Walls by Emma Fischel

Notes and ideas for discussions and activities for teachers and reading groups

About the book

Meet Ned Harrison Arkle-Smith—he's grumpy, bossy, and exasperating, but you can't help liking him. Oh, and he's just discovered he can walk through walls . . .

Ned's world is collapsing. His parents have split up, his best friend has made new friends, he has an awful new neighbour, and Snapper is making his life a misery. In fact, NOBODY is behaving the way Ned wants.

And then there are the walls. They divide up Ned’s family’s home and his family life. They’re a big brick reminder of all that's going wrong for him. Until, that is, he finds he has an amazing new skill . . .

For ages 8+, this is a story about family, friendship, power, and control, as well as change and understanding.

The book has a bit of everything: a wayward main character whom you can’t help liking, an old diary in a locked room, a poltergeist, a scary adventure, and a mind-boggling superpower!

About the author

Emma Fischel writes fiction and non-fiction for children of all ages. She grew up in the country, was the middle child of five siblings, and had a happy, muddy childhood. Emma now has three grown-up children, and divides her time between Kent and London. If she is ever offered a superpower, she would greatly appreciate the ability to teleport.
For teachers and reading groups

Here are ideas for children’s discussions and activities, including research, creative writing, art, and further reading.

Thinking and talking about the book

Introducing the book
Look at the cover and the blurb, and talk briefly about the look of the book—does it appeal? Read the first chapter aloud and pick up on any questions, then read the book all the way through, either reading aloud to everyone together, or letting everyone read and experience the book for themselves. Keep the flow of the story, and at the end allow time for people to reflect on it and think about their responses to it.

Talking about the book: some book-talk questions
Get everyone to share their first responses to this book. This could be with the whole class/group, or children could discuss the story in small groups and then share their initial feelings and questions with everyone. Ask lots of open questions to get people talking, and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the writing. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers—everyone will have their own feelings and thoughts about the book, as well as things they like or don’t like.

Here are some questions you might use:

- How did you feel when reading this book? And how did you feel when you’d finished it?
- Which parts of the story do you remember most?
- Did you skip any parts? Which parts?
- Were there any parts that didn’t make sense to you?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?
- Did you stop and start, or did you want to read it all through in one go?
- Are there parts you want to read over again?
• Who was your favourite character in the book? Why? And who was your least favourite?
• What was the thing you most liked finding out from the book?
• What kind of book did you think it was going to be?
• What would you say about this book if you were telling someone about what you’ve just read?
• Does the story work for you? What does the book say to you?
• At the end of the book, did you feel as if you’d been there in the story, too?
• Has reading the book changed or affected you? Has it made you think differently about anything? Has it made you decide to do anything differently now?
• Does this story remind you of other books you have read?

Some themes for discussion

**Anger**

“It was too much – all those feelings swirling around in my head. Much too much. Something snapped inside me . . .”

“I felt that, if a boy could reach boiling point like water does – then I’d just reached it.”

What feelings do you think are swirling around in Ned’s head?

Have you ever felt like this? What caused you to get to boiling point? How might you deal with such feelings?

**Families**

What makes Ned realise how much his family matters?

“On the other side of the wall were all the people I loved, the people I wanted to see. My family.”

Think about your own family and all the things you love about them—and maybe the things that annoy you as well!

Have a go at making a family time capsule!

What would you put in a family time capsule about your family so that people in 50 years’ time could open the capsule and get an idea of what your family
was like? If you’re doing this in a group, talk about your ideas and share them on a flip chart. Think about

- Books your family enjoys reading
- Your family’s favourite newspaper
- Objects you like using
- Favourite clothes (e.g. a hat or a T-shirt)

Talk about how some of the items might seem to people in the future—would they be easy to understand? Or might they be puzzling?!

**Friendship**

- “I thought back over the last year. Remembering all the fun me and Bill had had, down here on the beach – building sand robots, checking rock pools, exploring the caves.”
  What do you enjoy doing with your friends?
- “Me and Bill – a brilliant team.” Do you think Ned and Bill are a team at the beginning of the story?
- Why do you think Ned gets so anxious when he sees that Bill is making more friends and no longer wants to be only with Ned?
- “Of course I had other friends, FAR more friends than Bill”
  Do you think this is true or not? What seems to happen with Ned’s friendships?
- ‘Ned,’ he said. ‘What do you think makes a good friend?’ This is what Ned’s teacher says to him when he’s trying to find out why Ned ripped up the party invitation from Bill. What does Ned say? And what would you say in answer to this question? What do you think helps to make a friendship work?

