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| food | party | life | presents | happiness |
| tree | love | rainbow | queen | good day |

Each Ten Word Tale is written using 10 words suggested by children.

Where’s the Wandle Worm is inspired by 10 words chosen by Janelle (Year 2, Hillbrook Primary School), Rumaisa (Year 4, Singlegate Primary School) and Zunaira (Reception, Singlegate Primary School).

Can you spot these words – food, life, presents, party, good day, happiness, rainbow, tree, queen, love?

**Where’s The Wandle Worm?** by **Julie Sharp**

1

It was a warm sunny day. Inside Wandsworth Library, the two librarians, Vera Vellum and Meta Data, were putting the finishing touches to their summer book display. Every year they chose one of the library’s oldest books to put on show for visitors. This year they had chosen a book from 1737, called *The Wandle Worm*.

Today they were expecting an important visitor. Vera was wearing her favourite summer dress in rainbow colours. Meta wore her favourite jeans and a cool blue top with a palm tree and a parrot on the pocket.

The visitor was Mr Rubric, the London’s Chief Librarian. They had tidied every shelf, Vera getting rid of old tattered volumes and Meta dusting vigorously. They wanted the library to look its very splendid best.

*The Wandle Worm*, white leather cover with gold edges, by William Weldon, published in 1737 told of a huge freshwater eel caught where the River Wandle meets the Thames. The display included old pictures of the eel, called a water-worm, looking like a monster, its long body rippling and its mouth agape.

“The worm looks horrible,” said Meta, “But the display looks great.”

At ten o’clock Mr Rubric arrived. He congratulated them on the display and on the state of the library. “Always good to trim your shelves of old volumes,” he said. Meta thought guiltily of the old books Vera had thrown out. Meta had rescued them from the bin and taken them home. Mr Rubric also congratulated them on their security. “There have been some strange thefts from libraries in London over the last few months,” he said. “I’m glad to see your precious book in a glass case. I am sure you keep the key somewhere safe.” Vera laughed nervously. The key was at this moment in the pocket of her dress and she began to wonder if she had definitely locked the glass case.

Once Mr Rubric had left, Vera dashed back to the display. Meta heard a scream. She rushed to see what was wrong. The glass case was open, stuck to the case was a note,Vera was in a faint on the floor and *The Wandle Worm* had gone!

2

Meta and Vera rang the police and sent an email to Mr Rubric. The police asked lots of questions. Mr Rubric sent contact numbers for other London libraries that had had book burglaries. Meta and Vera kept the library open. They had to explain to five families, four old gentlemen, three young ladies and two students who came to see the display, about the theft of *The Wandle Worm*. At last, five o’clock came and the library closed. The two friends locked up VERY carefully and set off to a coffee shop. They felt depressed and not really hungry but they thought some food might give them energy.

“Let’s look at that note,” said Meta.

You have broken my heart.

Mend your ways Wandsworth Library,

or I will burn The Wandle Worm.

“What does it mean?” asked Vera, tucking into her pear and cheese sandwich.

“It sounds personal to us,” said Meta, munching her way through her bacon and banana baguette. “Mmmm. This is delicious. I love the sandwiches here.”

“Stop thinking about the sandwiches. Think about our lost book! Where’s *The Wandle Worm*??”

Meta apologised. “Let’s think calmly. We know the book was taken between 11 and 12.30. There’s CCTV footage to look at. The police have downloaded it and sent it back to us. The camera does not point at the display directly but it might help. And the note has some clues.”

“It sounds like someone who actually loves books. They know that burning an old book is a powerful threat.”

“They seem to think we’ve done something wrong. They say “mend your ways” and that we have broken their heart.” Meta felt a stab of pity. “Of course they’re mistaken: no library would ever hurt a book or a reader. “Perhaps it’s an old-fashioned person because the note is handwritten and not typed. Maybe even a writer…? Look at the alliteration: Ways, Wandsworth, will, Wandle, Worm.”

“It’s a book crime so we can’t leave it to the police,” said Vera firmly. “It’s up to us.”

3

The next day, back at the coffee shop after work, Vera and Meta compared notes.

Meta was excited. “The police told me there were two clues on the note: traces of letters on the paper. On one side, very faintly there is ASW. On the other side are the letters KC, as if the person signed it and then rubbed it out.”

Vera had been successful too. “I have been through everyone recorded on camera in the library. 53 people went past the cameras yesterday morning at the right time. I have worked out who *everyone* is, using *who* registered, *who* we know and *who* took out books.” Vera pulled a long list from her pocket.

“Wow. Any KCs?”

“Well, there’s Mrs Chumley who always comes in for recipe books. There’s Kim Chang but she is only 4. And, of course, old Mr Codex.”

“I know that name.”

“Yeah, you definitely know him: it’s the old man who always comes in on Friday mornings. He usually browses and snoozes in the gardening section. He was asleep on the blue chair when we were clearing out the shelves the other day.”

“You have two possible people and I have a place.” Meta explained that she had looked up the possible meanings of ASW. “It could stand for Actual Silver Weight, or A Small World (which is a travel company) or even Anti-Submarine Warfare but guess what’s right on our doorstep?” She waved her hand out of the coffee shop window. “All Saints Wandsworth!” Meta had checked the church website. “The font they use exactly matches the letters. Let’s go and ask if they know Kate Chumley or Kit Codex or anyone else with KC initials.” The friends went out into the summer evening. The old church was only moments away and fortunately it was open. They stepped inside the yellow stone building, suddenly cool after the warmth outside. “Welcome!” said one cheery voice. “Good Day,” said another. An old lady and a young man were standing in front of them, smiling.

