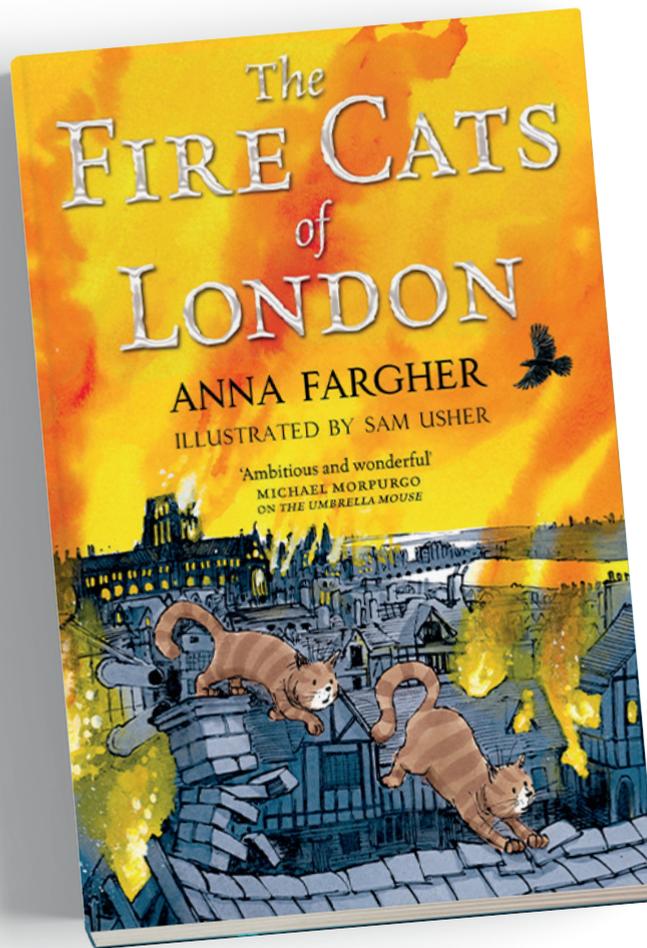


# KS2 QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES for Teachers and Librarians



Step into historic London and follow two young wildcats caught in the Great Fire, in *The Fire Cats of London: a story of daring, courage and loyalty* from bestselling, award-winning author of *The Umbrella Mouse*, Anna Fargher. Beautifully illustrated throughout by Sam Usher.

Young wildcats, Asta and Ash, find themselves captured and taken from their home in the forest to an apothecary's shop in the heart of London in the summer of 1666, when fear and superstition are rife. Asta's determination to escape London and return to the wild takes her on a perilous race against time to foil a dangerous plot that threatens the city and her brother, Ash, as the flames take hold.

Asta and Ash will take you on an inspiring journey around London during the most infamous fire in British history.



## Chapter

## Comprehension Questions

## Writing Opportunities

## Cross-Curricular Activities

### Chapter One: The Wildcats (pages 1-8)

- When is 'dawn'?
- What are the names of the two young wildcats? What do you learn about their relationship with their mother?
- Who could these men and their hounds be? What sort of characters are they?
- How does the author, Anna Fargher, set the scene in Chapter One? Pick out words and phrases that show this.
- Predict which wildcat has been hurt by the men.

Create a character profile of each wildcat in the story so far (Asta, Ash and their mother). Write what you know about each of them already, and add more detail to them as you read.

**ART** • This chapter features one of the many brilliant illustrations in the book by Sam Usher. Draw and label the appearance of the wildcats based on descriptions from the first chapter.

### Chapter Two: The Den (pages 9-19)

- Asta describes these men as 'monsters'. Is this an accurate description of them? Explain why or why not.
- How do they know that they have caught a wildcat rather than a tabby cat? List at least two differences between them.
- Find a word on page 11 that means the same as 'the skin of an animal with the fur, wool, or hair still on it.' (*pelt*)
- Which animals have the hunters caught?
- Where do you think Ash is? What might have happened to him to make him disappear at this point in the story?