- Which book character would you choose as a best friend—and why?

**Wanting to be in control**

“Better. Much better. Something I could control.”

“Wishing and wishing I could sort Mum and Dad the way I had sorted my pencils.”

What does this tell you about Ned?
What feelings do you think he gets when he’s sorting his socks or his books?
Do you have a favourite occupation that can relax you?
Talk about some of the times in the story when Ned is trying to get control of a situation. What scary thing happened to Ned that started off his need to feel in control?
Are there ever any times when you really want to be in control of something? What do you do about it when this happens?

**Putting up walls**

“This lobby, the walls, all the walls – they were PROOF. Mum, dad . . . They would never change their minds. Never knock down the walls.”

The title of this book refers to the walls in Ned’s house, which his parents put up to divide the house when they separated.
Make a list of all the things you can think of that we build and use walls for. Don’t forget the walls that Bill enjoys when he goes bouldering!

Sometimes our thoughts or our behaviour can make barriers which block us from doing something, or feeling or realising something.

Talk about how Ned has put up walls like this and what they have stopped him doing—‘walls’, for example, like his stubbornness, his anger, and his wanting to be in control. Why has he put up these walls?

**First impressions**

Here are Ned’s descriptions of three people in this story—Snapper, The Clodd, and The Hulk:

1. “He kicks and does angry stuff. Bullying stuff.”
2. “She had scary eyes – the shape of almonds, the colour of conkers. And glinty. Very glinty.”
3. “…smirking and swaggering his way around . . .”

What are they really like, beyond these first impressions, once you get to know more about them? What’s happening in their lives that affects how they deal with things?

**Being assertive**

Assertiveness is the skill of being confident and stating one’s point of view without being aggressive. Often it’s about listening to people and working out a compromise together.
Look at how Bill and Maddie manage things when Ned is trying to take control—for example when he wants Bill to un-arrange a plan to watch films, and when he doesn’t want to share writing a diary with Maddie. Look at how they listen to Ned and then calmly put their perspective on things.

More things to talk about

• How do you feel about Ned, the main character?
  o What would you think about him if you met him in real life? Would you like to be friends with him?

• Can you think of more stories or films where a character can walk through walls?
  o Maybe to another world or another dimension?

• What similarities do you see in Ned and Matilda Arkle, Ned’s ancestor, and what do you think are the reasons for their behaviour?
  o Why do you think Matilda writes such harsh things about people in her diary?

• What superpower would you like to have? Ned can wallboggle, Emma Fischel, the author of Walls, wants to be able to teleport, the Clodd would choose flying, and Snapper wishes he could turn into a fish.
  o What would you do with your chosen superpower?
  o And what would you do if your superpower was wallboggling, like Ned’s? “Would the government want a wallboggling boy as a spy?”
  o Think of walls in your house you could boggle through. Think about what’s on the other side, or about the electric wires in the walls—watch out for switches!

• “Why couldn’t I be a bit of sea? Because the sea doesn’t care about anything. It just IS.” Why do you think Ned says this?

• “I sat and I thought and I wondered” What things get Ned to think again about his behaviour? For example:
  o Things that Bill and Maddie say to him, and the outcomes of what he does: . . . “everything was wrong. Everything was messed up.” reading Matilda’s diary.
• **Your secret spot—and your favourite place:** “*My secret spot is on the riverbank, over the wall at the bottom of the Ivy Lodge garden*”
  - What’s your secret place to sit and think?
  - “*The bottom step was my favourite place to sit in the whole of Ivy Lodge.*” What’s your favourite place to be in your house?

**Walls: Quiz**

Have a go at this quiz. Choose your answers from a, b or c.

N.B. One of the questions has two answers!

1. What gives Ned the power to wallboggle?
   - a. Sizzling anger
   - b. An iron fist
   - c. A spell he finds in an old book

2. What gave Ned such a frightening experience that he needs to do things his way and be in control?
   - a. A ghost
   - b. Rice pudding
   - c. Custard

3. What does Ned do to help himself feel more in control of things?
   - a. Eat a favourite meal
   - b. Read a favourite book
   - c. Sort all his books and pencils into order

4. In the summer holidays Ned’s friend Bill has made new friends and gone bouldering. What is bouldering?
   - a. Making a beach sculpture with piles of rocks
   - b. A form of climbing without using ropes
   - c. Building a stone wall

