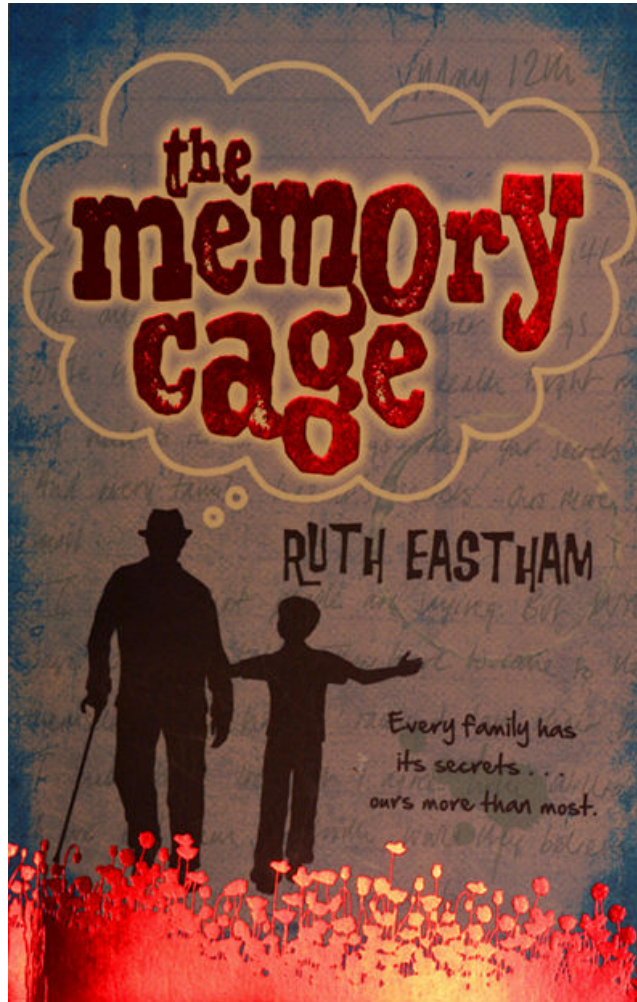


# The Memory Cage

by

Ruth Eastham



## Chapter-by-Chapter Reading Guide

**Reading Guide for 'The Memory Cage' by Ruth Eastham  
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## Forward

Hello. My name is Ruth Eastham and I'm delighted to introduce this study guide created by my good friend, Sarah Brennan. The two of us trained to be teachers in Cambridge together and when I was asked about resources for using *The Memory Cage* in schools, I knew just the person for the job! Sarah has many years of experience and ideas here are based on activities tried and tested in the classroom.

The following *Chapter-by-Chapter Reading Guide* has questions to kick-start discussions as well as suggestions for writing, and you're also welcome to ask for the accompanying *Literacy Study Guide* and *History Study Guide*.

Huge thanks to Sarah for all her tremendous work!

If you'd like to get in touch with comments, or let us know how the lessons worked in your school, our e-mail address is:

[contact@rutheastham.com](mailto:contact@rutheastham.com)

All the best,



Hi, I'm Sarah and I've been teaching for the last 15 years in Havering and Essex. I was thrilled for Ruth when I learnt that she was going to have her book published, and truly delighted to be asked to write this guide.

Ever since I've known her, Ruth has loved to write. In *The Memory Cage* she couples her skills as a writer and her artist's eye (she's also a talented photographer) to create vivid descriptions and a sensitively handled, moving story about the relationship between a grandfather and grandson. Her characters are keen to 'cage' their memories for different reasons - until they do, they are unable move on with their lives.

I hope these guides are helpful as you enjoy Ruth's book with your class.



## ***The Memory Cage - guided reading prompts***

Here are a selection of questions for you to choose from, linked to the UK National Curriculum APP reading grids (AF = Assessment Focus).

These may be used during whole class or group reading.

Where the contents of a chapter may need explanation for the benefit of younger readers, ideas for *Before Reading* have been included.

There are also discussion points and reading journal activities that could be used at the end of each chapter.

