



**A Life-changing
Game**



In the Cave



Longbow Girl

Reading Booklet

2025 key stage 2 English reading booklet

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Chess is a game for two players, who try to move their pieces across a board. The game is popular across the globe.



A Life-changing Game

Lots of children dream of becoming famous. Some want to be celebrated for their singing, dancing or acting, others for being athletes. This is the story of Phiona Mutesi, a girl who shot to international fame for doing something quite different: playing chess.

A challenging upbringing

Phiona's life used to be very different from how it is now. She grew up in a family which lived in Katwe, a very poor neighbourhood in a country called Uganda. At the age of nine, Phiona had to drop out of school, even though she was still unable to read or write, as her family could no longer afford to send her. She started selling maize and vegetables in a street market to support her family.

An intriguing game

One day in 2005, Phiona followed her brother Brian to see where he was going. Watching silently, out of view, Phiona saw that Brian had gone to a club where children had gathered to play a game with some small black and white pieces on a board. She was fascinated by what they were doing.

The game they were playing was chess. It was so unusual in Uganda at that time, there was no word for it in Phiona's language. Despite this, she was determined to play. She walked six kilometres every day to find out how. Within a year, it was clear that she had a special gift.





Coaching a champion

As with learning any new skill, you often need someone to teach you how to do it. In Phiona's case, her coach was a man called Robert Katende, who worked hard to get children interested in the game.

Robert hadn't always been dedicated to coaching chess. In fact, for a long time his passion lay with another game: football. A talented player himself, Robert coached the children of Katwe in football. But when he realised that some of the children had no desire to play football, he turned his attention to chess.

Robert spotted Phiona's potential in the game and put lots of time and effort into helping her improve. She played recklessly at first, too eager to win games as quickly as possible. But when Robert reminded her to play calmly and patiently, she changed her approach to playing the game, bringing her great success.

A roaring success

In 2007, at 11 years old, Phiona became Uganda's junior girls' champion. But Phiona's talent also took her far from home. She travelled to other countries to compete against some of the most experienced chess players in the world. In 2009, she took her first ever trip out of Uganda to attend a competition. She won and, just four years after first learning to play, became an international chess champion.

Watching her next move

Phiona gained fame very quickly. At one competition, she caught the attention of a journalist, who was so in awe of her talent that he wrote a book about her. He called the book *The Queen of Katwe*. A film of the same name was also made in 2016 to show the story of her life so far. Phiona accepted an opportunity to study at a university in the United States of America. She has already achieved great things and people are waiting in anticipation of what she will do next.



Tom and Geoff have fallen into a cave where Geoff sees something interesting...

In the Cave

Tom peered nervously into the darkness.

‘It's just a rock. They're all rocks, you can...’

He stopped. The rock Geoff was pointing to was a different colour to those around it, and had a curiously regular shape. As they walked towards it, they could see that, whatever it was, it certainly wasn't a rock.

It was large, smooth, a dull red in colour and shaped rather like a small boat. The front was pointed in a smooth upward curve that reminded Tom of the nose of a dolphin.

‘It's got writing on it.’ He leaned forward to brush away the dust with his sleeve. On the upper surface, someone had painted a series of letters in gold, but before he could make out what they were, Geoff called him.

‘Tom?’

There were two seats set into the centre of whatever it was, and Geoff was sitting in one of them. He was beckoning to Tom, and staring intently in front of him.

‘What?’

Geoff pointed and Tom came round to look. On the surface in front of the seats, a green light glowed in the dark.

‘What did you do?’

‘I didn't do anything. It just came on.’

‘It came on?’

‘I just sat down and it came on.’ Geoff pointed. ‘Like that one.’

A small orange light had appeared beside the green one. A moment later it was joined by another. And another.

Silently, Tom climbed in to sit beside Geoff. They watched as the lights continued to flick on until they extended to cover the whole board in front of them and then spread along the panel that stretched between them to the floor.

At the same time, the boys became aware of a faint humming, an almost inaudible vibration that they felt rather than heard, finishing in a ping that reminded Tom of a microwave oven telling you the pizza was ready.

And that was that.

‘Wow...’ Geoff reached out a hand. Directly in front of him were two horizontal handles and between them a circle of four large, blue lights arranged like the petals of a flower. ‘I wonder what it is?’

‘What?’

‘This. What do you think it is?’

