

Sabryna and the River Spirit

The day began as usual. The little ones scampered about while Pa complained of the aches in his back and the tingles in his toes.

Sabryna heated bread and pottage over the fire in their old iron pot. The family didn't have the money for a new alchemical stove like other families in the village, but Sabryna didn't mind. She liked the smell of a real fire better. It smelt honest.

Before the family ate breakfast, they stood before the shrine: three clay figures, nestled in the nook above the fireplace. Their paint was flaky and their limbs cracked but, since Pa had injured his back and lost his job on Strongarm's farm, there was no money for repairs. Sabryna nudged the little ones to remind them to bow their heads as Pa cleared his throat.

"Thank you, Barl, for the grain and the beans. Thank you, Sana, for light to bless the leaves. Thank you, Dia, for water to bless the roots."

Sabryna broke off breadcrumbs to give to each of the figurines: stout Barl, tall Sana and dainty Dia with her long, flowing hair.

"We are only a poor family – a lowly family," Pa went on. "We try our best but we are cold and hungry and our bellies always rumble. Please bless us, spirits. Send us barrels of grain, baskets of fruit and lots and lots of fish." Recently, Pa's pleas had become more and more desperate, and Sabryna had become more and more certain that the spirits weren't listening.

After breakfast, Sabryna tied on her apron and filled her pocket with salt for a day's luck. "Time for school," she said, leading the little ones outside.

"Have a good day," said Pa, "and don't run off with a passing merchant!"

"I won't," Sabryna promised. Sabryna had never travelled further than the next village but she knew that the merchants came from towns and cities far away. They brought tales of temples and domes, mighty machines and magic shows. Sabryna would love to see all that they described, but she knew that it was impossible. Her family depended on her.



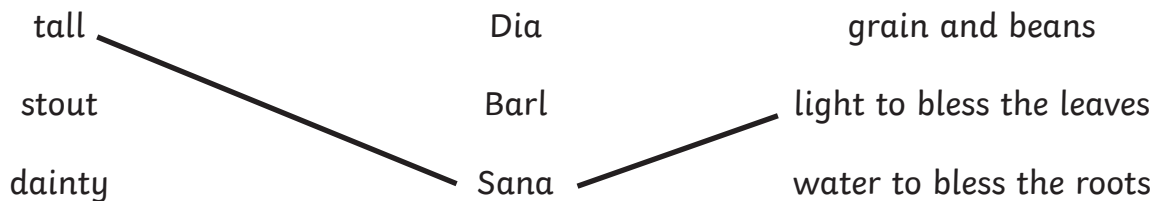
Questions

1. Look at the opening paragraph.

According to the text, what does Pa feel in his back and his toes?

_____ in his back _____ in his toes

2. Match the descriptions and reasons for which Pa was thankful to each of the three figurines. The first one has been done for you.



3. What type of food do the family ask the spirits to send them? Tick **three**.

- ☐ grain
- ☐ fruit
- ☐ beans
- ☐ vegetables
- ☐ bread
- ☐ fish

4. Which of these did Sabryna take out for a day's luck? Circle **one** answer.

her apron breadcrumbs a figurine a pocket full of salt

5. Where was Sabryna taking 'the little ones'?

6. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story:

- ☐ The family ate breakfast.
- ☐ Pa said a prayer before they ate.
- ☐ Sabryna tied on her apron ready to leave the house.
- ☒ 1 The little ones scampered about while Pa complained of his aches.
- ☐ Sabryna heated bread and pottage for the family for breakfast.

7. How did Sabryna feel about not being able to travel further away than the next village?

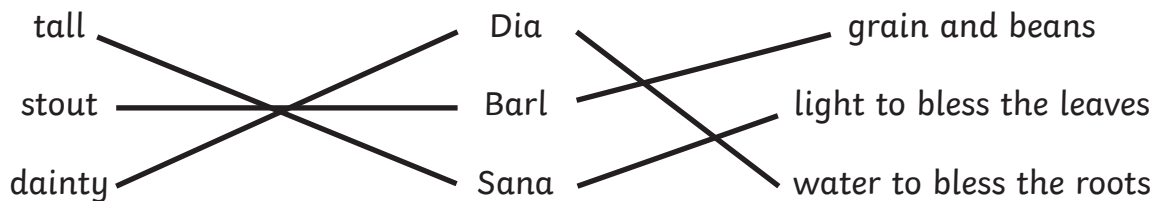
Questions

1. Look at the opening paragraph.

According to the text, what does Pa feel in his back and his toes?

aches in his back tingles in his toes

2. Match the descriptions and reasons for which Pa was thankful to each of the three figurines. The first one has been done for you.



