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# COME ON, BEAUTIFUL PHOENIX!

In the second fantasy novel of Edith Nesbit's trilogy, the star of the story is, without doubt, the mythical bird from a long time ago.

## THE PHOENIX

According to Egyptian, Greek, and Persian **mythology**, the phoenix is a very large bird, about the size of an eagle or a peacock. It is born in a fire and lives for 500 years. It is associated with the sun and immortality, and it is a symbol of new life. In some cultures, it has red and gold feathers, while in others, its body is purple, with a gold neck and a long blue tail. It is always a beautiful creature, and an amazing thing to see.

**Mythology** is a collection of myths, or stories, that are shared by a group of people. Check you understand the meaning of the word, then think of myths that you know.



In Chinese mythology, where it is called *Feng* (or *Fenghuang*), the phoenix is made of many different types of birds. It is one of the four mythical animals that help the god *Pangu* to create the universe, along with the dragon, the tortoise, and the unicorn. It therefore is a symbol of eternal life.





### DO YOU KNOW?

The phoenix is on coins from ancient Rome, the Eternal City, because it is a symbol of immortality.

## ETERNAL LIFE

Both in mythology and in Nesbit's story, when the phoenix feels that its life is coming to an end, it builds a nest and makes a fire. The fire burns the nest and the bird, leaving only ashes. The ashes are transformed into an egg, which opens again when someone makes a magic fire. So, the phoenix is born again, creating new life from its own ashes. This explains why the myth is so popular in different cultures.

### GLOSSARY

- **ashes:** what is left after a fire
- **eagle:** 
- **eternal:** forever
- **immortality:** state of living forever
- **it is associated with:** it makes you think of
- **peacock:** 
- **transformed:** changed

# The Phoenix and the Carpet



Father

Jane

Cyril

Robert

Anthea



Cook

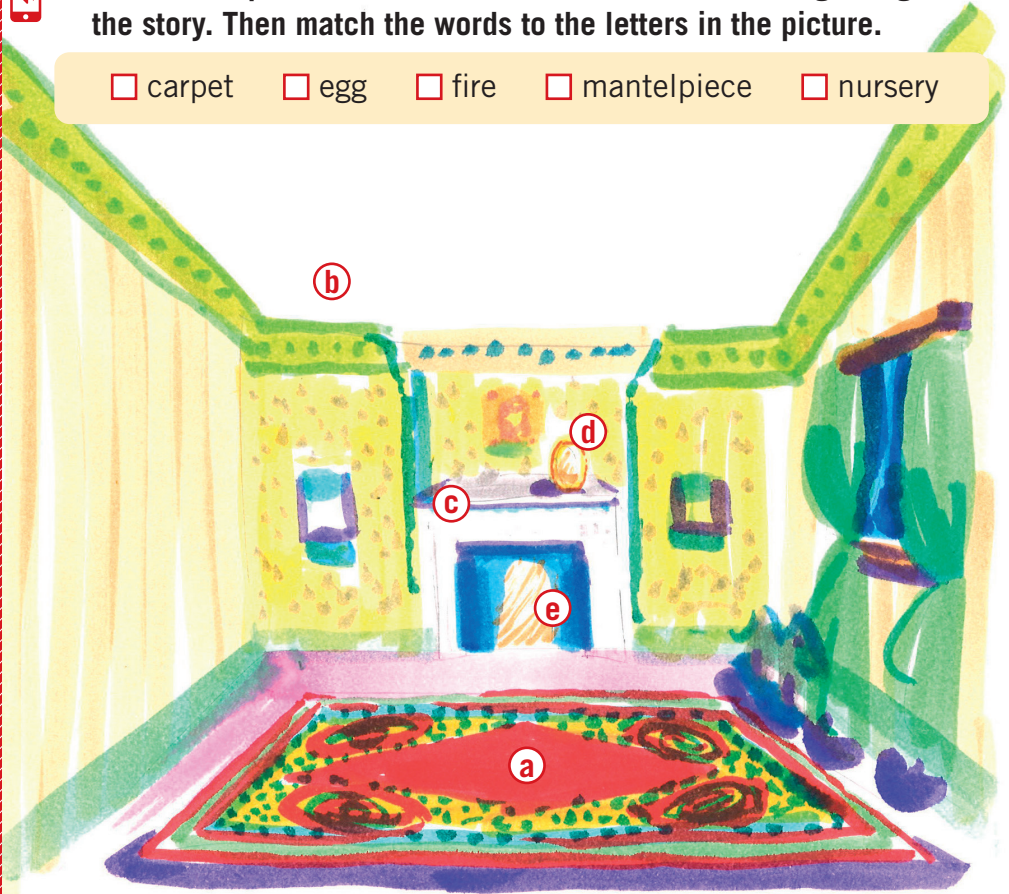
Mother

the baby

## BEFORE READING

-  1 Look at the picture and listen to an extract from the beginning of the story. Then match the words to the letters in the picture.

carpet     egg     fire     mantelpiece     nursery



-  2 Listen to the extract again and answer the questions.

