



THE PHANTOM PLAYGROUND

Chapter 1: The Discovery

The opening chapter of **The Phantom Playground**, a Scaremoor middle grade horror novel, is a 943-word reading passage. It ends on a cliffhanger, so students finish wanting the next page.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. The passage, with numbered paragraphs for citing evidence
2. 6 multiple-choice questions
3. Words in context and the author's similes
4. Two written responses and a prediction
5. Answer key

HOW TO USE IT

- Students read on their own or with a partner (about 10 minutes), then answer the questions.
- Every question names the paragraph to look back at.
- For grade 3, read it aloud and do the questions together.
- About 40 minutes in all. No prep.

WANT TO KEEP READING?

The Phantom Playground is book 3 of the Scaremoor series, for ages 8–12, in paperback and on Kindle. Find it at scaremoor.com or on Amazon (amazon.com/gp/product/B0F4GFP5PW). Every Scaremoor book is a standalone story, and every one is spooky but safe for school.





THE PHANTOM PLAYGROUND

Chapter 1: The Discovery

Name: _____

Date: _____

- 1 The woods had always felt alive. Not alive like trees and animals and all that nature stuff. Alive like they were watching. Listening.
- 2 I glanced over my shoulder for the fifth time in ten minutes, but nothing was there. Just shadows and the soft rustle of leaves. “Maybe this isn’t such a good idea,” I said, stepping over a fallen branch. The words came out quieter than I intended.
- 3 Jake turned around, his grin almost glowing in the dim light filtering through the trees. “Come on, Emily. Where’s your sense of adventure?”
- 4 “Back at home with my snacks,” I muttered. My fingers brushed the strap of my backpack, a comfort I didn’t even realize I needed.
- 5 “I told you,” Jake said, ignoring my sarcasm, “there’s something awesome out here. I can feel it.”
- 6 Jake was always sure of himself. Too sure. Whether it was sneaking into Old Man Baker’s barn to look for treasure (spoiler: there wasn’t any) or climbing the giant oak in my backyard just to see if he could (he couldn’t). If Jake thought this creepy hike was going to end in glory, it was probably going to end in mud and scraped knees instead.
- 7 Sam walked behind me, his arms crossed tight like he was trying to hug himself. “I don’t know why I let you talk me into this, Jake,” he said, glancing nervously at the trees. “The woods are huge. We could get lost, you know.”
- 8 Jake waved him off. “We won’t. I brought a compass.” He held it up like it was some magical artifact instead of a tiny plastic gadget he’d pulled from a cereal box.
- 9 “I don’t think that thing even works,” I said.
- 10 “It works fine!” Jake snapped, his grin faltering for the first time.
- 11 Sam muttered something under his breath, but Jake was already charging ahead, stomping through the underbrush like it owed him money. I didn’t have the heart to tell him that if we did get lost, his compass wasn’t going to help.
- 12 The farther we walked, the darker it got. The trees seemed thicker here, their branches clawing at the sky. And the air... it was colder. Not normal, shady-in-the-woods cold. Cold like someone turned on an invisible freezer.
- 13 “Do you feel that?” I asked, stopping in my tracks.
- 14 “Feel what?” Jake said without turning around.
- 15 “It’s freezing,” I said, hugging my arms. “It wasn’t like this when we started.”

- 16** "It's probably just the wind," Jake said, but his voice wasn't as confident as before. He glanced up, like he was trying to find the sun through the tangled branches. It wasn't there.
- 17** "Jake..." Sam said, his voice low and shaky. "Are you sure you know where we're going?"
- 18** Jake stopped and spun around. "Yes, I'm sure! Just trust me, okay? There's something cool out here—I just know it."
- 19** Before I could argue, Jake pointed ahead. "See? There it is!"
- 20** I followed his finger and felt my stomach drop. Through the trees, hidden beneath a canopy of shadows, was a playground.
- 21** It looked ancient, like something out of a creepy movie. Rusted swings hung from chains that creaked in the breeze. A merry-go-round leaned to one side, its paint faded and peeling. And in the center of it all was a seesaw, its wood splintered and cracked, one end buried in the dirt like it had given up.
- 22** "No way," Sam whispered. He stepped closer to me, his eyes wide. "Why would anyone build a playground all the way out here?"
- 23** Jake didn't answer. He was already running toward it.
- 24** "Jake, wait!" I called, but he didn't stop. He hopped onto one of the swings, his feet kicking up clouds of dust as he pushed off. The chains groaned like they hadn't moved in years.
- 25** "This is awesome!" Jake shouted, swinging higher and higher.
- 26** I hesitated at the edge of the clearing. Everything about this place felt wrong. The air was colder here, heavier, like it was pressing down on me. I wanted to tell Jake to get off the swing and leave, but the words caught in my throat.
- 27** Sam tugged on my sleeve. "Emily, let's go. This place is... it's not right."
- 28** "I know," I whispered, but my feet wouldn't move.
- 29** "Push me!" Jake called, grinning like he didn't have a care in the world.
- 30** Against my better judgment, I stepped onto the playground. The moment my sneaker hit the dirt, a shiver ran down my spine. It wasn't just cold—it was like the ground itself didn't want me there.
- 31** I walked over to Jake and grabbed the swing chains, giving him a half-hearted push. The metal was ice-cold under my fingers, the kind of cold that makes your skin stick.
- 32** "See?" Jake said, pumping his legs to swing higher. "This is the best idea I've ever had."
- 33** Sam wandered toward the seesaw, staring at it like he couldn't look away. "It's stuck," he said, pressing down on one end. "It won't move."
- 34** "Probably rusted to the ground," I said, watching him from the corner of my eye. But even as I said it, I felt uneasy. The seesaw didn't look stuck. It looked... wrong.
- 35** That's when I heard it. A giggle. Faint, but unmistakable.
- 36** I froze. "Did you hear that?"