To download APP grids for assessment and guidance on how to use them to reach levels, please go to:

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/assessment>

**Prologue - page 1**

AF2 - What does this passage say about our reasons for writing?

**Discussion** - What do you think the writer means by 'Before then, I didn't exist'.

**Reading journal** - write down your earliest memory. How does it differ from the one mentioned on page 1?

## **Part 1 - The Promise**

**Chapter 1 - Trying To Put It Out of My Mind - page 5**

**Before reading** - What kinds of things do you 'put out of your mind'?

AF2 - Who are the key characters in this chapter?

AF2 - What is Alex worrying about on page 14?

AF3 - What makes us think that Leonard dislikes Alex?

AF3 - How do we know that Alex thinks that he doesn't fit into this family?

AF3 - Do you think Grandad should be put into a home? Find evidence to support your opinion.

AF4 - Why does the author use italics on page 8?

**Discussion** - Do you think this family is happy?

**Reading journal** - Write about what you know so far about each family member.

## Chapter 2 – Grandad Makes Me Promise – page 15

**Before reading** - What promise do you think he makes?  
Do you think Alex will be able to keep it?

AF2 - Who were Alex's Bosnian family?

AF3 - Why do you think Alex reacted in the way he did to '*Stupid Tie Mart*' on page 16?

AF3 - How are Alex and Grandad similar in the way they deal with events in their past?

AF4 - Which words does the author use to make the figure in the photo seem menacing on page 20?

AF5 - '*The paper quivered, dripping water on to the bench like spots of blood*' (page 20). How does this simile effect the mood here?

**Discussion** - Grandad says on page 18 that '*Ignorance is bliss*'. Is he right to think this? Can you think when this might be true?

**Reading journal** - Begin a list of Grandad's and Alex's memories (a 'memory list' for each) to be carried on during the story as they surface (see pages 16 and 18).

## Chapter 3 – The Forbidden Word – page 22

**Before reading** - Why might words be 'forbidden'?

AF2 - What information has Lia got for Alex?

AF3 - Why do you think Alex doesn't want to read the leaflet or discuss it with Lia?

AF3 - Find reasons in this chapter why Leonard seems to hate Alex.

AF3 - What other words could be 'forbidden words' in this chapter, apart from 'Alzheimer's'?

**Discussion** - How would you feel if your parents adopted another child?

**Reading journal** - Write a letter to Alex, advising him how to deal with Leonard.

## Chapter 4 – Mind Games – page 29

**Before reading** – What do you think '*mind games*' are?

AF2 – What causes Alex to have a flashback at the fete?

AF3 – What do we find out about Mum's character in this chapter?

AF3 – In chapter 1, Alex's focus is on keeping Grandad out of an old people's home. What does he decide to do by the end of this chapter in order to achieve this?

AF5 – Why does the author use '*sharks*' in the simile about memories near the top of page 34?

AF4 – Look at pages 40 and 42: '*getting worse*', '*aggressive*', '*judging me*', '*traitor*', '*murder*'. What effect has the author created by writing these words and phrases in this way?

AF5 – How does the repetition of the word 'sick' make what is said more effective on page 43?

**Discussion** – Should children be carers? Do you think it is right that Alex looks after Grandad for the family?

**Reading journal** – Read the description of Aunt Mildred on pages 31 and 32. Draw a picture of her.  
Think of 5 words to describe her yourself.

## Chapter 5 – Lest I Forget – page 44

**Before reading** – What does the chapter heading mean?

AF5 – What has the author done on pages 51 to 52 to recreate a telephone conversation?

AF3 – How do you think Grandad got his black eye?

**Discussion** – Why has the author chosen '*Lest I Forget*' as a chapter heading?

**Reading journal** – Add page 44 to the 'memory list'.  
With a talk partner, think of reasons for and against putting Grandad in a care home. Be ready to feed back to the class.

## Chapter 6 - White Feather - page 56

**Before reading** - find out if the children know about the significance of the white feather (given to cowards).

AF5 - Look at the questions in the middle and bottom of page 64.

