



THE VANISHING WORDS

Chapter 1: The Weird Word

The opening chapter of **The Vanishing Words**, a Scaremoor middle grade horror novel, as a 999-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 Vanishing Words is book 5 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/B0FHJBT5YH). Every Scaremoor book is a standalone story, and every one is spooky but safe for school.





THE VANISHING WORDS

Chapter 1: The Weird Word

Name: _____

Date: _____

- 1 I should've picked lunch duty.
- 2 Seriously. Wiping ketchup off tables and pretending not to hear seventh graders making fart noises would've been better than this. At least lunch duty doesn't give you frostbite.
- 3 The library is freezing. Not just "the air conditioning is too strong" cold—*weird* cold. Creeps-into-your-socks cold. And for some reason, the lights in the nonfiction aisle keep flickering like the place is trying to signal Morse code to the undead.
- 4 But I needed the extra credit.
- 5 And if I have to choose between gym class—with Coach Deetz yelling about hustle while dodgeballs are flying like missiles—and spending an hour in a haunted library reshelving books no one's read since 1982? I'll take my chances with the ghosts.
- 6 "Oliver?" Miss Lindell doesn't look up from her desk. Her glasses are halfway down her nose, and she's clicking away on her ancient keyboard like it owes her money. "History and science. Alphabetical order. You know the drill."
- 7 I nod, even though she can't see me. I've done this enough times now that I know the routine.
- 8 Most kids spend the hour before school in the cafeteria or playing games on their phones. I get the honor of sorting moldy nonfiction books.
- 9 The nonfiction section smells like dust, old paper, and something sour—like the breath of a dragon that just ate a grilled cheese. The books here are weird. Half of them are about astrology, and the other half are things like *The History of Fencing (Not the Sport—The Wood Kind)*.
- 10 I wedge myself between two sagging shelves and drop to my knees, a stack of books leaning like a Jenga tower in my arms.
- 11 "Of course," I mutter. "Because *Famous Caves of Minnesota* absolutely belongs between *Dinosaurs: Big Teeth, Small Brains* and *How to Make Your Own Yogurt*."
- 12 I start shifting the books into place, my fingers already stiff from the cold. The overhead lights make that awful buzzing sound, like there's a fly trapped in every bulb. Every few seconds, one of them flickers. It doesn't help that the window near the back of the library looks out into nothing but gray sky and a dead tree that's somehow always moving, even when there's no wind.

- 13 The stack finally settles. I scoot a little deeper into the aisle and reach for the next mess of misplaced titles.
- 14 That's when I see it.
- 15 A gap behind the lowest shelf. Just a sliver—too small for a book but wide enough for something thin to fall into. Something black is wedged deep in the space between the shelf and the back wall. Almost invisible.
- 16 I reach in.
- 17 My fingers brush something soft—not paper, not cardboard. It's... leathery. Cold. It doesn't feel like anything that belongs in the library.
- 18 I tug it free.
- 19 It's a notebook. Sort of. The cover is soft and cracked, like it was soaked and then dried in an oven. The corners are warped, and there's a weird dark stain in the center that hasn't dried completely. It smells like burned sugar and old ink. And underneath that, something worse. Like hair. Singed hair.
- 20 I glance toward the front desk. Miss Lindell is still typing.
- 21 I flip the notebook open.
- 22 The first few pages are full of scribbles. Not doodles—*words*. Hundreds of them. Some written in blocky capital letters, others in swirly cursive I can barely read. A few are in languages I don't recognize at all. There are symbols, too—tiny triangles, spirals, stars, eyes. Some pages are torn. Others look like they were written with something that bled through—one has a smear that looks like dried blood.
- 23 There's no name inside. No school label. No "If Found Return To." Just line after line of chaotic writing. Like someone was trying to decode a secret. Or maybe keep one.
- 24 I keep flipping. Most of the pages make no sense.
- 25 Then I stop.
- 26 One page is different.
- 27 At the top, in heavy black ink, is a single word:
- 28 ELWEN
- 29 That's it. No definition. No symbols. Just the word.
- 30 ELWEN.
- 31 I stare at it for a long time. There's something about it—like it's pressing itself into my brain. The longer I look at it, the more I feel like I've seen it before. In a dream maybe. Or on the edge of a thought I couldn't quite catch.
- 32 I whisper it.
- 33 "...Elwen."
- 34 The word hangs in the air like it doesn't want to leave.

