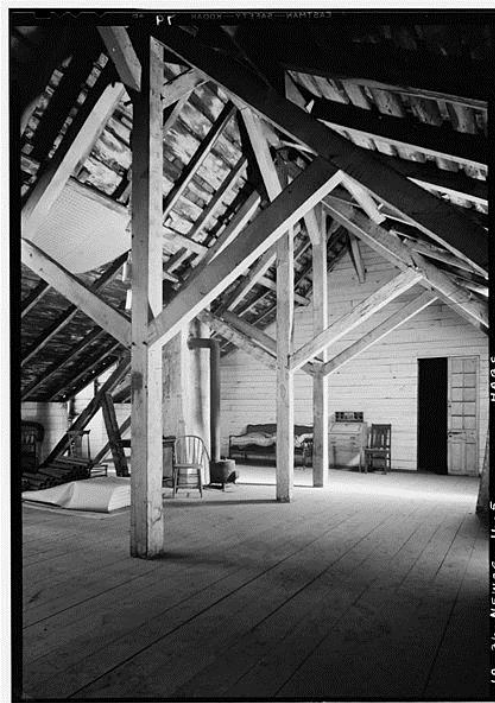


# The Spookiest Attic

W.M. Akers



I hear sounds coming from up above my head. I try to sleep, but the tighter I close my eyes, the louder the noises seem to get. It sounds like someone dragging a rake across a chalkboard. Or...no, it's more like a bunch of marbles falling onto a linoleum floor. No, not that either. Tonight the sound could be two dozen maracas, rolling back and forth on a lazily tossing boat.

Whatever it is, it's scaring me to death. My name is Drew, and I sleep in the bedroom just underneath the attic. At least, I'm *supposed* to sleep there. Ever since the noise started, I can barely catch four winks, much less 40 of them. It's not the sound that bothers me so much as the pictures it puts in my head. Stuff like a rake on a chalkboard. Who could sleep while that's running through their brain?

Well, as my mother likes to say, I've had enough of this nonsense. Tonight I'm getting to the bottom of this. The only problem is, even before the noises started, the attic wasn't my favorite part of the house. In fact, it was my least favorite place—not just in the house, but in the whole world. A lot of people have spooky attics, but ours is the spookiest.

We live in a big old house—my dad says it's "rambling"—and the attic is way bigger than it needs to be. The lights don't work very well, and there are all sorts of shadowy corners behind clothes chests and boxes that have been there since long before we moved in. We really have *no idea* what is up there, and I can't imagine anything scarier than that.

Except, except...except whatever it is that's making these noises.

Tonight I'm not going to let my imagination run wild. I grip my dad's most powerful flashlight in the hand and check to make sure the batteries are working. I have spares in my backpack, just in case they run out. I also have a water bottle, a sandwich, some chips, and a few cookies in case I get stranded up there. Most importantly, I have my music player. This is crucial because everyone knows that monsters can't get at you as long as you've got music to keep you safe. I jam the headphones into my ears and turn the music up *loud*.

My parents have been asleep for hours when I open the creaky attic door and climb the steps into the darkness. The flashlight beam sweeps ahead of me, illuminating trunks and piles of junk and who knows what else. I creep across the dusty floor, moving slowly and making

sure not a single part of the attic escapes my flashlight's glare. I ignore my sweaty palms, pounding heart, and the sickening sensation in my stomach that I am making a *very bad mistake*. This isn't about facing my fears, I tell myself. It's about getting some sleep. If I can't sleep, I can't study. If I can't study, I'll flunk out of school and have to join the circus. And the fact is I don't like the circus one bit.

I'm thinking so hard about how much I don't want to join the circus that I space out a little and am shocked to find myself all the way at the other end of the attic. I didn't find anything at all. If there are monsters up here, they must be better at hiding than I am at looking. Only now do I realize how far I am from the stairs. This attic is long, dark and full of secrets. And I have to walk back across. More importantly, I *have* to find out what's making the skittering noise, or this whole trip was a waste. I take out my headphones and wait for the monsters to strike. They leave me alone...for now.

I hear the noise coming from far away. It's not just right above my bedroom, but seems to be coming from several different directions at once. My ears are playing tricks on me, I think. This is what happens when you don't get enough sleep. I walk toward the place where the noise is the loudest, my quivering flashlight held straight out in front of my body. There are three boxes stacked on top of one another with writing too small for me to read. I get closer, and the noise gets louder. A label on the box, written in faded marker, reads "Toys."