3. What type of food do the family ask the spirits to send them? Tick **three**.

- ☒ grain
- ☒ fruit
- ☐ beans
- ☐ vegetables
- ☐ bread
- ☒ fish

4. Which of these did Sabryna take out for a day's luck? Circle **one** answer.

her apron

breadcrumbs

a figurine

a pocket full of salt

5. Where was Sabryna taking 'the little ones'?

Sabryna was taking the little ones to school.

6. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story:

- 4** The family ate breakfast.
- 3** Pa said a prayer before they ate.
- 5** Sabryna tied on her apron ready to leave the house.
- 1** The little ones scampered about while Pa complained of his aches.
- 2** Sabryna heated bread and pottage for the family for breakfast.

7. How did Sabryna feel about not being able to travel further away than the next village?

Accept answers referring to any of the following:

- She was sad/she wished that she could travel further/she dreamed of being able to do it
- She was jealous/envious of the merchants and their stories
- She felt responsible for her family/her family depended on her

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Before the family ate breakfast, they stood before the shrine: three clay figures, nestled in the nook above the fireplace. Their paint was flaky and their limbs cracked but, since Pa had injured his back and lost his job on Strongarm's farm, there was no money for repairs. Sabryna nudged the little ones to remind them to bow their heads as Pa cleared his throat.

"Thank you, Barl, for the grain and the beans. Thank you, Sana, for light to bless the leaves. Thank you, Dia, for water to bless the roots."

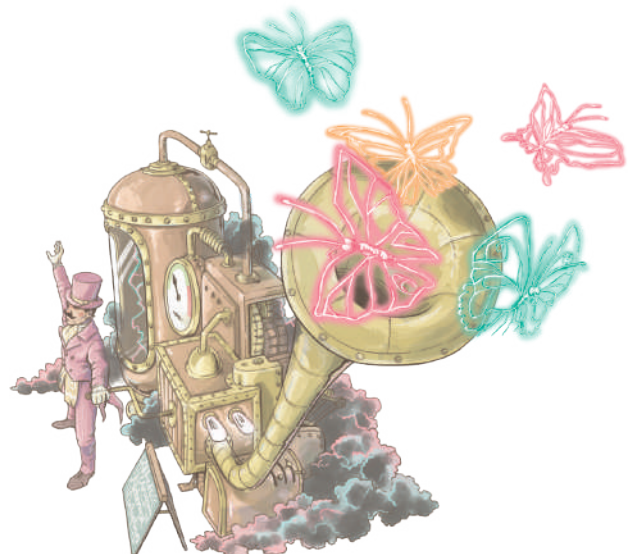
Sabryna broke off breadcrumbs to give to each of the figurines: stout Barl, tall Sana and dainty Dia with her long, flowing hair.

"We are only a poor family – a lowly family," Pa went on. "We try our best but we are cold and hungry and our bellies always rumble. Please bless us, spirits. Send us barrels of grain, baskets of fruit and lots and lots of fish." Recently, Pa's pleas had become more and more desperate, and Sabryna had become more and more certain that the spirits weren't listening.

After breakfast, Sabryna tied on her apron and filled her pocket with salt for a day's luck. "Time for school," she said, leading the little ones outside.

"Have a good day," said Pa, "and don't run off with a passing merchant!"

"I won't," Sabryna promised. Sabryna had never travelled further than the next village but she knew that the merchants came from towns and cities far away. They brought tales of temples and domes, mighty machines and magic shows. Sabryna would love to see all that they described, but she knew that it was impossible. Her family depended on her.



The village school only cost a penny each for the morning and taught sums and letters. Alongside this, the children were taught about alchemy: lessons involved mixing simple formulas and drawing diagrams of alchemical contraptions. It was only the basics, but it was a start. Sabryna hoped that her brothers and sisters would achieve great things one day.

It was a long walk from their cottage, high on the hillside, to the schoolhouse in the valley below. As usual, they were the last to arrive and Sabryna, who was already fourteen, hurried her siblings through the gate as the bell rang.

“Work hard – and don’t upset the teacher!” she called, before heading into the village to collect the day’s laundry work.

