

TEXT	<i>FIVE CHILDREN AND IT</i> (1902)
AUTHOR	Edith Nesbit
THEMES	Holidays (unit 3), houses and homes (unit 4), city living (unit 11), life experiences (unit 13)
VOCABULARY	Houses, holidays, the countryside
WRITING	Students write holiday postcards.
SPEAKING	Students debate the pros and cons of city versus country life.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Edith Nesbit (1858–1924) was an innovative writer of children's fiction and her influence cannot be overstated (see portrait on the Worksheet). In a sense, she invented the modern children's adventure novel and created a template for writers as diverse as C.S. Lewis, Enid Blyton and J.K. Rowling to follow. This template defined both the realistic story (*The Railway Children*) and the fantasy tale (*Five Children and It*). Nesbit's work has never been out of print and the latter novel was made into a successful film in 2007. Inevitably, there is a lot of period detail in her stories that sounds strange to a young person today, but her deep sense of childhood's hopes and fears touch on timeless issues. Nesbit's personal and professional life was unusual for her time – a committed socialist, a non-conformist, an outspoken critic of the status quo – she was admired and respected by contemporaries including Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw.

### WARMER

Find three or four pictures of different kinds of houses in the country (a very pretty one, a rather Gothic one, a very modern one, for example). Ask students to talk about which they would like to spend a holiday in, and why / why not.

### ABOUT YOU

Use the discussion questions to get students thinking about the differences between town/city life and life in the country. They will use these themes again in the Speaking activity.

Read the introduction and establish that the children have never seen the house. As an extra topic, you could ask how they think life was different for children at that time.

**1** This is a good text to read out loud. If you do that, practise beforehand, and try to give different pitch or volume to the various voices in order to make it more dramatic. After reading, ask students for their ideas about the question.

#### Possible answers

Very excited – they are looking for the house and asking if they are there. They want to get there and see it as soon as possible.

**2**

#### Possible answers

1 The colour (white), the roses, the plums and that's it's nice  
2 They are poor and don't go to things like the theatre or buy things. They don't go away from London and they don't have many things to play with.

3 They can go to places to do things and touch things. There are not so many rules for them.

4 The text gives no clues for this, so students can imagine whatever they want. You might want to elicit suggestions – they already know the house has a garden and an orchard. What else might it have at the back? What might make them so sure they are going to enjoy themselves? Possible suggestions could include: a swimming pool, a river, a tree-house, a lake, a wood, etc.

### VOCABULARY

**3**

#### Answers

1 seaside 2 roses 3 orchard 4 plums

**4**

#### Answers

This can be done as a game. Make groups. Each group writes an example for Question 1. Each group reads out their answer. If you think the answer is good, they get two points. If two or more groups give the same answer, they get one point. Continue with Question 2 and so on. At the end, the questions can be repeated. Obviously, the longer you go on, the more challenging it is for students to think of examples!

### WRITING

**5** You might want to talk a little about postcards first. If possible, find (or write) some examples of 'having a lovely time, the weather is nice and I am going swimming every day'-type postcards. Do people still send postcards? Why? / Why not? Would it be nicer to get a postcard than a text message? Using the prompts, students write their postcards. If they make the postcards to size, they can also draw a picture of the house on the other side as they imagine it.

### SPEAKING

**6** This is a debate activity. If the class is small enough, divide the class in half and get them to prepare their ideas. You chair the debate and invite the groups to explain their ideas. You can decide at the end which group made the strongest arguments.

#### MIXED ABILITY

For this activity divide the class into four groups. Divide each group into two teams, a pro-city and a pro-country team. Make a further group of strong students who are going to chair the debate. Give the students about 15 minutes to prepare their ideas. Give the third group some basic guidelines on leading a debate (you can find these online by searching *basic debate guidelines for middle/secondary school*). They go through these while the other groups are working on their arguments. One or two of the stronger students then lead the debate between the two sides (it's probably a good idea to set a time limit). Finally, get each debate leader to tell the class which group made the most convincing arguments.