Find out more about hunting, and how Henry VIII had a great love for it. Using reasons for, such as keeping animal populations from getting too high, and against it, like killing species, extinction, and animal rights, write a short balanced argument about hunting.

**PSHE** • What is grief? How is it explored in this chapter? Make a note of the different emotions Asta would have felt finding out about her mother being hurt, having to say goodbye, and how this links to her memories of her mother.

### Chapter Three: Ash (pages 20-24)

- How much time has passed since Asta saw her mother? Why is the phrase 'hunger gnawed at her' particularly effective?
- Foreboding is a feeling that something bad will happen. Can you find words or phrases that show this tone or warning in the descriptions of the forest?
- What causes the thin man to be angry with the stout man?
- Why does Asta have a desire to 'maul' the men?
- How, and with what, had Asta become trapped?

List at least five verbs which show the quick-paced actions of Asta in this chapter as she seeks Ash and freedom. Use these in sentences of your own to show your understanding.

**GEOGRAPHY** • Learn about how trapping is the use of mechanical and passive devices to catch animals. Discover why they are trapped, including for food, wildlife management, hunting, and pest control. Debate the issue of animal trapping and if it should happen.



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**Chapter Four:  
The Hunters**  
(pages 25-29)

- Do you sense a change in Asta in this chapter? Why?
- Mad Rathder has already been mentioned in a previous chapter. Can you go back and find what job he does?
- Why do you think a live wildcat demands a special price?
- What impression do you get of the hunters? How are they connected to Mad Rathder: could they be friends, employees or someone else?
- What does Asta use to comfort herself at the end of this chapter?

Write an acrostic poem for the word 'TRAPPED'. What does this word mean to you?

**DRAMA** • Imagine you are Asta. Using the descriptions provided, act out how she feels when she realises she has been trapped in the metal cage. Think carefully about how to use body language, expression and tone to convey emotions.

**Chapter Five:  
Surrender**  
(pages 30-36)

- Why does the author repeat the word 'so' four times in the first line of this chapter?
- What does it mean when an animal is described as 'docile'? Use dictionaries to find this word's definition, if necessary.
- How did Ash become trapped?
- Why are they heading to London?
- What is Asta's plan for escaping the human hunters?

Write the events of the chapter from Ash's perspective. Think about the different emotions he experiences, such as learning about his mother being shot, and his interactions with different characters.

**HISTORY** • Research the Vermin Act, which were parliamentary laws introduced during Tudor Times to kill animals that were considered vermin. Thousands of animals, from badgers and bats to owls and otters, were slaughtered because they were seen as being in competition with people, for food.

**Chapter Six:  
To London**  
(pages 37-46)

- Who is the man referring to when he says 'forest tigers'?
- What is a 'churchwarden'?
- Why is Mad Rathder initially reluctant to buy the two wildcats?
- What do we learn about what happened to the wildcats' mother?
- Predict who you think the woman at the end of the chapter is, and what her impact on the story will be.

Is the woman right in this chapter when she says that 'animals have feelings'?

Write a short explanation about how animals can have feelings, and experience varying degrees of emotional responses.

**MATHS** • In this chapter, there are mentions of old money such as thruppences, sixpences and shillings. Find out more about this system and convert into current day coinage. Discuss with children about how imperial measurements may soon be coming back

**Chapter Seven:  
Rathder's  
Apothecary  
Shop**  
(pages 47-57)

- How much does Mad Rathder give to the hunters? Why is this a surprise to them? What cost does it also involve?
- What effect does the vapour in the bowl have on the wildcats?
- Why does Beauty call her owner her 'master'? What does this show about them?
- What is the reason for their capture, the use of their blood and the removal of their whiskers?
- Where is home for the wildcats? Why does Beauty have a different view of where home is for her?

