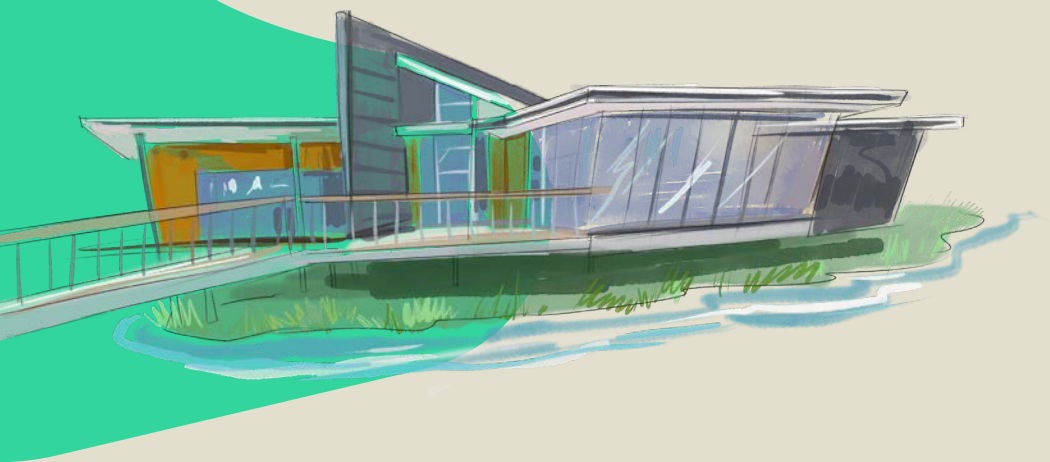
The story was written by Wendy Booth and illustrated by Andy O'Rourke.

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Welcome to the Gwent Levels

The Gwent Levels are a special coastal landscape in South Wales. Long ago, people built sea walls and ditches to protect the land from flooding. These channels, called reens, still shape the land today. The Levels are home to birds, insects and plants and they hold many stories from the past – from Roman times to today. Walking here is a chance to explore nature, notice small details and imagine how people once lived.



The Trail

Molly, Dylan, Jamila and Luca are full of excitement as they leave the Visitor Centre. Dylan has brought his pet parrot, Pete. Molly has her rucksack full of 'useful' things. Luca has a mini torch in his pocket and Jamila has her knitting with her in case it rains. They follow the path into the wetlands.

The Rope Bridge

Soon, they pass the area with seats and tables and the friends reach a rope bridge. It moves gently as they step onto it. Dylan lets his parrot fly free and he perches on top of the highest rope. "Come on!" says Luca, and he leads them across the rope bridge.

OVER TO YOU

Walk carefully across the bridge. How does it feel under your feet?

Count your steps as you cross.

Take a slow deep breath before you step off.

Write two words to describe how the bridge moves.



Mini Beasts



After the rope bridge there is a sign for the mini beast pond. They stand on the viewing platform at the water's edge.

"I hope there are tadpoles in the water," says Dylan.

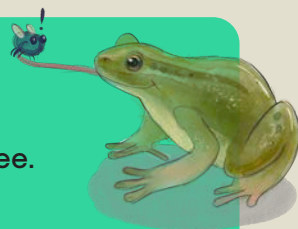
"Look! There's a frog!" exclaims Jamila, "There must be tadpoles!" As she steps back, she steps on a plastic brick that has dropped out of Molly's bag, "Messy Molly!" they laugh, as Molly picks up her brick.

OVER TO YOU

Write down the names of two creatures you can see.

Choose one and describe how it looks or moves.

Molly dropped a plastic brick, why is it important not to drop litter?





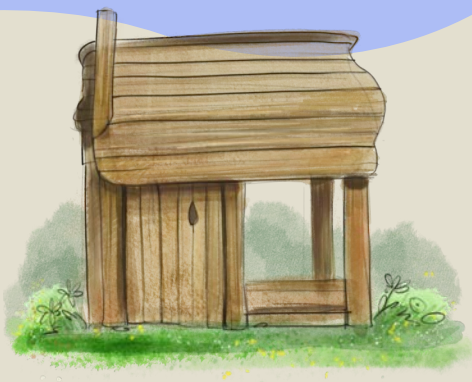
The Wooden Hut

The friends turn back to the trail and turn left towards the wooden hut.

“Let’s go in that hut and have a rest,” suggests Pete. They sit down and Jamila gives everyone some banana cake. Molly drops half of her cake on the floor and they hear, “Quack quack!” as a duck pokes its beak through a gap in the floor and eats

the cake. “Oh no! My cake,” cries Molly. “Oh, you are messy Molly!” exclaim the others. Molly looks in her rucksack for something to put in the hole in the floor. She can’t find anything in her bag, but she does spot a strange looking spoon in the corner of the hut. She stares at its unusual appearance before placing it in the hole.