Of course! It's a box of old toys, probably from a hundred years ago or more. There are probably some wind-up toys in there, and somehow they've gotten wound. Each night they rattle up against each other, and each night they keep me awake. All I have to do is take the toys out of the box, and they'll quiet down.

I stand on my tiptoes, trying to reach the upper box of toys. I'm just getting a grip on it, when it slips out of my sweaty palms. It flips over, dumping its contents all over me. My head takes the blow from a bunch of heavy old toys, and my body is covered in 15 or 20 thousand creepy, crawly, fuzzy spiders.

Sometimes, it's not possible to scream loud enough. I run as fast as I can back to the stairs, knocking spiders off my body with both hands. I must have dropped the flashlight along the way, because it's dark when I get back downstairs, and I can't see whether I've gotten all the spiders off me until my mom turns on the hallway light.

"Drew!" she says. "What's wrong?"

"I want to switch bedrooms," I tell her. "And you need to hire an exterminator."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why is Drew not able to sleep?

- A** The noises coming from up above his head are too loud.
- B** His mom turns on the hallway light and starts talking.
- C** The attic in his house has shadowy corners.
- D** He is worried that he will have to join the circus.

2. Where does this story take place?

- A** on a lazily tossing boat
- B** in Drew's house
- C** at Drew's school
- D** at a circus Drew visits

3. Read these sentences from the story: "The only problem is, even before the noises started, the attic wasn't my favorite part of the house. In fact, it was my least favorite place—not just in the house, but in the whole world. A lot of people have spooky attics, but ours is the spookiest."

What can be concluded from these sentences?

- A** Drew likes the attic because it is interesting.
- B** Drew likes the attic because it is noisy.
- C** Drew dislikes the attic because it is spooky.
- D** Drew dislikes the attic because it is boring.

4. Why does Drew explore the attic?

- A** He wants to find out what is making the noises he hears from his bedroom.
- B** He wants to try dragging a rake across a chalkboard while his parents are asleep.
- C** He wants to find some of his old toys to play with because he cannot fall asleep.
- D** He wants to have an adventure without leaving the house where he lives.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A** how much fun old toys can be
- B** how nice mothers can be
- C** how boring a circus can be
- D** how scary an attic can be

6. Read the following sentences: "My name is Drew, and I sleep in the bedroom just underneath the attic. At least, I'm *supposed* to sleep there. Ever since the noise started, I **can barely catch four winks, much less 40 of them.**"

What does Drew mean when he says that he "**can barely catch four winks, much less 40 of them**"?

- A He means that his eyes are itching and causing him to wink.
- B He means that he used to be able to wink forty times in a row.
- C He means that he is having trouble sleeping.
- D He means that he sleeps very well every night.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Drew does not find monsters in the attic; \_\_\_\_\_, he finds spiders.

- A including
- B instead
- C therefore
- D for instance

8. After Drew knocks the box over in the attic, the toys that were inside it fall on top of him. What else from the box falls on him?

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9. Describe what Drew does after the contents of the box fall on him.

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10. Will Drew be able to sleep better now that he knows the cause of the noises in the attic? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 850

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8. After Drew knocks the box over in the attic, the toys that were inside it fall on top of him. What else from the box falls on him?

**Suggested answer:** Spiders fall on him. (Students may specify "15 or 20 thousand creepy, crawly, fuzzy spiders.")

9. Describe what Drew does after the contents of the box fall on him.

**Suggested answer:** Responses may vary in degree of detail but should all reflect the text. Drew runs out of the attic, brushing spiders off his body. He drops the flashlight along the way. When he sees his mom in the hallway, he tells her that he wants to switch bedrooms and that she needs to hire an exterminator.

10. Will Drew be able to sleep better now that he knows the cause of the noises in the attic? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the passage. For example, students may respond that Drew will be able to sleep better. The imaginary pictures running through his head at night and keeping him awake will go away now that he knows the true cause of the noises. Conversely, students may respond that Drew will not be able to sleep better. The experience of discovering the spiders was so scary that falling asleep may be even harder for him now that knows what lurks above his bedroom.