The village bustled. Farmhands jostled and gossiped as they headed to the fields. Apparently, the river was low, but the farmhands said that there was no

need to worry because Mr Strongarm had bought a new alchemical fertiliser and it made the grain pop up like a rabbit from a hole.

The farmhands might not have been worried about the low river but Sabryna was – she could hardly make a living as a laundress without water.



Questions

1. Look at the opening paragraph.

According to the text, in what parts of his body is Dad feeling aches or tingles? Circle **two**.

head

back

legs

toes

2. Find and copy a word to describe each of the three figurines.

Barl	
Sana	
Dia	

3. What type of food does Pa ask the spirits to send them? Give two examples.

1	
2	

4. According to the text, what did Sabryna take out with her for a day's luck?

5. Look at the section beginning:

"I won't," Sabryna promised. Sabryna had never travelled further than the next village but she knew that the merchants came from towns and cities far away.

Why did Sabryna wish to travel further than she had done before and what was stopping her?

6. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story:

- ☐ The family ate breakfast.
- ☐ Pa said a prayer before they ate.
- ☐ Sabryna walked her brothers and sisters to school.
- ☐ Farmhands gossiped and went to work in the village.
- ☐ Sabryna heated bread and pottage for the family for breakfast.

7. In what ways does Sabryna take responsibility for her family and her siblings?

Give evidence to support your answer.

8. The story is not in a real or modern setting. What evidence is there to support this statement?

Answers

1. Look at the opening paragraph.

According to the text, in what parts of his body is Dad feeling aches or tingles? Circle **two**.

head

back

legs

toes

2. Find and copy a word to describe each of the three figurines.

Barl	stout
Sana	tall
Dia	dainty also accept long, flowing hair

3. What type of food does Pa ask the spirits to send them? Give two examples.

Accept two of the following: (barrels of) grain; (baskets of) fruit; (lots and lots) of fish

4. According to the text, what did Sabryna take out with her for a day's luck?

(a pocket full of) salt

5. Look at the section beginning:

"I won't," Sabryna promised. Sabryna had never travelled further than the next village but she knew that the merchants came from towns and cities far away.

Why did Sabryna wish to travel further than she had done before and what was stopping her?

Accept answers referring to both:

- **the things that Sabryna wishes to see, such as 'temples and domes, mighty machines and magic shows';**
- **Sabryna's responsibility to her family, such as 'her family depended on her'.**

6. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story:

3 The family ate breakfast.

2 Pa said a prayer before they ate.

- 4** Sabryna walked her brothers and sisters to school.
- 5** Farmhands gossiped and went to work in the village.
- 1** Sabryna heated bread and pottage for the family for breakfast.

7. In what ways does Sabryna take responsibility for her family and her siblings?

Give evidence to support your answer.

Accept answers including any of the following, or any justified response:

she cooks breakfast for the family; she reminds the little ones to bow their head; she walks the children to school; she tells the children to work hard; she works as a laundress to earn money.

Also accept direct quotes from the text such as '[h]er family depended on her'.

8. The story is not in a real or modern setting. What evidence is there to support this statement?

Accept answers which refer to multiple points from the list below:

- **Sabryna heats food over a fire ('Sabryna heated bread and pottage over the fire in their old iron pot').**
- **Food and meals are old fashioned ('Send us barrels of grain, baskets of fruit and lots and lots of fish').**
- **School costs one penny for the morning and does not teach modern subjects ('The village school only cost a penny each for the morning and taught sums and letters').**
- **Sabryna works as a laundress and relies on the river for her water, rather than a washing machine (The farmhands might not have been worried about the low river but Sabryna was – she could hardly make a living as a laundress without water).**
- **There is reference to a form of science called 'alchemy' that does not exist in the real world.**

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lessons involved mixing simple formulas and drawing diagrams of alchemical contraptions. It was only the basics, but it was a start. Sabryna hoped that her brothers and sisters would achieve great things one day.

It was a long walk from their cottage, high on the hillside, to the schoolhouse in the valley below. As usual, they were the last to arrive and Sabryna, who was already fourteen, hurried her siblings through the gate as the bell rang.

“Work hard – and don’t upset the teacher!” she called, before heading into the village to collect the day’s laundry work.

The village bustled. Farmhands jostled and gossiped as they headed to the fields. Apparently, the river was low, but the farmhands said that there was no need to worry because Mr Strongarm had bought a new alchemical fertiliser and it made the grain pop up like a rabbit from a hole.

