

Name: ..... Date:.....

***A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness - reading comprehension**

Read the following narrative poem based on *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness.

**A Monster Calls**

Conor's Nightmare - THE nightmare - stalked his mind;  
The wind laughed: sudden - short - breaths;  
Sweat trickled as he thrashed like the sea.

Conor awoke.

Awoke into the nightmare.

The nightmare beyond his bedroom window.

Out in the cold gloom; depths of the garden...

A crack in the soil - black, tearing wound

Forced apart by a gnarled hand of twisted twigs.

A form, a huge shape; a knotted, mangled inhuman giant.

Red eyes glared. Mouth dripping dank hatred.

It stepped forward.

Trees were thrown aside; arms flail and destroy.

Shed crushed like an eggshell;

Earth retreating in trembling thuds;

Leaves shiver, wildlife panics -

Closer - Closer - CLOSER!

Baleful beady eyes and a hellish leering maw.

The spotlight moon shone coldly on the scene

A silver, sardonic skull;

A frozen grimace;

An audience staring at the monster,

Pressing its vine-tangled arms against the house.

The monster peered in the window. Smiling. Hungry.

The moon mesmerises. The monster speaks.

Its voice pierces his mind, body, soul.

"Come with me. You are now *mine!*"

Conor gasps. Conor reels in a hard breath: Conor becomes steel.

"No! NO! I'm not scared of you anymore!"

Fire explodes in the monster's heart. Ashes fly to the winds.



Answer the following questions based on the narrative poem.

**Decode and explore vocabulary**

Find three unfamiliar words in the poem to explore further.

| Word  | Guess the meaning | Actual meaning |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|
| ..... | .....             | .....          |
| ..... | .....             | .....          |
| ..... | .....             | .....          |

**Retrieve**

1. Make a list of the things the monster damages as it approaches:

.....  
.....

2. In verse 4, what evidence is there that the monster means to do something bad?

.....  
.....

**Infer**

3. Which word in the final paragraph suggests that Conor might still be in a dream?

.....  
.....

4. What is it that destroys the monster?

.....  
.....

**Choice of language**

5. What is your impression of Conor at the start of the poem, compared to Conor at the end of the poem? Supply two pieces of evidence.

.....  
.....

**At the start of the poem...**

.....  
.....

**At the end of the poem...**

.....  
.....

Name: .....

Date:.....

**Read the following narrative piece inspired by the opening of *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness.**

Conor had a nightmare: the horrifying howling wind laughed; a torturous trickle of sweat dripped down his neck; sudden short breaths shook him; and now, here came the sinister shadowy figure, writhing from the earth. His nightmare had taken form and was coming, coming ever closer. Closer! CLOSER!

He awoke. He awoke gasping. He awoke trembling.

Click! His lamp was on but offered little comfort. 12.07 - seven minutes past midnight. For Conor, time dragged desperately in slow motion. He was helpless, trapped, vulnerable. His heart pounded in his chest, beating twice as fast as the ticking clock. With each beat, the buried beast came closer.

Conor, sitting on the edge of his bed, looked back at the slowing clock, counting the long, last moments of his final confrontation. He must face his nightmare, he knew this. For too long it had controlled him. The light of the moon cut through the darkness, like a knife slicing through black silk. The morbid moon beckoned Conor to come to its cold, harsh light. He stepped forth into the spooky, greenish spotlight. "Is this it? Is this how it's supposed to end?" he asked himself.

Outside, out there in the deep pit, angry shadows became solid and transmogrified into a gigantic livid shape - sinister, threatening. The house shook; the earth rippled.

Crash!

The earth tore.

Thud!

The soil split apart.

Boom!

Thunder and lightning cracked. Trees were pushed apart by a gnarled, clawing arm.

Conor felt himself pulled further towards the glowing windowpane as if the monster itself were guiding him to his doom.

"I've got to face this nightmare," said Conor. "I can't keep letting it win!"

Piercing from the dismal depths of the garden were red angry embers of eyes; hot with hatred; pulsating with power.

