



This text is from *Keeping Henry* by Nina Bawden.

*The family in this story have moved to live on a farm in Wales during the Second World War. Charlie, one of the children, finds a red squirrel and brings him home. The next morning the children are eager to see how the squirrel is.*

## Keeping Henry

In the morning, before even Bill was up (usually the first thing we heard was him swearing and stamping in his stiff heavy boots up the yard) we raced into the room. Charlie was already sitting at the table, eating his breakfast.

‘Is he alive?’ James said.

A look passed between Charlie and our mother. A self-conscious smirk.

She said, ‘He’s all right. Eat your breakfast.’

‘You’ve looked,’ I said. ‘Haven’t you? You wouldn’t let us look last night, but you’ve looked this morning ...’

She said, ‘Breakfast first.’

I swallowed my hot porridge so fast my throat burned. James choked on his and made sick-sounding noises.

‘Oh leave it, leave it,’ she said – impatiently, as if she couldn’t bear to wait any longer.

She put some pieces of bread in the box, just in front of the hole in the hay. The hay stirred. There was a small nibbling sound. A furry head poked out. I saw its dark beady eyes, its sharp-pointed ears.

I said, ‘Squirrels have hair sticking out of their ears. His are bare. Like a rat’s. And he’s sort of brown. I thought squirrels were grey.’

‘London squirrels,’ she said. ‘Not this one. He’ll be red when he’s grown. And he’s too young yet to have tufts in his ears. Do you think he wants a drink? Shall I teach him to suck, like we do with the calves?’

She dipped her finger in the milk she had warmed for our porridge and held it in front of the squirrel. There was a very faint rasping sound as it started to suck. She said, ‘What shall we call him?’

‘Ssh,’ James said. ‘Don’t speak so loud, Mum. You’ll scare him.’

She laughed. ‘Scared is the last thing he is.’

As if he had understood what she had said, the squirrel came out of the hay at that moment and sat on the edge of the box. Squirrels don't have much expression on their faces, but his eyes seemed alert and inquisitive, as if he were as interested in us as we were in him.



'Squirrels are supposed to be born in May or June,' our mother said. 'That's what the books say. It shows you books don't know everything. March 22nd today, and he's about four or five weeks old, I'd guess, with those tuftless ears and that raggedly tail. He looks as if he wants to play. Why don't you pick him up, one of you?'

And one of us did. I can't remember who was bold enough to be first, only that we passed him from hand to hand, stroking him rather timidly, until we found out what he seemed to be asking for was quite a rough game; rolling on his back while we tickled his stomach and he fought with his feet, kicking our hands with his back legs, clinging to our fingers with his front paws, with his little stumpy thumbs and long toes. He chattered and nipped with his teeth; very gentle nips, as if he knew that he mustn't bite.

Name:	Class:	Date:
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# Keeping Henry

- 1 ... we *raced* into the room.  
In this line, the word *raced* is closest in meaning to ...  
Tick **one**.

hurried ☐  
 competed ☐  
 strolled ☐  
 proceeded ☐

2a  
1 mark

- 2 A look passed between Charlie and our mother.  
What does this suggest about Charlie and their mother?

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2d  
1 mark

- 3 What does a *self-conscious smirk* mean?  
Tick **one**.

an embarrassed frown ☐  
 a knowing grin ☐  
 an awkward grimace ☐  
 a confident laugh ☐

2a  
1 mark

- 4 Why does the children's mother put some pieces of bread in the box?

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2d  
1 mark

- 5 What is the first sign that the squirrel is alive and well?

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2b  
1 mark

/ 5  
Total for this page

6

a) Why does the narrator find it hard to believe that the animal is a squirrel?

\_\_\_\_\_

b) How does the children's mother know that the squirrel is young?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark 2b

7

Look at the paragraph beginning: *As if he had understood ...*

**Find** and **copy two** different words which show that the squirrel is curious about the children.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 mark 2a

8

Give **two** things the squirrel enjoys when the children are playing with him.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 mark 2b

9

How does this text show that the children's mother knows about animals?

Give **two** ways.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

2 marks 2d

/ 10  
Total for this test