What advice would Mother give to Asta if she could speak to her? In Mother's voice, write down some of her words of wisdom that Asta can use to help herself and Ash to escape.

**HISTORY** • Understand more about the role of an apothecary during these times, and how they were the Tudor version of a pharmacist, selling medicine and herbal remedies.

**SCIENCE** • Create your own potions in the style of an apothecary using natural materials.



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**Chapter Eight:**  
**Beauty**  
(pages 58-67)

- What does Beauty do to encourage the wildcats to build up their strength?
- How does Beauty befriend Ash? Why does this infuriate Asta? List at least two ways in which she treats Ash differently to Asta.
- What is Beauty referring to when she talks about the 'pestilence'?
- What does it mean if something is 'written in the stars'?
- Do you feel any sympathy for Beauty? How does she try to help? Do you think she will keep to her promise?

Asta wonders what Beauty must have said to Ash to convince him to forget his home, and want to stay with her. Use speech marks to write short conversational statements from Beauty about some of the things you think she said to Ash.

**HISTORY/COMPUTING** • Research more about the terrible disease known as The Great Plague, that happened in London, during the hot summer of 1665. Create a presentation to show how it spread rapidly, the assumed causes, and how the real root of the problem was rats.

**Chapter Nine:**  
**The Bartholomew Fair**  
(pages 68-81)

- Why doesn't Asta want to escape at first even though her cage is wide open?
- How does the author make the reader use their senses when describing what Asta sees at the window?
- Why is Asta surprised to see very little greenery?
- Which animal causes the most shock to the wildcats when they see it in the cluster of carts?
- Who is the man that bangs on Mad Rathder's door? What plan do they hatch together to make money?

Create an emotions graph to plot Asta's changing thoughts and feelings throughout the last few chapters. Refer to key events such as: being trapped; telling Ash about their mother; meeting Beauty; and seeing London.

**HISTORY** • Write a report about the types of Elizabethan entertainment that were on offer at the time such as going to the theatre, and even how people like Elizabeth I liked pastimes involving animals which we would find very cruel such as bear-baiting, cock fighting, and dog fighting.

**Chapter Ten:**  
**War**  
(pages 82-89)

- What are some of the sights and sounds that Asta experiences when viewing the people of London?
- What is the term on page 85 that is used to describe cats, and other animals, that live alongside humans? (domestic)
- Why does Asta feel that she doesn't recognise Ash any more?
- What happens at the end of this chapter? Has Asta done something wrong or has Beauty had a part to play?
- How do you think Asta is feeling at this point in the story?

Write a diary entry from Asta's point of view. Describe her journey to London so far, her frightening nights in Mad Rathder's house, her rivalry with Beauty, and her hope of finding freedom.

**HISTORY** • Discover more about health and hygiene during Tudor times, including why people emptied their chamber pots out the windows into the streets below, and how this led to towns becoming riddled with diseases. Investigate the historical accuracy of this to see if it was real or an urban myth



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**Chapter Eleven:**  
**The Fair**  
(pages 90-100)

- Which two objects do Rathder and Moore use to capture Asta?
- Where does Moore take Asta? Why?
- Summarise the character of Moore in three words. Use the illustration to help you.
- What is the most popular attraction at the fair?
- How does Osborne 'see what Asta is made of'?

Write a persuasive argument arguing why animals should not be used for entertainment in modern day Britain in circuses, and throughout history.

**ART** • Create an advertisement or poster for the Bartholomew Fair. Include images of the fayre, its attractions, and descriptions to persuade people to visit.

**Chapter Twelve:**  
**Tilia and Lipa**  
(pages 101-109)

- Who are Tilia and Lipa?
- What is their backstory? Where did they come from?
- Why does Tilia lower her voice in front of Lipa?
- What does it mean if someone 'rigs' something?
- How does Asta feel about the fights? How can you tell?

Tilia says that she was snared in the Carpathian Mountains. After research, write a fact file, detailing how they are a habitat and home to about 8,000 brown bears, the second largest population in Europe.