The farmhands might not have been worried about the low river but Sabryna was – she could hardly make a living as a laundress without water.

In the village square, the blacksmith’s iron hissed as he plunged hot metal into a liquid that turned the outside bright gold. A cart bounced down the street, delivering wool to the dyers. In the alley stood great vats of dye in every colour the alchemists could dream up.

More and more people were moving to the village. Some came to work on the farms, which grew bigger each year, while others came to profit from passing merchant trade as ever more alchemical wares were transported up and down the land by boat.

Sabryna bowed her head to disguise her gaze as the merchants’ daughters bustled past in their jewel-bright gowns, showing off the latest fashions. Sabryna wished that she could afford a colourful gown, too, but all she had to wear was a beige smock. Every new alchemist invention seemed like magic – Sabryna just wished that she had a little more magic in her own life.



Questions

1. Look at the first three paragraphs. Find evidence from **two different paragraphs** to show that Pa is suffering from poor health.

2. According to the text, what are Barl, Sana and Dia? Your answer should include what they physically appear as and what the family believes they represent.

3. What three types of food does Pa ask the spirits to send them?

4. Why does Sabryna take salt with her when she goes out?

5. How old is Sabryna?

6. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story:

- ☐ The family ate breakfast.
- ☐ Pa said a prayer before they ate.
- ☐ Sabryna walked her brothers and sisters to school.
- ☐ Farmhands and blacksmiths worked in the village.
- ☐ Sabryna heated bread and pottage for the family for breakfast.

7. In what ways does Sabryna take responsibility for her family and her siblings? Give evidence to support your answer.

8. Why were the farmhands not worried about the river being low? Tick **one**.

- ☐ The rain would come soon.
- ☐ They didn't need to wash their own clothes.
- ☐ The farmer had bought a new fertiliser.
- ☐ The river was good for paddling in.

9. How do you think Sabryna feels towards the merchants' daughters? Support your answer with evidence.

10. What do you think the effect on Sabryna's family will be if the river levels continue to become lower? Explain your answer.

Answers

1. Look at the first three paragraphs. Find evidence from **two different paragraphs** to show that Pa is suffering from poor health.
Accept answers which refer to both: 'Pa complained of the aches in his back and the tingles in his toes' and 'Since Pa had injured his back...'
2. According to the text, what are Barl, Sana and Dia? Your answer should include what they physically appear as and what the family believes they represent.
Barl, Sana and Dia are three clay figures/figurines of spirits to whom the family pray. Dia represents water, Barl is grain and Sana is sunlight.
3. What three types of food does Pa ask the spirits to send them?
(barrels of) grain, (baskets of) fruit and (lots and lots of) fish
4. Why does Sabryna take salt with her when she goes out?
To bring her luck
5. How old is Sabryna?
fourteen
6. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story:
 - 3** The family ate breakfast.
 - 2** Pa said a prayer before they ate.
 - 4** Sabryna walked her brothers and sisters to school.
 - 5** Farmhands and blacksmiths worked in the village.
 - 1** Sabryna heated bread and pottage for the family for breakfast.
7. In what ways does Sabryna take responsibility for her family and her siblings? Give evidence to support your answer.
Accept answers including any of the following, or any justified response: she cooks breakfast for the family; she reminds the little ones to bow their head; she walks the children to school; she tells the children to work hard; she works as a laundress to earn money.
Also accept direct quotes from the text such as '[h]er family depended on her'.

8. Why were the farmhands not worried about the river being low? Tick **one**.

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- ☐ They didn't need to wash their own clothes.
- ☒ The farmer had bought a new fertiliser.
- ☐ The river was good for paddling in.

9. How do you think Sabryna feels towards the merchants' daughters? Support your answer with evidence.

Accept children's answers which are justified with evidence from the text, such as: 'I think that she felt jealous / envious / inferior ('Sabryna wished that she could afford a colourful gown, too...'); 'I think that she was fascinated by them because it says that she 'gazed' at them'; I think that she didn't want them to see her looking ('Sabryna bowed her head to disguise her gaze').'

10. What do you think the effect on Sabryna's family will be if the river levels continue to become lower? Explain your answer.

Accept answers which refer to the following:

- **If the river levels are too low, Sabryna won't be able to do her job as a laundress.**
- **If she cannot work, she won't earn money and the family will be even poorer / the family may struggle to buy food / the family will have even less money.**