

The Night the Light Went Out

A lighthouse has one job. On the worst night of the year, it stopped doing it.

6 min read

Before you read

- **keeper** — a person who looks after something
- **beam** — a long line of light
- **gale** — a very strong wind
- **generator** — a machine that makes electricity
- **spiral** — a shape that curls round and round
- **harbour** — a safe place for boats to rest



The lighthouse at Kinnaird Point, its beam sweeping out over a rough sea

- ¹ My grandfather is the keeper of the lighthouse at Kinnaird Point, on the east coast of Scotland. He has looked after it for thirty-one years, and he says the light has never once failed on his watch.
- ² The lighthouse stands on a cliff above the harbour. At night its beam turns slowly and sweeps across the water. Fishing boats coming home in the dark look for that beam, because it tells them exactly where the rocks are. Without it, they would have to guess.
- ³ Last November a gale came in from the North Sea. The rain did not fall downwards; it flew sideways and hit the windows like handfuls of gravel. Grandfather and I were eating soup when every light in the cottage went out at once.

⁴ "Generator," said Grandfather. He did not sound worried, but he put down his spoon and stood up straight away. "Bring the torch, Freya."

⁵ We went out into the wind. It pushed against the door so hard that we had to lean on it together to get it open. In the shed at the back, Grandfather knelt beside the old generator and I held the torch steady while he worked.



Freya holding the torch while her grandfather works on the generator

⁶ He checked the fuel. He checked the wires. Nothing. Then he looked up at me and said something I did not expect.

⁷ "The lamp has a hand crank," he said. "It was built in 1897, before there was any electricity out here at all. It will still turn. It just needs someone to turn it."



Grandfather and Freya taking turns at the hand crank in the lamp room

⁸ We climbed the spiral stairs to the lamp room. There are seventy-six steps, and I counted every one. Grandfather turned the crank first. Then I turned it, with both hands, while my arms ached and the wind screamed against the glass. We took turns until nearly two in the morning, when the engineer finally arrived from Fraserburgh.

⁹ The beam never stopped turning. Not once.

¹⁰ In the morning, three boats came into the harbour. One of the skippers walked up the hill to thank my grandfather. Grandfather pointed at me and said, "Thank her. She did the second half."

Part A Choose the best answer

Circle the letter next to the right answer.

1. How long has Freya's grandfather looked after the lighthouse?

- A Eleven years
- B Twenty years
- C Thirty-one years
- D Since 1897

2. Why do the fishing boats need the beam?

- A It tells them where the rocks are
- B It tells them the time
- C It keeps them warm
- D It helps them catch more fish

3. What stopped working during the gale?

- A The spiral stairs
- B The generator
- C The harbour wall
- D The telephone

4. How did they keep the light turning?

- A They used a torch instead
- B They waited for the engineer
- C They turned it by hand with a crank
- D They lit a fire at the top

Part B Write your answer

Answer in two or three full sentences.

5. The lamp was built in 1897. Why did that turn out to be lucky on this particular night?

6. At the end, Grandfather tells the skipper to thank Freya instead of him. What does this tell you about the kind of person he is?

Part C**Think deeper**

There is no single right answer here. Say what you think, and say why.

7. Grandfather says the light has never failed on his watch. Why do you think that mattered so much to him that he climbed seventy-six steps in a gale rather than let it go dark for one night?

8. Freya's arms ached, but she kept turning the crank. Write about a time you kept going with something difficult. What made you carry on?

Answer key

For parents and teachers

Part A

1. C — thirty-one years | 2. A — it tells them where the rocks are | 3. B — the generator | 4. C — they turned it by hand with a crank

Part B

5. The old lamp was made before electricity reached the lighthouse, so it was built with a hand crank. When the generator failed, the crank still worked and they could turn the light without any power at all. Accept any answer that connects the lamp's age to the fact that it did not depend on electricity.
6. He shares the credit and does not take it all for himself, even though he is the keeper and did the first half. Accept: he is modest, he is fair, he wants her to feel proud.

Part C

These answers vary. Mark the reasoning, not the answer.

7. A strong answer links his pride to the consequence — boats depend on the beam, so failing once could mean someone does not come home. A weaker answer says only that he liked his job. Prompt with: what would have happened to the boats?
8. Any honest personal answer counts, as long as it gives a reason for carrying on. The skill being practised is cause and effect in the child's own life.

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