**SCIENCE** • Within this chapter, the terms 'predators' and 'prey' are used. Create your own food web for a chosen habitat that explains the circle-of-life relationship between all living things to discover who are the producers, consumers, predators and prey!

**Chapter Thirteen:**  
**The Ring**  
(pages 110-121)

- What has caused Asta to not have a very good night's sleep?
- Mimic the way in which Osborne paced 'regally' before the animals' cages.
- Which breeds of dog meet Asta in the cage?
- Which literary technique does the author use in the phrase 'rambunctious round of applause'? (alliteration)
- Why did Rathder and Moore jump up and down for joy after Asta won her fight with her dogs?

Write a diary entry from Asta's perspective detailing the events of this chapter, including her relief at winning in her fight, but also her exhaustion and feelings of empathy towards the dogs that she had killed.

**DRAMA** • Create a 'Conscience Corridor'; half of the class stand on one side of the room, persuading Asta that she is a brilliant fighter. The other half stand on the other side, persuading Asta to think about the animals that she has hurt and to leave the fair behind. Take turns walking through the corridor in-role as Asta. How does it feel?

**Chapter Fourteen:**  
**Isaac, Cosima and Rosie**  
(pages 122-131)

- What gives Asta the motivation to keep on fighting?
- How does Asta grow up fast in the baiting ring?
- What does it mean when Cosima says that 'Osborne and his men will flay us if they catch us here' on page 125?
- Predict who you think the cleverest being they know is.
- With a partner, act out the look that Asta and Tilia share at the end of the chapter that gives them hope.

Write the next part of the story, predicting what you think happens to Lipa, and who helps them.

**HISTORY** • As we have seen from previous parts of this book, there were bears kept for the bloodthirsty attraction of bear-baiting, and now we know that there were also performing bears. But sometimes they escaped. Find out more about bears who broke loose from their captors, including one who bit a man to death in Oxford in 1565, who wasn't punished but was taken into royal custody.



**Chapter Fifteen:**  
**Jet**  
(pages 132-142)

- Read the first page of this chapter. How do you think the raven will help the animals?
- What was it about Miriam that made her seem different to Asta from the other people she met when she arrived in London?
- What is the name of the raven?
- What is Tilia prepared to sacrifice for the freedom of her cub, Lipa? Why?
- Do you think their plan of escape will work?

Write a short summary of how Asta has changed from the start of the story. What has she discovered about herself?

**SCIENCE** • Create a biography about Nicholas Culpeper, an English botanist, herbalist, physician and astrologer, after finding out more information about him, his life, and his achievements.

**Chapter Sixteen:**  
**Now or Never**  
(pages 143-151)

- Which phrase on the first page of this chapter shows that the sun is rising?
- Locate the meaning of the word 'brouhaha' in a dictionary and use a thesaurus to find synonyms for this unusual word.
- List at least three verbs used in this chapter which show the fast pace and chaotic action of it.
- Give an example of how Asta encourages Lipa to keep going.
- What landmark was Asta searching for?

Imagine you are a reporter at the Bartholomew Fair. Write a local newspaper article describing what happened that day in the great escape of these animals.

**RE** • Asta and Lipa go towards the Priory Church of St Bartholomew the Great. Learn more about the history of this mediaeval church located in Smithfield within the City of London.

**Chapter Seventeen:**  
**Miriam**  
(pages 110-121)

- Why does the author juxtapose the setting of the far with the setting of the church?
- How is the River Thames described?
- What has been the effect of humans on the river? Does this still happen today?
- Why do the attitudes of the animals change when the raven explains the circumstances of Asta and Lipa?
- How do they show empathy for them?

There are many plants mentioned in this chapter. Identify and classify a range of plants found in Britain, using classification keys. Label parts of plants using scientific vocabulary. Visit your school grounds and record the plants that you can find.