Conor watched as the nightmare shadow emerged from the ground. Twigs tangled, roots wrenched, leaves laced to form the monster from his nightmares.

Conor stared out at the beast. He was spellbound. The monster lumbered to the house - towering over it as if it were just a thin cardboard box. The monster lowered his gnarled hand and beckoned. "You will come with me!" It bellowed. "You are now mine!"

"NO! I'm not afraid of you anymore!"

The monster staggered back. Its chest exploded in fiery kindling flames - until only a cloud of ash drifted into the wind.



Answer the following questions based on both the narrative (story) and narrative poem.

**Decode and explore vocabulary**

Find three unfamiliar words in the poem to explore further.

| Word  | Guess the meaning | Actual meaning |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|
| ..... | .....             | .....          |
| ..... | .....             | .....          |
| ..... | .....             | .....          |

**Retrieve**

1. What is the same about the start of the narrative and the poem?

At the start of the narrative and poem: .....  
.....  
.....

2. What is different about the start of the narrative and the poem?

At the start of the narrative: .....  
.....  
At the start of the poem: .....  
.....

**Infer**

3. How do you know that the monster is underground in both the story and the poem? Give evidence from each one:

At the start of the narrative: .....  
.....  
At the start of the poem: .....  
.....

**Choice of language**

4. In the poem why does the poet say ‘Conor becomes steel’ just before he speaks to the monster?

.....  
.....  
.....

**Narrative poetry comprehension - suggested answers**

**Decode and explore vocabulary**

| Word                   | Guess the meaning   | Actual meaning   |
|------------------------|---|--|
| maw<br>dank<br>mangled | Encourage looking at meanings of words in the context of the line, verse and overall story of the poem. | Use a dictionary to help find precise definitions, family words and etymology. |

**Retrieve**

1. Make a list of the things the monster damages as it approaches:

The soil, trees and the shed are damaged by the monster.

2. In verse 4, what evidence is there that the monster means to do something bad?

It says the monster is ‘Smiling. Hungry.’ This infers it thinks it has won, it is confident, and it is going to eat / consume / destroy Conor.

**Infer**

3. Which word in the final paragraph suggests that Conor might still be in a dream?

The word ‘mesmerises’ suggests Conor is still in a dream.

4. What is it that destroys the monster?

Conor’s brave words / the shock of him refusing to cooperate / it is implied that he has faced this fear before ‘not afraid of you anymore’ and probably has shown fear. This time he stands up to the monster.

**Choice of language**

5. What is your impression of Conor at the start of the poem, compared to Conor at the end of the poem? Supply two pieces of evidence.

At the start, he was fearful ‘sudden - short - breaths’ ‘sweat trickled’ ‘thrashed like the sea’. At the end of the poem, he ‘becomes steel’ suggesting a new-found strength of character and showing no fear.

### Narrative and narrative poetry - suggested answers

#### Decode and explore vocabulary

Encourage pupils to find examples of words from the narrative and use strategies such as reading words in context, looking for root words, prefixes and suffixes. They can also use a dictionary to check their meanings.

#### Retrieve

1. What is the same about the start of the narrative and the poem?

At the start of the narrative: **Conor is scared. He is having a dream/asleep. (Also accept inference: A nightmare comes to life.)**

2. What is different about the start of the narrative and the poem?

At the start of the narrative: **Conor knows that the monster in the dream is coming from the ground 'writhing from the earth' and approaching. His lamp is on but offers no comfort.**

At the start of the poem: **No lamp is mentioned. The monster is somewhere in the garden 'beyond his bedroom window'.**

#### Infer

3. How do you know that the monster is underground in both the story and poem?

Give evidence from each one:

At the start of the narrative: **'writing from the earth'**

At the start of the poem: **'a crack in the soil' and 'forced apart' (Verse 2 evidence)**

#### Choice of language

4. In the poem why does the poet say 'Conor becomes steel' just before he speaks to the monster?

**To show he is becoming strong, becoming brave, overcoming his fear and becoming hardened to the threat. The monster is wooden / made of twigs. Conor is stronger - he is metal, fearless, indestructible.**