5. What is Ned’s favourite animal?
   - a. An elephant
b. A lemur

c. A cat

6. Why is Ned’s next-door neighbour Maddie on the phone a lot?
   a. She’s worried about her little sister
   b. She’s worried about her grandmother
   c. She has a lot of friends

7. What did Matilda Arkle, Ned’s ancestor, want to do in her life?
   a. Build a house by the sea and have adventures
   b. Marry a rich man and have lots of children
   c. Stay at home and write books

8. Who were Morwenna and Drummond Moraggon?
   a. Ned’s friends when he was young
   b. Twins who were mean to each other and were haunted by the Craggelton poltergeist
   c. Characters in a story book

9. How does Ned do a good deed for his sister Grace when George, her boyfriend, dumps her?
   a. He wallboggles into George’s room and frightens him
   b. He wallboggles into George’s room and covers things with slime and itching powder
   c. He challenges George to a fight

10. Who is Snapper?
    a. A photographer from a newspaper
    b. Someone who used to be Ned’s friend
    c. The Hulk’s stepbrother

11. What danger does Ned save Bill from?
    a. Being trapped in a cave by the rising tide
    b. Falling from a cliff
    c. Being crushed by a collapsing wall
12. What does Ned realise about the walls in his house?
   a. They are very thin
   b. They wobble
   c. They are keeping his family together

**Walls: Ideas for activities**

**Shorter activities**

**Word search**

Here are the names of some of the characters in *Walls*, along with some interesting words which turn up in this story.

They’re hidden in the grid below, running upwards, downwards, left-to-right, and right-to-left.

