

The Ceiling Full of Stars

PASSAGE · NON-FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Inference

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 15 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about four minutes.
- 2 Turn to the next page and cover this one. No looking back.
- 3 Write what you remember, then mark it on the last page.

Under the green hills of Waitomo, on the North Island of New Zealand, there are caves with rivers running through them. Visitors climb into small boats, the guide puts out the lamp, and the darkness is complete.

Then you look up, and the roof of the cave is full of stars.

They are not stars, of course, and they are not quite worms either, although everyone calls them glowworms. Each tiny light belongs to the larva of a fly — the young stage, before it changes into an adult. Its proper name is *Arachnocampa luminosa*, which means something like “glowing spider-grub”. Only New Zealand has it.

The larva hangs in a little hammock of silk stuck to the cave roof. From that hammock it lets down threads, as many as several dozen, each one beaded along its length with sticky droplets. The whole arrangement looks like a beaded curtain hanging in the dark.

The light comes from the larva's tail end, and it is blue-green. A small flying insect, hatched in the stream below, sees the glow above it and heads for what it takes to be open sky. It flies into the threads, sticks fast, and the larva hauls the thread up to eat.

Here is the strange part. The hungrier a glowworm is, the brighter it shines. A well-fed one dims. The lights you are drifting beneath are a ceiling full of empty stomachs.

The glow goes out if the larvae are startled, which is why the guides ask for silence and keep torches switched off. So the boats move without a sound, pulled along by ropes fixed to the cave wall, and nobody speaks until they are back out in the daylight.

Cover the passage before you start.

Looking back turns this into a copying exercise. Getting it slightly wrong from memory is what makes it work.

PART A Tell it back

Write down everything you can remember about the Waitomo glowworms and how they catch their food.

PART B 5 questions

1 What are the glowworms actually the young stage of?

2 How does a glowworm catch an insect?

3 Which glowworms shine most brightly?

4 Why do the guides ask visitors to stay silent and keep their torches off?

5 The passage calls the larva's silk nest a “hammock”. What does that word tell you about it?

PART C Mark your own work

Now go back to the passage. Tick every answer you got right. You do not need the same words as the answer below — if you wrote the same idea in your own words, it counts.

- ☐ 1 • A fly. They are the larvae of a fly found only in New Zealand, called *Arachnocampa luminosa*.
- ☐ 2 • It hangs sticky beaded threads down from a silk hammock on the cave roof. An insect flies towards the light, sticks to a thread, and the larva pulls the thread up.
- ☐ 3 • The hungriest ones. A well-fed glowworm dims.
- ☐ 4 • Because the larvae stop glowing when they are startled by noise or light. If that happened, the cave roof would go dark and there would be nothing to see.
- ☐ 5 • That it is a small hanging bed or sling, slung from the cave roof, with the larva resting in it.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 5

DATE

THE STRATEGY Teach it to someone

Cover the page and explain the glowworms to somebody else — a brother, a friend, even a cushion on your bed. Teaching forces you to put the facts in order and to notice the gap where a fact should be. If you get stuck halfway through the sentence, you have just found the part to go back and learn.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

Who could you teach something to this week? What would you choose to explain?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER · This sheet trains recall, not reading speed. Let your child read the passage twice if they wish, then cover it completely before Part A begins — do not prompt, and do not let them look back. The vocabulary question asks what a word meant in the passage, so an answer in their own words is better than a dictionary definition.