

Tins Lesson One

Blurb

Fergal collects tins. He likes the bargain ones without labels because the contents are always a surprise. But one day he makes the gruesome discovery of a finger inside on tine, and the word HELP inside another...and what was just a screwball hobby becomes a deadly can of worms.

What questions do we have based on the blurb of the book? What sparks our interest? Why is a blurb an important thing for all books to have?

Read the following extract from the beginning of the book. Here we are introduced to our main character Fergal. Answer the questions at the bottom of the sheet.

Extract

Fergal Bamfield found his reputation for cleverness as irritating as it was underserved. I weighed heavily upon him, like a bag full of bricks. It wasn't that he was stupid; far from it. He was capable and got good – often above average – marks in exams. It was his eccentric appearance that marked him out. His unruly hair stuck out at all angles and could never be tamed, not even with a pot of gel. And then there were his glasses, which not only enlarged his eyes, but somehow had the effect of making his very head (and by implication his brain) seem bigger than it really was. The overall effect was that of the 'mad professor's apprentice' (or perhaps 'the professor's mad apprentice' might have been a bit more accurate).

The general rule seemed to be that he who looks like an eccentric genius must be an eccentric genius. Appearance was destiny. So Fergal came to acquire a reputation for extreme cleverness, which he hated. He hated it because he knew he didn't deserve it and he hated it because he felt pressured to live up to it, and to do and say clever things.

As a result, he sought refuge in greater eccentricities, and that was the beginning. That was what started him on the tins.

Fergal felt he needed somewhere to hide, a wall to retreat behind – some shelter. He didn't want a hobby to bring him into contact with other people, he wanted one to shield him from them. And that was when he became interested in tins.

Not rare tins, though, nor ancient tins from expeditions to the North or South Pole; not foreign tins from exotic places, or tins in unusual colours. Just simple, ordinary, everyday tins.

Without labels.

Tasks:

1. Look up the following words in the dictionary and write about the definitions. Once you have all the definitions write two sentences that contain these words.
Reputation, irritating, eccentric, unruly, destiny
2. What does Fergal hate about his appearance? Why does he hate this?
3. What does the line 'Fergal felt he needed somewhere to hide, a wall to retreat behind – some shelter.' Tell us about Fergal's character?
4. Based on the blurb and the extract from the opening to the book, what do you think is going to happen to Fergal? Write down five predictions you have for the story.

Tins Lesson Two

Fergal's hobby of collecting label-less cans has grown and his parents are concerned. They make a deal with him. He is allowed to collect one final tin, then he has to think of a different hobby. Fergal wants to make sure his final tin is a good one! In this extract he makes his choice...

Extract

One more tin. Just one more tin. If Fergal could only buy one more tin, then he would have to be selective about it. When you could only have one more tin, then you didn't want just any old tin. You wanted one that was a bit different, a bit unusual in some way. A tin among tins, that was what you wanted. A tin of distinction. A tin with personality.

So, like a true collector, Fergal became very choosy. It wasn't enough now for a tin simply to have no label and to be in the bargain basket. It had to have extra qualities, fresh dimensions.

Weeks went by. Fergal came across several unlabelled tins at that time, but they all looked remarkably similar to the forty-nine tins he already had. His collection was fairly diverse in that some tins were small, some were large, some were heavy and some were light. Most were shiny, some were dull, some were tall, some had a ring-pull on the top, others could only be opening with a tin opener. But to find a different kind of tin was like looking for a rare stamp.

And then he found it. The moment he picked it up, he knew he was on to something. Something strange and unique and extraordinary.

It wasn't an unusual shape; in fact, it was quite a standard size. He hadn't even been going to bother with it, it looked so ordinary. He only had gone to move it out of the way to see if there were other tins hidden underneath it in the bargain basket. Only when he picked it up he immediately realised that here was a tin with a difference.

For one thing, it was lighter than all the others he had come across. Far, far lighter. This was definitely no ordinary tin of beans or soup or stewed steak or curried chicken or macaroni cheese. This was a tin which felt so light that it could almost have been empty. But despite being so light, it definitely had something inside it. Fergal knew that for certain. He could tell quite clearly. Because, when he shook the tin, it rattled.

Tasks:

1. Answer the following questions in full sentences:
 - a) What kind of tin does Fergal want for his last tin?
 - b) What does the writer mean by a 'true collector'?
 - c) How many tins does Fergal already have in his collection?
 - d) What is the different kind of tin Fergal is looking for compared to in paragraph three?
 - e) What makes Fergal interested in the tin when he finds it?
2. What do you think draws Fergal to collect label-less tins?
3. When Fergal finds 'the tin' he says he was onto something 'strange and unique and extraordinary', what do these three words mean and what is the impact of them being used together?
4. Why does the fact that what's inside the tin rattles excite Fergal so much?
5. Fergal doesn't normally open his tins, do you think he is going to be able to resist this time? Why might it be harder to resist? Why do you think he normally leaves his cans unopened?