When you’ve found them all, talk about who is your favourite character, and check out what the words mean and how they fit into the story.

```
NED  BILL  ISABEL  THE HULK  SNAPPER  THE CLODD  GRACE
POLTERGEIST  ALIBI  ARCHIVE  CANUTE  PANDEMONIUM
CANOODLE  STUBBORN  AGGRAVATING  TRIGGERS  GENE
GROVELLING  AUDITION
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G R O V E L L I N G X Z B Q W Z
R P Y X Q B C S F X P W J F D J
A L I B I X Q A J S N A P P E R
C X Z I M D Z B W I W Q J Z N S
E F V L X F P E Y H X X P F X E
B A E L J P O L T E R G E I S T
Q X E Z F X P Z Q X R D C Q F H
G W V X R C J C F T H E H U L K
N O I T I D U A Q X Z V M J H X
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Three-word challenge!

For each of these characters think of three words to describe what they are like. A few words are already here to get you going.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>Stubborn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Hulk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddie</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matilda Arkle</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Nicknames**

What are the real names of these characters in *Walls*?

- *Snapper*
- *The Clodd*
- *The Great Beauty*
What nicknames do you think Ned could give to these book characters? For example, Harry Potter could be *The Wizard*.

* Matilda
* Frodo
* Paddington
* Peter Pan
* Pinocchio
* Cinderella

**Sayings about walls**

Here are some sayings based on the word ‘wall’, along with their meanings. They’ve all been mixed up—can you match each saying to its correct meaning? Make up some sentences using each saying, for example ‘Ned banged on the party wall between Dad’s side and Mum’s side of the house.’

‘Mary kept on stonewalling about what had happened and wouldn’t say anything about it.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saying</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Walls have ears</td>
<td>A. Get very angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Party wall</td>
<td>B. The person you are talking to isn’t listening or doesn’t understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Off the wall</td>
<td>C. Feeling trapped or enclosed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Go up the wall</td>
<td>D. Be careful what you say as people may be eavesdropping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A wallflower</td>
<td>E. Obstructing things by refusing to talk or answer questions; being defensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Feeling walled in</td>
<td>F. A shy person at a party, with no dance partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Stonewalling</td>
<td>G. A wall common to two adjoining buildings or rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. It’s like talking to a brick wall</td>
<td>H. Eccentric or unconventional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lists**

“I make lists ALL the time” Why do you think Ned likes making lists?

- “‘Secret Sleuth’, number one of my top ten favourite books.” What are your top ten favourite books?
“Lemurs are number one of my top twenty-five best animals.”
What are your top ten favourite animals?
And did you know that in French the words le mur mean ‘the wall’?!

Get a notebook and start making and collecting your own lists! Here are some you might want to include: ‘My five worst dinners’; ‘My ten best things to do’; ‘Ten reasons why I like my family’.

Custardophobia!
“The thing I have nightmares about. Nightmares that wake me screaming in terror . . . CUSTARD.”

A phobia is an extreme fear of something. What started Ned’s extreme fear of custard? And what is Bill’s deep fear?

Here are the names of some phobias which many people have. Their descriptions have been muddled up—see if you can match each phobia to its correct description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phobia</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Agoraphobia</td>
<td>a. Fear of spiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ornithophobia</td>
<td>b. Fear of being enclosed in small spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Claustrophobia</td>
<td>c. Fear of dentist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Arachnophobia</td>
<td>d. Fear of sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Somniphobia</td>
<td>e. Fear of open spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Zoophobia</td>
<td>f. Fear of numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dentophobia</td>
<td>g. Fear of birds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Arithmophobia

Longer activities

Walls—make one house into two!

Here is a floor plan of the ground floor of a house.

Have a go at drawing a floor plan of your house—downstairs, upstairs, or both.

Imagine you are one of Ned’s parents and you are trying to divide the house into two parts. Can you find a way of doing this with your house? Where might you put in a wall, or walls?

If it looks too difficult to do this with your house, have a go at dividing up the ground floor of the house in the plan above.

Talk about walls!

Make a PowerPoint presentation called ‘Walls’.

You could do this in a group, planning and researching the content together.

Decide what you could include in your talk, for example
* What are walls? What are they for?
* What kind of walls are there (e.g. house, garden)?
* What could they be made of?
* Famous walls (e.g. Hadrian’s Wall, the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall).

**Walls game**

Make your own *Walls* board game!

You could invent one of your own or try making this one:

- Get a sheet of stiff card at least 20 cm by 20cm. This is your board.
- Divide it into squares. Have at least 25 squares, with five columns across and five rows down.
- Number the squares from 1 to 25 (or whatever number of squares you have).
- On square 1 write ‘START’, and on the last square write ‘FINISH’.
- Choose eight squares at random across the board and make the lines around each square thicker (to look like walls!).
- Decorate your board however you like. You could draw scenes of the beach and the caves, pictures of characters from the story, or wall patterns or graffiti.
- Then make a set of 50 playing cards with text as follows:
  - 8 cards which say **WALLBOGLER!**
  - 12 cards which say **BUSY SORTING MY BOOKS AND PENCILS – MISS A GO!**
  - 2 cards for each of the following:
    - I go to my favourite spot. Forward 2 spaces.
    - I am horrible to Isabel. Back 3 spaces.
    - I am angry about the walls. Forward 3 spaces.
    - I sleepwalk. Forward 1 space.
    - I steal the jar of Swizzlers. Back 2 spaces.
    - I make some lists. Forward 2 spaces.
    - I share a diary activity with Maddie. Forward 2 spaces.
    - I read Matilda Arkle’s diary. Forward 1 space.
    - I pretend to be a poltergeist. Forward 2 spaces.
- I hide under Bill’s bed. Back 1 space.
- I make a trap for Bill. Back 2 spaces.
- I help Grace. Forward 2 spaces.
- I try to make friends again with Bill. Forward 2 spaces.
- I save Bill’s life. Forward 3 spaces.
- I manage to eat some custard! Forward 4 spaces.

To play your game:

- Shuffle the cards and place the pack face down by the board.
- The first player takes a card and does what the card says, then puts the card in the discard pile. If it’s not possible to move—for example if the card says ‘Back’ and you are still at the start—stay put and wait for your next go.