- 37** "Hear what?" Jake asked, still swinging.
- 38** "That laugh," I said, glancing at Sam. "Did you hear it?"
- 39** Sam shook his head, his face pale. "I didn't hear anything."
- 40** Jake stopped pumping his legs and let the swing slow to a stop. "You're probably just hearing things. It's just the wind."
- 41** But it didn't sound like the wind. It sounded like a kid. And it was close.



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Look back at the passage. Each question tells you which paragraph to check.

Name: _____

Date: _____

PART A: WHAT HAPPENED?

Circle the best answer.

1. Who is telling this story? (paragraph 3)

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| A. Jake | B. Sam |
| C. Emily | D. Old Man Baker |

2. What does Jake bring so they won't get lost? (paragraph 8)

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| A. A plastic compass from a cereal box | B. A map of the woods |
| C. A flashlight | D. His phone |

3. What changes the farther they walk into the woods? (paragraph 12)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| A. It gets warmer and brighter. | B. It gets darker and colder. |
| C. The trees get smaller. | D. They hear music. |

4. What is in the center of the playground? (paragraph 21)

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| A. A merry-go-round | B. A slide |
| C. A sandbox | D. A cracked seesaw with one end buried in the dirt |

5. How do the swing chains feel when Emily grabs them? (paragraph 31)

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| A. Warm from the sun | B. Sticky with sap |
| C. Ice-cold, the kind of cold that makes your skin stick | D. Wet from the rain |

6. What does Emily hear that the boys say they don't? (paragraph 35)

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. A giggle | B. A dog barking |
| C. Someone calling her name | D. A swing creaking |





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PART B: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Find each word in its paragraph. Use the words around it to figure out what it means.

7. **faltering** (paragraph 10) means:

8. **canopy** (paragraph 20) means:

9. **unmistakable** (paragraph 35) means:

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

A simile compares two things using *like* or *as*. Explain what each one means.

10. *"Jake was already charging ahead, stomping through the underbrush like it owed him money."* (paragraph 11)

11. *"Cold like someone turned on an invisible freezer."* (paragraph 12)





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PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

Answer in complete sentences. Name the paragraph your evidence comes from.

12. What kind of person is Jake? Use two details from the chapter.

13. How does the author make the playground feel wrong? Use two details.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with “It sounded like a kid. And it was close.” What do you think happens next? Use two clues from the chapter.





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PART A: WHAT HAPPENED?

Circle the best answer.

1. Who is telling this story? (paragraph 3)

A. Jake

B. Sam

C. Emily ✓

D. Old Man Baker

2. What does Jake bring so they won't get lost? (paragraph 8)

A. A plastic compass from a cereal box ✓

B. A map of the woods

C. A flashlight

D. His phone

3. What changes the farther they walk into the woods? (paragraph 12)

A. It gets warmer and brighter.

B. It gets darker and colder. ✓

C. The trees get smaller.

D. They hear music.

4. What is in the center of the playground? (paragraph 21)

A. A merry-go-round

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5. How do the swing chains feel when Emily grabs them? (paragraph 31)

A. Warm from the sun

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6. What does Emily hear that the boys say they don't? (paragraph 35)

A. A giggle ✓

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C. Someone calling her name

D. A swing creaking





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PART B: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Find each word in its paragraph. Use the words around it to figure out what it means.

7. **faltering** (paragraph 10) means:

getting weaker or starting to fade

8. **canopy** (paragraph 20) means:

a covering overhead, like a roof

9. **unmistakable** (paragraph 35) means:

so clear it can't be mistaken for anything else

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

A simile compares two things using *like* or *as*. Explain what each one means.

10. "Jake was already charging ahead, stomping through the underbrush like it owed him money." (paragraph 11)

Jake stomps along hard and fast, like he's angry at the plants in his way.

11. "Cold like someone turned on an invisible freezer." (paragraph 12)

The cold comes on suddenly and doesn't feel natural.





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PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

Answer in complete sentences. Name the paragraph your evidence comes from.

12. What kind of person is Jake? Use two details from the chapter.

He is confident, even too sure of himself (6): he snuck into Old Man Baker's barn and tried to climb the giant oak (6), trusts a cereal-box compass (8), and runs ahead to the playground (23). He gets less confident as it gets colder (16) and snaps when doubted (10).

13. How does the author make the playground feel wrong? Use two details.

Any two: rusted, creaking swings, a leaning merry-go-round, and a buried seesaw (21); the air is colder and heavier (26); the ground seems not to want Emily there (30); the seesaw looks wrong (34); a giggle comes from nowhere (35).

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with "It sounded like a kid. And it was close." What do you think happens next? Use two clues from the chapter.

Answers will vary. Strong predictions use clues such as the giggle (35), the stuck seesaw (33–34), or the strange cold (12, 26).