**GEOGRAPHY** • Research the River Thames, which flows through London, the capital city, and has played a central role in British history for some 2000 years. Create a map of the river, showing its source and mouth. Understand more about the measures such as barriers that have been put in place to prevent a major flooding event.

**Chapter Eighteen:**  
**Rathder and Moore**  
(pages 159-166)

- What is a 'brute'? Why is this a good word to describe Moore?
- How did Rathder and Moore know it was Miriam's house they needed to go to in order to find Asta and Lipa?
- Why does Miriam call Rathder by his full name of 'Marcus Rathder'? What does this show about her?
- What does Rathder accuse Miriam of being?
- What do we learn about at this chapter's end?

Write a character profile for Miriam. What are her personality traits, her strengths and her weaknesses? Include key quotes and descriptions from the text.

**HISTORY** • Carry out some research into the history of witchcraft in England. Create a presentation to share with your classmates.

- Find out about the Anglo-Dutch Wars which were a series of conflicts fought between the Dutch Republic and England from mid-17th to late 18th century.



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## Chapter Nineteen: Miriam's Kitchen

(pages 167-179)

- How does Miriam show her outrage towards Rathder and Moore? Pick out key words and phrases that she says.
- What does it mean to 'plunder someone's belongings'?
- Why is Asta unwilling to go inside another human's house again?
- What convinces Asta that trusting Miriam is the best thing to do in these circumstances?
- Predict where you think Asta, Lipa and the raven are hiding.

Discuss the concept of homoeopathy with the children, which is a complementary or alternative medicine. Talk about natural ingredients used. Write your own recipe for a remedy.

**ART** • In Miriam's house, there are wooden walls covered with botanical and anatomical drawings. Sketch out your own observational drawings of plants and animals.

## Chapter Twenty: Three Days

(pages 180-191)

- Where are they actually hiding?
- Miriam says that 'outsiders are always the first to be blamed'. Do you agree?
- What vision has Miriam foreseen that will happen to London?
- Where does Miriam want to take Asta and Lipa?
- Why does Miriam gladly accept Cosima, Isaac and Rosie's offer of joining her?

Write an alibi note from the perspective of Miriam on the night the animals escaped from the Bartholomew Fair.

**MYTHOLOGY** • Learn about astrology. Discuss how people who study astrology believe that the positions of the stars and planets have an influence on life, people and their personalities, and that some also believe that you can use the zodiac to predict things about the future. Find out your star sign.

## Chapter Twenty-One: Rescue

(pages 192-204)

- Why would Asta never admit feeling safe for the first time since leaving the forest?
- What does the word 'ajar' mean on page 193?
- Pick out words that show Ash's anger in this chapter. What do you think of his behaviour?
- Do you think Asta and her mother have controlled Ash?
- How does the mood change at the end of the chapter?

Write a monologue in Asta's voice. Consider how she feels about events so far, the changes that have happened to Ash, her mother and everything else. Can you recreate her style and voice?

**HISTORY** • Learn all about the Tower of London, including its Roman origins when the original structure was built at the corner of a wall around Londinium, and the executions held there.

## Chapter Twenty-Two: Plot

(pages 205-214)

- What are some of the insults that are traded between Rathder and Moore?
- What does Rathder mean when he says 'strong water' on page 207?
- What is Rathder's plan for the city?
- How do the descriptions of Asta show that she is changing both in character, and in confidence?
- Where are Asta and Jet situated in London?

Turn this chapter into a playscript, using stage directions to show the argument between Rathder and Moore.

**GEOGRAPHY** • Consider how maps of London have changed throughout time. How has London been represented in the past? How can we get a different view of London, such as by using Google Earth or Street View? What will maps of London look like in the future? and England from mid-17th to late 18th century.



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**Chapter  
Twenty-Three:  
Fire**  
(pages 215-224)

- Why is Asta and Jet's route 'compromised'?
- What advice does Jet give to Asta?
- Use a dictionary to define the word 'conflagration'. Then, use it in sentences of your own to show your understanding.
- How could Asta feel the fire before she saw it?
- Why is the fire easily spreading from house to house?