- 35 I don't know what I expected. Nothing, I guess.
- 36 But then I hear it.
- 37 *CLACK.*
- 38 A sharp, metallic sound from the front of the library.
- 39 I jump, nearly dropping the notebook.
- 40 I peek around the end of the aisle.
- 41 Miss Lindell is still typing, totally unfazed.
- 42 But something's different.
- 43 Her stapler is gone.
- 44 The big silver one she always keeps on her desk, right next to the goat-shaped paperweight. She's obsessed with it. Once she gave me a full five-minute lecture about *not borrowing the stapler without signing it out.*
- 45 It's not there.
- 46 I step closer. There's just a faint outline in the dust.
- 47 She doesn't seem to notice.
- 48 I back away slowly, clutching the notebook against my chest like it might jump out of my hands.
- 49 What the heck just happened?
- 50 I didn't do anything. I just said a word. One word.
- 51 Back in the aisle, I open the notebook again.
- 52 The page with ELWEN looks the same... but the letters are glowing now.
- 53 Not bright. Not neon. Just a faint shimmer, like the afterglow from one of those cheap glow-in-the-dark stars you stick to your ceiling. They glitter and pulse faintly.
- 54 Softly. Steadily.
- 55 I snap the notebook shut and shove it into my backpack.
- 56 It thumps heavier than it should. I zip the bag halfway and sling it over one shoulder.
- 57 As I turn toward the door, something makes me look out the window.
- 58 The clouds outside are thicker now. The sky's gone from gray to that weird pale green it gets before a thunderstorm.
- 59 And in the glass, I see my reflection.



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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. Why is Oliver working in the library before school? (paragraph 4)

- A. He is in trouble.
- B. He needs the extra credit.
- C. He loves books.
- D. Miss Lindell is his aunt.

2. What job does Miss Lindell give him? (paragraph 6)

- A. Shelving history and science books in alphabetical order
- B. Fixing the flickering lights
- C. Checking out books to students
- D. Cleaning the windows

3. Where does Oliver find the notebook? (paragraph 15)

- A. On Miss Lindell's desk
- B. In the lost and found
- C. Under a chair
- D. Wedged in a gap behind the lowest shelf

4. What single word is written at the top of one page? (paragraph 28)

- A. ELWEN
- B. DRAGON
- C. STAPLER
- D. LINDELL

5. What disappears after Oliver whispers the word? (paragraph 43)

- A. The goat-shaped paperweight
- B. Miss Lindell's glasses
- C. Miss Lindell's stapler
- D. The library cart

6. What happens to the letters on the page afterward? (paragraph 52)

- A. They fade away.
- B. They turn red.
- C. They change into a different word.
- D. They glow with a faint shimmer.





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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. **wedge** (paragraph 10) means:

8. **unfazed** (paragraph 41) means:

9. **shimmer** (paragraph 53) means:

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

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

10. *"And for some reason, the lights in the nonfiction aisle keep flickering like the place is trying to signal Morse code to the undead."* (paragraph 3)

11. *"I wedge myself between two sagging shelves and drop to my knees, a stack of books leaning like a Jenga tower in my arms."* (paragraph 10)





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PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

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

12. How can you tell Oliver doesn't love his library job? Use two details.

13. Why is the missing stapler such a big deal? Use evidence.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with "And in the glass, I see my reflection." What do you think Oliver sees? Use two clues from the chapter.





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

PART A: WHAT HAPPENED?

Circle the best answer.

1. Why is Oliver working in the library before school? (paragraph 4)

- A. He is in trouble.
- B. *He needs the extra credit. ✓*
- C. He loves books.
- D. Miss Lindell is his aunt.

2. What job does Miss Lindell give him? (paragraph 6)

- A. *Shelving history and science books in alphabetical order ✓*
- B. Fixing the flickering lights
- C. Checking out books to students
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3. Where does Oliver find the notebook? (paragraph 15)

- A. On Miss Lindell's desk
- B. In the lost and found
- C. Under a chair
- D. *Wedged in a gap behind the lowest shelf ✓*

4. What single word is written at the top of one page? (paragraph 28)

- A. *ELWEN ✓*
- B. DRAGON
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5. What disappears after Oliver whispers the word? (paragraph 43)

- A. The goat-shaped paperweight
- B. Miss Lindell's glasses
- C. *Miss Lindell's stapler ✓*
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- D. *They glow with a faint shimmer. ✓*





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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. **wedge** (paragraph 10) means:

squeeze into a tight space

8. **unfazed** (paragraph 41) means:

not bothered or surprised at all

9. **shimmer** (paragraph 53) means:

a soft, flickering light

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

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

10. "And for some reason, the lights in the nonfiction aisle keep flickering like the place is trying to signal Morse code to the undead." (paragraph 3)

The lights blink on and off in a creepy pattern, like a secret message.

11. "I wedge myself between two sagging shelves and drop to my knees, a stack of books leaning like a Jenga tower in my arms." (paragraph 10)

The stack of books is wobbly and about to fall over.





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PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

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

12. How can you tell Oliver doesn't love his library job? Use two details.

Any two: he wishes he had picked lunch duty (1); the library is freezing (2–3); he's only there for extra credit (4); he jokes about the books being in the wrong order (11).

13. Why is the missing stapler such a big deal? Use evidence.

It always sits next to the goat-shaped paperweight, and Miss Lindell is obsessed with it (44). It vanishes right after Oliver whispers the word (33–43), leaving only an outline in the dust (46), so the word may make things disappear.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with "And in the glass, I see my reflection." What do you think Oliver sees? Use two clues from the chapter.

Answers will vary. Strong predictions use clues such as the stapler vanishing (43), the glowing letters (52), or the notebook feeling heavier than it should (56).

