

The Curse

Word Work

“.....the letters could still be faintly seen”

The author uses the passive voice, with a modal verb, to tell us that something could have happened.

For a little while the letters could still be faintly seen; then they were gone forever.

Think back to the text. What were ‘the letters’ that are referred to? Who could see them? Why were they then gone for ever?

What was your answer to the second question – who could see the letters? The correct answer is either ‘we don’t know’ or ‘anyone’. That is the way the passive voice works sometimes – we use it to talk about some action when the subject either isn’t important to us, or we don’t know who it is.

In this case, however, we do know who the subject is – it is ‘people’ – anyone. The author might have written

For a little while, people could still faintly see the letters.

Why didn’t he? There was a poignant purpose in using the passive. As we know, there was no one left alive to read the words! The implication that ‘people’ could see the letters is chilling. It is almost as if the writer had used the so-called third conditional

If there had been people alive, they would still have been able to see the letters.

He didn’t need to. The economy of words has a much stronger effect.

He does the same thing here, increasing the effect of there being no one left alive:

Yet still the graven words could be clearly read.....

.....the archaic words could still be traced as the water rose around them.....

Over to you

1. See how much of an author you can be by turning these sentences into passive voice sentences. Make sure you use a suitable modal verb – could, should, would etc – in every case.

1. It was so dark I could hardly see the road signs.

2. She could still remember what he looked like years later.

3. They saw him walking down the hill carrying a heavy box.

4. They are able to respond to a threat of attack within four minutes.

5. They will probably be able to see the difference between a friend and an enemy.

6. If there had been the slightest misunderstanding then they might have destroyed the world.

2. Write sentences using the passive voice plus 'could' or 'should' about possible situations in **one** of the following contexts:

People living during World War 1 (1914-18)

(e.g. *It was believed that peace could be achieved by Christmas 1914*)

People living during World War 2 (1939-1945)

People who lived during the period of 'the Discoveries'

The Curse

Glossary

The following words are correct within the context of the story 'The Curse' but may be different in other contexts.

Armada	reference to the invasion fleet assembled by Philip II of Spain in 1588
banish	remove; take away
blistered	have bubbles created by intense heat
bloomed	flowered; grow rapidly
brushed aside	defeated easily
corpse-light	reference to a candle placed by graves of the dead
gazed	stared; looked at in reverence
glare	brilliant light
glimmering	shining faintly
glow	giving low light
graven	cut (in stone)
mutely	without sound or words
overflowed	level of water exceeded sides of the river
plaster	<i>estaque</i>
random	without any order or plan
ravening	hungry
ripples	small waves
slabs	blocks of stone
stray	lost; separated from main group
timidly	without much courage
toil	work
twisted	forced into strange shapes
unwavering	continuous

Word focus

There are a number of words which are associated with light that begin with *gl*. In the story we find:

glare
glimmer(ing)
glow

They are not alone. Use a dictionary to find a few more. Then try to put them in order of luminosity!

The Curse

Glossário

As seguintes palavras encontram-se correctas no contexto da história “The Curse” mas podem ter significados diferentes noutros contextos.

Armada	referência à frota invasora de Filipe II de Espanha em 1588
banish	banir; afastar
blistered	com bolhas provocadas por calor intenso
bloomed	florescido; resplandecer
brushed aside	facilmente derrotado(s)
corpse-light	referência à luz emanada das velas colocadas nas campas
gazed	contemplado
glare	claridade; brilho
glimmering	luz fraca; vislumbre
glow	luz sem chama
graven	gravadas, esculpidas na pedra
mutely	mudamente; em silêncio
overflowed	transbordar
plaster	estuque
random	ao acaso; sem ordem
ravening	esfomeado
ripples	pequenas ondas; ondulações
slabs	lajes
stray	perdido; errante
timidly	timidamente; sem grande coragem
toil	trabalho
twisted	contorceu(-se)
unwavering	contínuo; constante