Create a timeline of events in the story so far which you can build on as you continue to read.

**HISTORY** • Research the events of the Great Fire of London, and find out how the Fire started in a small street called Pudding Lane in Thomas Farriner's bakery. Write a diary entry from the perspective of someone finding or fleeing the fire.

**Chapter  
Twenty-Four:  
Suspect**  
(pages 225-235)

- Why are the church bells ringing all across London?
- Describe Miriam's reaction to the cart driver.
- What are looters?
- What are the people doing to try to stop the fire? Is it working?
- Why do the people think it is the Dutch who started the fire? Or the French? Or the Catholics?

Summarize Rathder's character now in three words. Compare them with three adjectives you would have chosen to describe his character earlier on in the story.

**DRAMA** • In pairs, one child takes on the role of Miriam and one child takes on the role of questioner. Hotseat the character of Miriam to find out how she felt seeing the fire ravage the city and Rathder looting. Once complete, swap over.

**Chapter  
Twenty-Five:  
The Mob**  
(pages 236-247)

- What does 'the mob' mean in the title of this chapter?
- Read to the middle of page 239. Where have Miriam and the animals managed to escape to?
- Why is Asta scared of being caged again, even though this time it's for her own good?
- What causes the animals to burst from the box?
- What happens to Moore at the end of this chapter?

Write your own ending to the story predicting what you think will happen.

**ART** • Using Sam Usher's illustrations as inspiration, and coloured pastels or pencils, recreate what the landscape of London would have looked like with the fire ablaze.

**Chapter Twenty-Six:  
The Lion's Den**  
(pages 248-259)

- What type of remedy does Miriam give to Isaac?
- List some of the materials that were fuelling the fire across the city.
- Cosima says 'it's like the end of the world' on page 250. Is she right?
- Why do people think the fire is linked to Satan?
- Can you find examples of Asta's resilience in this chapter?

People are spreading rumours about why the fire has started, which include blaming it on other people from other countries, God, the Devil and others. Write a report explaining the real causes of the fire.

**MUSIC** • Sounds of the fire have been described in detail by the author in these chapters to create atmosphere and tension. In groups, use different instruments and sound effects to create a dramatic and atmospheric soundtrack as you re-read this chapter.



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**Chapter  
Twenty-Seven:  
Into the Fire**  
(pages 260-272)

- Find evidence from the text that Asta is starting to doubt herself and lose hope at the beginning of this chapter.
- Why were the pigeons not abandoning their young, even though they were in danger?
- How are Rathder and Beauty being cruel to Ash?
- Why is 'ASH?' said by Asta, and 'ASTA!' said by Ash written in capital letters on page 268?
- Asta and Ash collapse due to a mixture of relief and exhaustion. Talk about a time when you have felt so relieved that it has left you feeling overwhelmed.

In this chapter, Asta and Ash repeat the phrase 'We're free'. Write a paragraph explaining why this is such an important phrase in the story of The Fire Cats of London.

**PSHE** • How is the theme of resilience explored in the story? Give three examples of times when Asta and Ash have shown resilience. Think about why resilience is an important quality and how you can show it in your own life.

**Epilogue:  
1676**  
(pages 274-276)

- What is an epilogue?
- Who is the woman with long white hair tied in a bun?
- Why has their time in the human world made Asta, Ash and Lipa 'vigilant'?
- What is the mood of this chapter?
- What do you think will happen to Asta, Ash and Lipa in the future?

Write a book review based on your thoughts about the story.

Write a letter to Anna Fargher telling her your thoughts and feelings about the book.

Write a continuation story about what happens to some of the characters.

**LITERACY** • For each character in the story, draw a diagram or a timeline of events to show how they've developed or changed.

**LITERACY/PSHE** • Share five ways you've been inspired by the cats and their story.



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