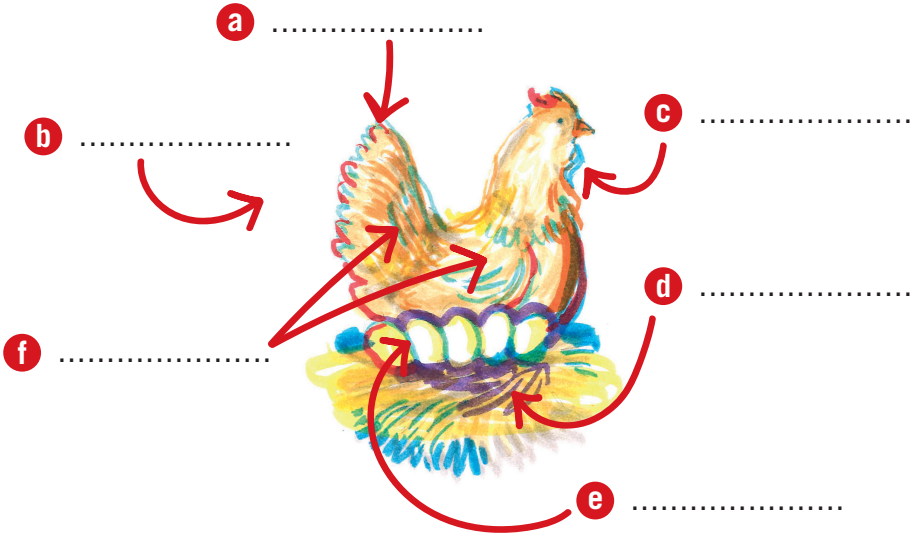
- a Where do the children live?
- b Where do the children find the egg?
- c Where do the children put the egg?

- 3  Look at the picture. Describe the room to a partner.



4 Label the picture with the words.

egg feathers hen  
neck nest tail



5 Circle the correct word to complete the sentences.

- a The bird has beautiful golden **feathers** / **necks**. And it is the same size as a **hen** / **tail**.
- b 'I lay an **egg** / **nest** like all birds,' says the Phoenix.
- c 'Oh, look! A bird's **hen** / **nest**,' says Robert. And he steps off the carpet to look inside.




6 Listen and check.





# 1 The egg

 The story begins in Camden Town, London, in November, with a new carpet. The children have got a beautiful new carpet for their nursery floor. But when they open it, something falls out. It looks like a big golden egg. In fact, it looks like an egg with fire inside.

They put the egg on the mantelpiece, and it looks very pretty. That night, Mother and Father go to the theatre, and the children sit beside the fire in the nursery.

‘Let’s talk about our holiday last year and our sand fairy, the Psammead!’ says Anthea. So, they talk about the Psammead and all their wishes. You can read about this in the book called *Five Children and It*.

## WISHES

When you wish for something, you want it to be real.  
What do you wish for?

‘We need some magic,’ says Cyril.

Robert looks around the room. He looks at the new carpet. He can’t see any magic.

‘Let’s make a magic fire!’ says Anthea. ‘We need some things that smell nice. Spices smell nice. Let’s put some on the fire!’

So, they put some spices on the fire, but still nothing happens. Then they get some cloths from the kitchen. They wave them and sing. Suddenly, Robert’s cloth hits the egg, and it falls off the mantelpiece and into the fire.

## GLOSSARY

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- **cloths:** pieces of material used to dry things
- **fairy:** creature with magic powers
- **golden:** the colour of gold
- **mantelpiece:** shelf above a fireplace
- **spices:** we use these to make food taste and smell nice
- **wave:** move something in the air

‘Oh no!’ they all say, and they look at the egg.

‘Look! Something is happening!’ cries Anthea.