Suddenly, the light in the hut changes. Molly picks up the spoon. When they step outside, the wetlands look different. They hear loud footsteps and banging. “Quick!” shouts Dylan, and the others follow as he runs into the long reeds to hide. The friends peer out and cannot believe their eyes! Fifty Roman soldiers are marching along and banging their shields. They have travelled back in time!



OVER TO YOU

Look around and imagine the wetlands long ago. Write one sentence beginning:

‘Long ago this place was...’

The Stony Hill



They leave the hut and walk towards the stony hill where Roman soldiers are working.

One of the Roman soldiers spots the four friends and calls to them. He signals towards a cart with sacks on the back. “He wants us to pull the cart!” exclaims Luca. “We better do what he wants.” They grab the handles on the cart and pull it to the top of a stony hill. “Look at their tools and all those rocks. I wonder what they’re building,” says Luca.

OVER TO YOU

Why do you think people built sea walls here? Write one sentence explaining your idea.

The Lookouts at the Dragonfly Hotspot



The four friends walk along the path until they reach the lookouts. From the lookout points, they can see water, reeds and birds moving across the landscape.

OVER TO YOU

Read the information on the signs.

Can you spot any birds or dragonflies? Can you list their names?

Write down one fact that you learned.

Pause for a moment. Is there one thing that makes you feel calm here?



The Rubber Bridge

After the Dragonfly Hotspot they follow the path as it bends right, then left. The path changes under their feet. It feels springy and soft.

OVER TO YOU

Walk slowly and listen.

Write three words to describe the sounds you hear.

What colours do you see?



The Lighthouse

As the sky darkens, the friends reach the lighthouse. Molly drops the unusual spoon again, this time it falls into a hole in the ground and, as before, the sky changes colour and there is a flash of light. They have travelled in time again! Then, out of the darkness, an old man with a long white beard comes running. “The red warning light has gone out and there’s a ship! There’s a ship!” The four friends look out to sea. They can see a ship approaching. Luca runs up the stairs of the lighthouse. At the top, he takes the torch out of his pocket, making it flash through the window. The old man enters and jumps up and down, “Yes, yes! Very good, boy!” And they watch as the ship slowly turns and makes its way back out to sea, avoiding the sandbanks and the shallow water. Luca shows the torch to the old man and tells him to keep it before running back down the steps of the lighthouse.

OVER TO YOU

What is the light warning ships about?

Look around, why might this place be dangerous at night?



Starling Murmuration

The group ask Molly to take out her time-travelling spoon again so that they can go back to the present day. Molly places the spoon on the floor, there is a loud crash and the sky changes colour again, and everything is quiet. The friends slowly make their way back to the hut.



The sun is sinking low, painting the sky with soft oranges and purples. The air feels cooler and everything is quiet. They are back in the present day.

Then Jamila points towards the sky.

At first there are just a few birds – small dark shapes moving across the sky. Then more appear. And soon, more. Within minutes, hundreds of starlings are flying together, twisting and turning as one.

“They’re moving like a wave,” whispers Molly.

The flock stretches, shrinks and folds in on itself. The birds swoop low, then rise again, creating swirling patterns that ripple across the evening sky. It feels as though the sky itself is alive.

Dylan watches silently as Pete settles on his shoulder.

“They’ve been doing this here for hundreds of years,” he says. “Long before us.”

The friends stand together, filled with wonder. After all their walking and imagining, this moment feels like a gift – the Gwent Levels sharing one of its greatest stories.



OVER TO YOU

Can you see any birds? Stand still and watch them in silence for a little while. Notice your breathing.

How does watching the birds move together make you feel?

Write a short paragraph describing:

What the sky looks like.

How the birds move.

How watching them makes you feel.

Here are some words to help you write your description, you might think of others:

murmuration, swirling, flock, dusk, patterns, together, harmony, wonder.

Extra Challenge

Imagine that you are one of the starlings. Write three sentences describing:

What you can see below you.

Why you stay close to the flock.

You can find space to write your answers on the next page.

Starlings gather at the Gwent Levels each evening between November and February. If you can, come back one evening at sunset to see a real murmuration and experience this magical moment for yourself.

Wordsearch

N	S	S	S	K	C	U	D	I	E	F	M
I	E	L	N	T	N	P	L	E	S	O	U
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LEVELS
MIGRATION
NATURE
BIRDS
ROMANS
SWAN

DUCKS
SEAWALL
NEWPORT
REEDS
FOOTPRINT
PATH

MURMURATIONS
WETLANDS
LIGHTHOUSE
BRIDGE