

The chicken gave it to me

Andrew laid it on Gemma's desk. A cloud of farmyard dust puffed up in her face. The first thing she asked when she stopped sneezing was:

"Where did you get that?"

"The chicken gave it to me."

"What chicken? How could a chicken give it to you? It's a *book*."

It was, too. A tiny little book. The cover was just a bit of old farm sack with edges that looked as if they had been – yes, well – *pecked*. And the writing was all thin and scratchy and – there's no way round this – *chickeny*.

"This is ridiculous! Chickens can't write books. Chickens can't *read*."

"The chicken gave it to me," Andrew repeated helplessly.

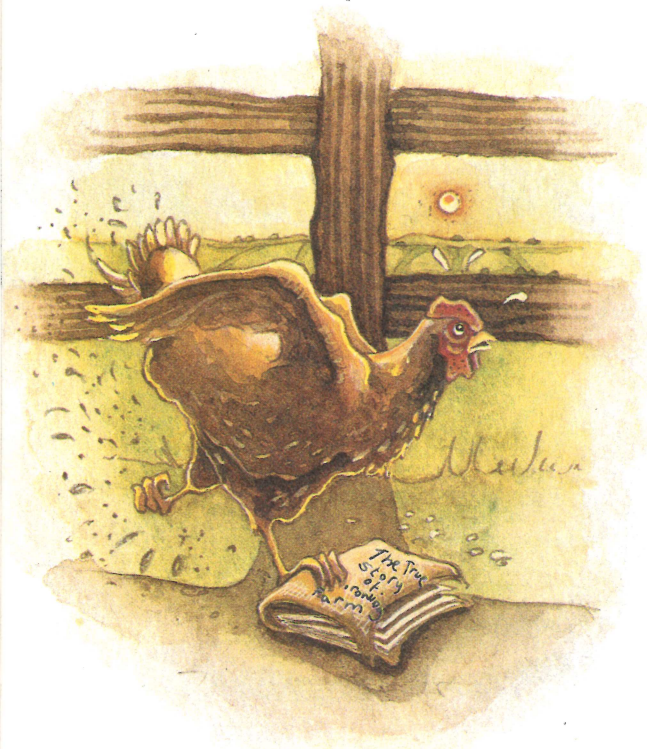
"But *how*?"

So Andrew told her how he'd been walking past the fence that ran round the farm sheds, and suddenly this chicken had leaped out in front of him in the narrow pathway.

"Pounced on me, really."

"Don't be silly, Andrew. Chickens don't pounce."

"This one did," Andrew said stubbornly. "It fluttered and squawked and made the most tremendous fuss. I was quite frightened. And it kept pushing this book at me with its scabby little foot – just pushing the book towards me whichever way I stepped. The chicken was absolutely determined I should take it."



Gemma sat back in her desk and stared. She stared at Andrew as if she'd never even seen him before, as if they hadn't been sharing a desk for weeks and weeks, borrowing each other's rubbers, getting on one another's nerves, telling each other secrets. She thought she knew him well. Had he gone mad?

"Have you gone *mad*?"

Andrew leaned closer and hissed rather fiercely in her ear.

"Listen," he said. "I didn't *choose* to do this, you know. I didn't *want* this to happen. I didn't get out of bed this morning and fling back the curtains and say to myself, 'Heigh-ho! What a great day to walk to school down the path by the farm sheds, minding my own business, and get attacked by some ferocious hen who has decided I am the one to read his wonderful book -'"

"Her wonderful book," interrupted Gemma. "Hens aren't him. They're all her. That's how they get to lay eggs."

Andrew chose to ignore this.

"Well," he said. "That's what happened. Believe me or don't believe me. I don't care. I'm simply telling you that this chicken stood there making a great fuss and kicking up a storm until I reached down to pick up her dusty little book. Then she calmed down and strolled off."

"Not strolled, Andrew," Gemma said. "Chickens don't stroll. She may have strutted off. Or even -"

But Andrew had shoved his round little face right up close to Gemma's, and he was hissing again.

"Gemma! This is *important*. Don't you *see*?"

And, all at once, Gemma believed him. Maybe she'd gone mad too. She didn't know. But she didn't think Andrew was making it up, and she didn't think Andrew was dreaming.

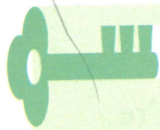
The chicken gave it to him.

She picked it up. More dust puffed out as, carefully, she stretched the sacking cover flat on her desk to read the scratchy chicken writing of the title.

The True Story of Harrowing Farm

Opening it to the first page, she slid the book until it was exactly halfway between the two of them.

Together they began to read. ➡



Answer in sentences.

- 1 What made the book look as if a chicken had made it and written it?
- 2 Explain exactly how Andrew must have been feeling when he repeated helplessly that a chicken had given the book to him.
- 3 What is the difference between strolling and strutting?
- 4 Find the following words in the passage. What other words or phrases could be used instead without changing the meaning?
 - a) ridiculous (paragraph 6)
 - b) ferocious (paragraph 16)
 - c) ignore (paragraph 18)
- 5 Several words are used in the passage that are to do with different ways of saying something. Explain clearly the special meaning of the following words.
 - a) repeat
 - b) interrupt
 - c) hiss
- 6 Why did Gemma believe Andrew in the end? Explain what was convincing about the way Andrew told his story.
- 7 What do you find out about what Gemma's personality is like from this passage? Include all the details you can find.