4

Astonishingly as soon as Vera and Meta mentioned Mr Codex the old lady and the young man knew exactly who they meant.

“Dear Mr Codex,” said the lady, fondly. “The best gardener we’ve ever had.”

“Kit keeps our trees trimmed for free,” said the man. “He’s been a royal gardener you know.”

 “We were looking for him because we … we have a question about books,” said Meta carefully.

The old lady smiled again. “I knew I recognised you. You’re the librarians. Mr Codex is a great reader. Of course, he has written so many books himself.”

“He’s written books?!” squeaked Vera, her voice echoing round the old church.

“I own one about roses,” said the old lady, “but they’re mostly out of print.”

Meta suddenly remembered something. “What’s your book called?”

“*Queen Elizabeth’s Roses*,” said the lady

“I’ve just understood something,” Meta whispered to Vera. “Come on.”

Meta thanked the friendly church people and pulled Vera away. Vera was utterly confused. As they climbed the steps to their tiny flat overlooking the Wandle, she demanded to know what was going on. “I’ll show you,” Meta said, pushing a cardboard box towards her. Inside were all the books Vera had pronounced too tatty to live any longer in the library. “I thought it was OK to take them as they were thrown out.”

“Of course it’s OK,” said Vera, fishing out three battered books by Kit Codex, all about gardens.

“I think when the note said we’d broken his heart, this was why,” said Meta.

“Look at the number of people who have taken this book out,” said Vera, checking *Royal Gardens* on the library system she kept on her phone. “46 people in the last 6 months. These books are tatty because so many people have been reading them.”

“I’ll mend them. We’ll put them back,” said Meta.

“I’ve got another idea too,” said Vera, “but first we must find *The Wandle Worm* and bring it home and we must stop Kit getting into trouble.”

Meta looked out of the window at the hundreds of people still bustling round Southside. “How can we ever find him?”

Vera grinned. “We’ve got his library details so we’ve got his address. He’s just round the corner from King’s George’s Park.”

The friends did not want to startle Mr Codex into an act of violence against *The Wandle Worm*. They decided to watch his house for a while and then make a plan.

They walked there through the park, past the pigeon-infested bridge over the pond, the swans drifting like clouds on the dark water. On the tennis courts a few late players were tap-tapping balls. Somewhere a party boomed out from someone’s flat. Somewhere else people were shouting at the football. Mr Codex lived by the Recreation Centre. Everything there was quiet. They found a bench where they could watch his front door.

At 9 o’clock they saw the door open. The old man came out. They hid behind a tree as he walked past them, towards the park entrance.

“Let’s follow him,” said Vera.

They skulked and hid, sliding between bushes and shadows, past the tennis courts, through the old rose garden. Kit walked towards the pond with its sleepy swans and he stooped over the bridge. When he stood up, he was holding something. A package!

Vera and Meta were horribly excited. The old man was heading home but he hesitated by the bench that they’d sat on earlier before walking back to his house. He had left the package on the bench! The package was fat but light. Vera unwrapped it cautiously. Under the paper and four layers of bubble wrap was the white and golden book, *The Wandle Worm*.

“The kettle’s on if you want to come in.” The women started at the sound of a sudden strange voice. Kit was calling from his back door. “And I’ve rung the police to give myself up,” he said.

5

When the police arrived, Vera and Meta said they were sure the library would not want to press charges. Kit confessed to taking books from other libraries but he’d returned them all. “I am very sorry. I just get very sad when my books are thrown away. I know they won’t be in libraries forever. They will become old and shabby and have to go. You’ll probably tell me that everything will be safely digital soon. I still love old books. Think of *The Wandle Worm*. That book is 284 years old! You wouldn’t have it today if someone somewhere hadn’t kept it safe.”

Meta’s eyes were full of tears. “Mr Codex, we didn’t mean to make you feel rubbish. I saved you and I’m sellotaping you back together in my flat!”

Vera was also crying, “When I saw the books Meta had rescued, I realized they were tattered because they were well-read and well-loved. We’ll make sure your books live on.”

The old man’s face was a mixture of happiness and sadness. “Thank you,” he said simply.

Fortunately, the police decided not to arrest Mr Codex for the moment, and he promised not to flee the country. As the moon rose over the park, Vera and Meta went to the library and locked *The Wandle Worm* in the safe before going home.

Three weeks later, Kit was invited to a special event at Wandsworth Library. When he arrived, the library was full of people. Vera was standing in front of *two* glass cases with Mr Rubric. Everyone went quiet.

“Dear Mr Codex,” she said. “A few weeks ago, we were reminded of something we’ve known for a long time, that *all* books are precious. We are opening two displays today, the old book, *The Wandle Worm*, and something new.”

She waved her hand to the second case and there Kit saw a display about himself, with copies of all his books.

“We celebrate a book that’s almost three hundred years old and a writer who is alive today. We have some presents for you. Mr Rubric will say a few words.”

The tall librarian stood up. “There are now online copies of your work available in all libraries and Vera contacted your old publishers, offering the data from our libraries to prove how popular your books are. The publishers have brought out a new edition of every one of your books. These copies are for you.”

As everyone watched, Kit unwrapped copies of his sixteen books. The covers were shiny and new but every word inside was the same.

“Thank you for everything,” said Kit, his voice shaking. “I admit I felt a bit ‘thrown-away’ but now you have made me feel that I have still got something to say.” He waved a copy of *Queen Elizabeth’s Roses* over his head and everyone cheered.

“This might be the happiest day of my life,” he said.

And they cheered again.

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