Now the egg is red hot<sup>•</sup>, and something is moving inside it. Suddenly, the egg breaks and the children see a bird. It is the colour of fire. The bird sits for a moment in the fire, and it gets bigger and bigger. Then it flies out of the fire and lands<sup>•</sup> on the mantelpiece. Cyril tries to touch it. ‘Be careful! I’m still very hot,’ says the bird.

The children are not surprised when the bird speaks, but they are very interested. The bird has beautiful golden feathers. And it is the same size as a hen<sup>•</sup>.

‘I know what it is,’ says Robert. ‘There is a picture of it in one of Father’s books.’

He goes and gets a book from Father’s study<sup>•</sup>. When he comes back into the room, the bird is speaking.

‘Which of you,’ it says, ‘put the egg into the fire?’

‘Robert,’ say three voices together.

‘Thank you, Robert,’ says the bird.

‘I know who you are,’ says Robert. And he shows the children a picture of a bird sitting in a fire.

‘You’re the Phoenix,’ says Robert.

## THE PHOENIX

What is the Phoenix and why is it famous?  
How do you say ‘phoenix’ in your language?



### GLOSSARY

- **hen:** 
- **red hot:** very hot
- **study:** room where one works or studies
- **lands:** (here) is

‘I’m still famous two thousand years later!’ it says happily. ‘Can I see my picture?’ It looks at the book. ‘That doesn’t look like me,’ it says. ‘Can you read, please?’

Cyril starts to read. ‘There is only one Phoenix.’

‘That’s correct,’ says the Phoenix. ‘Please continue reading.’

‘It has golden feathers on its neck, purple feathers on its body, and its tail is white. It lives for five hundred years in the desert. When it’s very old, it makes a fire and burns itself. Then it becomes a worm, and the worm becomes a phoenix again.’

## ITSELF

**Itself** is a reflexive pronoun. We use reflexive pronouns when the subject and object of a verb are the same.

**It** burns **itself**.

Let’s (**us**) wish **ourselves** at home.

Find and underline reflexive pronouns as you read.


‘That book is wrong,’ says the Phoenix. ‘My feathers aren’t purple. And is my tail white?’

The children look at its tail. ‘No, it isn’t,’ they say.

‘And there isn’t a worm,’ says the Phoenix. ‘I lay an egg like all birds. Then I make a fire, and I burn myself. I go to sleep for five hundred years and wake up inside my egg. And then I come out of my egg and live again. I get very tired.’

‘But why are you here?’ asks Anthea.

‘Ah, that’s my secret,’ says the Phoenix. ‘But I *can* tell you my story.’

- 
- **burns:** (here) is changed with fire
  - **desert:** hot, dry place with lots of sand
  - **happily:** in a happy way
  - **lay (an egg):** (of birds) make (an egg)
  - **neck:** part between the body and head
  - **secret:** something you don’t tell people
  - **thousand:** 1,000
  - **worm:** 

‘Please, don’t disappear•!’ says Anthea.

‘Why not?’ it asks. ‘Do you want me to stay here?’

‘Oh, yes,’ says everybody.

‘Why?’ asks the Phoenix.

‘Because...’ says everybody, and then they stop.

‘Because you’re beautiful,’ says Jane.

‘You’re a clever girl,’ says the Phoenix. ‘Now, let me begin my story! I’m in the desert, and it’s almost time for me to burn myself again. I see two people sitting on a carpet. So, I go and talk to them. They are a prince and princess, and the carpet is a magic carpet. They don’t want the carpet anymore, so they give it to me. And this is it,’ the Phoenix says, pointing at the carpet on the nursery floor. ‘You wish to go somewhere, and this carpet takes you there. So I say, “Carpet, take my egg somewhere safe and let me sleep for a long, long time, until• someone makes a magic fire with spices”. And here I am!’

Just then, they hear Father’s key• in the door.

‘Oh no,’ says Cyril, ‘It’s late and we’re not in bed.’

‘Wish yourselves there,’ says the Phoenix. ‘And then wish the carpet back here.’

Immediately, the children are in bed, and the lights are out. They hear the soft voice of the Phoenix in the dark.

‘I’m here on top of the curtains•,’ it says. ‘Please, don’t tell your parents.’

‘A magic carpet and a phoenix. What fun!’ says Robert.

‘Children,’ says Father, ‘go to sleep now!’

## GLOSSARY

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• **curtains:** material that goes in front of a window

• **disappear:** go away

• **key:** 

• **until:** up to that time