‘It’s...’ Tom shrugged. ‘Well, it’s a machine.’

‘Yes, but what’s it for?’ Geoff ran a finger cautiously over the surface of one of the lights. ‘I wonder if we could find out.’

‘What are you doing?’

‘They’re not just lights, are they?’ Leaning forward, Geoff stared intently at the surface under his hand. ‘They’re buttons, you see? I reckon if you pushed one of these –’

‘You can’t do that!’ Tom stared in horror at his friend. ‘You don’t know what’ll happen!’

Geoff said nothing. Obviously they didn’t know what would happen. It was why he wanted to push a button and find out. His finger still hovered over the group of blue lights.

‘At least let’s think about it first,’ Tom pleaded.

‘Think about it?’

‘Just for a minute or two. It might help.’

Reluctantly, Geoff sat back and thought about it. But the more he thought, the more it struck him that you could think forever and still not know anything. There was only one way to really *know*.

Longbow Girl

This story is set in the past. Merry Owen is a young girl who loves archery. Here, she is taking part in a competition against a group of adult archers who have never met her before. She has to shoot an arrow into a target of black and white circles on a board. There are two rounds in the competition.

Merry stepped forward. She was dimly aware of applause, of jeers, of shouts, but nothing intruded above the roaring of blood in her ears. She positioned herself behind the line, rolled her shoulders and took a few deep breaths.

‘We’re all ready when you are,’ said the marshal, as if it were a great joke.

Merry selected an arrow, eyed her target. She felt a cool focus flood her veins.

‘Ready your bow!’ cried the marshal.

Merry took her stance, then, listening to the commands of the marshal, she nocked* her arrow, bent from her waist, marked the target, drew back her bow and loosed. The crowd had fallen silent. The only sound she could hear was the whisper of her bowstring and the hiss of her arrow. It seemed to take long seconds to fly home to its target. Merry saw it hit and lodge in the black ring, just left of the white centre.

* nock: to place an arrow against the string of the bow





She chose another arrow, let fly. It lodged in the black ring again, just to the right of the white centre. Then she took out her third arrow, aimed, loosed. Inner white! She was sure of it.

She turned, walked back from the line as the crowd, which had been stunned into silence, started to clap. She didn't smile. Not yet. She just stood and waited. She was aware of the marshal staring at her, mouth hanging open, revealing stumps of discoloured teeth. She just looked at the mountains rising behind the castle, tried to keep at bay the noise and the attention.

'Well!' stated the marshal. His voice came out high-pitched. He cleared his throat and started again. 'Well...it would appear that Merry Owen will go through to round two.'

More noise from the crowd.

Merry walked forward to retrieve her arrows. She passed the marshal. He looked at her with sheer surprise.

'In round two,' he declared for her benefit, 'we move ten yards back and each competitor will take turns so that we might better enjoy the spectacle. So we might better appreciate their skills.'

The atmosphere became even more charged. The men glanced at each other, each thinking, it seemed to Merry, of the ten gold coins, of the fortune awaiting the winner. But for her, there was even more at stake than a purse of gold.

The ten other competitors all took their turns. The clear winner so far had two arrows in the black ring and one in the inner white.

Then it was Merry's turn. She walked forward. The crowd cheered. The men watched. Gone was the air of ridicule, amusement or pity directed her way.

She waited till it fell quiet, then chose her first arrow. She nocked it, drew back her bow to its fullest extension. She needed all its power now to make the extra distance and to maintain accuracy. She felt and sensed the almost unbearable tension in the wood. Please don't break, she prayed silently. Please give me just a few shots more. She let out her breath, loosed the arrow. The bow held strong. The arrow flew to the target. Black circle.

Second arrow. She had to do better. No thinking, no worrying, just instinct and skill. She heard the ancient commands, in her head, in her body and somewhere deep inside that must have been her soul. She pulled in a breath, released it smoothly as she loosed the arrow, as she watched it home in. Inner white! She felt the first flush of euphoria, pushed it down, selected her third and final arrow. She let it fly. Closed her eye, breathed, waited. The crowd roared. She opened her eye, looked at the target. Even from this distance she could see: dead centre of the inner white.

Only then did she smile.

The marshal hurried up to the target, eyed the arrows and smiled back.

'We have an outright winner,' he declared. 'With one first circle and two golds, Merry Owen wins!'

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