- If you land on a square which has thick sides all around it you will have to wait until you get a WALLBOGGLER! card, and then you can move to the next square.
- Each player in turn takes a card, does what it says, and then discards it.
- When all of the cards are in the discard pile, take the pile, shuffle it, place it face down, and carry on as before.
- The winner is the first person to get to the FINISH square.

Traps—a challenge!

“There is a fine art to the creation of traps.”

Ned’s ancestor Matilda Arkle is an expert at making traps for people. Have a look at what she says about them and then design a trap of your own. You could draw it or write about it, BUT here’s a challenge: see if you can invent a trap which will give someone a NICE surprise!

Writing activities

Walls—take another point of view

In Walls, Ned is telling us his story in the first person. He describes everything from his point of view. What might the story be like if you told it from someone else’s point of view? Imagine you are the Clodd and write an email from the Clodd to her little sister Ruby, telling her about meeting Ned, the boy next door.
The locked room in the cellar: write your own adventure!
In Ned’s house there is a locked room full of family papers—the history of Ned’s family. He wallboggles his way in to find the documents.

Starting with Ned’s words, write your own story about a locked room. How long has it been locked? Do you know why it was locked? How might you open it? What might you find or what might happen when you open it?!

The Locked Room

But we did have a LOCKED room. A locked room inside the cellar, the door with the missing key. The one with no way in . . .
First sentences

‘A wall?’ I said, and I gaped . . .

The first sentence of any story is important for setting the scene and for catching your attention. What does the first sentence of *Walls* tell you about Ned? Does it give you an idea of what the story will be about?

Look at the first sentences of some of your favourite books and think about how they work. Did they get you wanting to read more straight away?

Below are some first sentences from some well-known books. Can you give the titles of the books? You could choose one of these beginnings and use it to start a new story of your own!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST LINE</th>
<th>BOOK TITLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. These two very old people are the father and mother of Mr. Bucket.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Here is Edward Bear, coming down the stairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. A mouse took a stroll through the deep dark wood.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A fox saw the mouse and the mouse looked good.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Where are you going to, little brown mouse? Come and have lunch in my underground house.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. That Spot! He hasn’t eaten his supper. Where can he be?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and their names were – Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind and another, his mother called him ‘WILD THING!’ and Max said ‘I’LL EAT YOU UP!’ so he was sent to bed without eating anything.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. One sunny Sunday, the caterpillar was hatched out of a tiny egg. He was very hungry.

8. Once upon a time there were three billy goats, who were to go up to the hillside to make themselves fat, and the name of all three was ‘Gruff’.

9. Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.

10. Mr. and Mrs. Brown first met Paddington on a railway platform. In fact, that was how he came to have such an unusual name for a bear, for Paddington was the name of the station.

**Art activities**

**Draw a wall! Any wall!**

Paint or draw a picture of a wall. It could be brick, stone, plaster, or wood; it could be an inside wall, a garden wall, a castle wall, a gallery . . .

You could paint a wall in every detail, a landscape with walls, or an abstract wall pattern.

**Graffiti, murals, and cave paintings**

Find out about the different kinds of art that you can find painted or sprayed on walls.

‘Dead Ladybird Under Leaves in the Moonlight’

“. . . she [Isabel] put one last dab of paint on a big splatty mess – swirls of greens and browns with one red splodge . . . ‘It is a SAD painting’, she said . . .”

This is what Ned’s sister Isabel painted when she was feeling unhappy. She explains to Ned that it’s about a ladybird who ‘died of SADNESS.’
Create your own SAD—or HAPPY—picture. What is the story of your picture and what will you call it?

More reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>More books by Emma Fischel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witchworld</td>
<td>Nosy Crow</td>
<td>978-0857634177</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Witchmyth</td>
<td>Nosy Crow</td>
<td>978-0857634245</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Witchwild</td>
<td>Nosy Crow</td>
<td>978-0857634986</td>
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<td>Ghosts &amp; poltergeists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eva Ibbotson</td>
<td>The Secret of Platform 13</td>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td>978-1447265719</td>
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<td>Macmillan</td>
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<td>About friends</td>
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<td>Lincoln Peirce</td>
<td>Big Nate</td>
<td>HarperCollins</td>
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<td>Holly Robbins</td>
<td>Sink or Swim</td>
<td>Stripes</td>
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<td>Jacqueline Wilson</td>
<td>Best Friends</td>
<td>Yearling</td>
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<td>Sleuths</td>
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<td>Lauren Child</td>
<td>Ruby Redfort: Look into My Eyes</td>
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<td>Colin King</td>
<td>The Usborne Official Spy’s Handbook</td>
<td>Usborne</td>
<td>978-1409584384</td>
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<td>Tom McLaughlin</td>
<td>The Accidental Secret Agent</td>
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<td>Allen &amp; Unwin</td>
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Answers

Walls word search

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Quiz

1a; 2c; 3c; 4b; 5b; 6a; 7a; 8b; 9b; 10b & c; 11a; 12c

Nicknames

- Maddie is The Clodd
- Samuel is Snapper
- Grace is The Great Beauty

Sayings about walls

1 D; 2 G; 3 H; 4 A; 5 F; 6 C; 7 E; 8 B

Custardophobia!

1e; 2g; 3b; 4a; 5d; 6h; 7c; 8f
First sentences

1. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Roald Dahl & Quentin Blake)
2. Winnie the Pooh (A. A. Milne & Ernest Shepard)
3. The Gruffalo (Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler)
4. Where’s Spot? (Eric Hill)
5. The Tale of Peter Rabbit (Beatrix Potter)
6. Where the Wild Things Are (Maurice Sendak)
7. The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Eric Carle)
8. The Three Billy Goats Gruff (Traditional)
9. Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone (J. K. Rowling)
10. A Bear Called Paddington (Michael Bond)