How does the use of questions here encourage us to read on?

AF3 - Look near the top of page 65. Why do you think Alex gave up believing in fairy tales when he was 7?

AF5 - Read the description of the view in the middle of page 65.

Which words has the author chosen to create a foreboding atmosphere?

AF3 - Read the bottom of page 65, page 66 and 67.

How does the author link memories to the action of the sea?

**Discussion** - Read the middle of page 67 '*what was somebody without their memories?*

Can you still be the same person without your memories?

**Reading journal** - Add flashback at bottom of page 69 to 'memory list'.

## Part 2 - A Scrapbook of Memories

### Chapter 7 - Freda and Tommie - page 75

**Before reading** - Ask if anyone has kept a scrapbook, look at current trend for 'scrapbooking' and journaling. What kinds of things could you include in a scrapbook?

AF3 - From what we already know, why would Alex want to hide his Bosnian photos? (towards bottom of page 76)

AF5 - Read the top of page 78: '*That is, until Mum gave me that album.*

Why has the author put this line on its own?

AF5 - Look at the simile the middle of page 82:

*'My past, waiting in the shadows like an enemy. Waiting to jump out on me. Ambush me.'*

How does the use of '*enemy*' and '*ambush*' link to the flashback at the top of page 82?

AF3 - What is the significance of the carnation mentioned in the middle of page 85? Where have we come across one before?



**Discussion** - Why do you think Grandad reacts so badly to the photo?  
Who do you think might be after him and what evidence are they trying to get rid of?

**Reading journal** - Write a diary entry as Alex recalling Grandad's reaction to the man in the photo.

### Chapter 8 - Mr Webb - page 87

AF4 - Why are '*really*' and '*pretending*' in italics at the top of page 90?

AF6 - Reread page 91.

*'I had an uneasy feeling ... keep hidden?'*

*'Maybe it ... memories buried.'*

*'A life ... look at again!'*

How do these views affect your own views about memories?

AF5 - Look at the paragraph in the middle of page 93:

*'The damp grass ... shudder and hurried on.'*

What atmosphere is the author trying to create?

AF3 - On pages 94 and 95, how do we know that Mr Webb dislikes Grandad?

AF3 - Look at the bottom of page 95.

Do you get the impression that being a 'conchie' is a good or bad thing? What do you think it means?

AF4 - Read the bottom of page 97: *'Footsteps.*

*Getting closer.'*

What atmosphere do sentence length and new lines help create?

AF5 - Why has the author used the adjective '*jagged*' at the top of page 98?

AF3 - Who do you think is talking to Alex at the end of the chapter?

**Discussion** - Is it better to talk about painful things, or to bury them?

**Reading journal** - List the words and phrases used to create a scary atmosphere in the middle of page 93:

*'The damp grass ... shudder and hurried on.'*

## Chapter 9 – Reverend Posselthwaite – page 99

AF2 – Why does Reverend Posselthwaite take rubbings of headstones?

AF2 – What is 'conchie' slang for?

AF3 – Why did Alex say '*There didn't seem to be anything fine...*' about the memorial inscribed '*Our Finest Hour*' (top of page 102)?

AF2 – How did the locals react to the memorial?

AF5 – Read the last sentence (page 106).

How does this make you want to read on?

**Discussion** – What ways are the dead remembered in this book?  
(flashbacks, photos, headstones, memorials, statues, poppies)  
Which do you think are more appropriate?  
Are there other ways to remember the dead?  
(Poppy Day, November, church services, poems, music etc.)

**Reading journal** – Compare Reverend Posselthwaite's study (page 103: '*The room ... don't I dear?*') and Grandad's Den (page 60: '*In one corner ... was the train set.*').  
How are they similar or different?  
What do their rooms reveal about their characters?

## Chapter 10 – Messed Up – page 107

**Before reading** – What has been 'messed up' so far?  
What do you think the chapter heading refers to?

AF3 – Who do you think vandalised the dark room?

AF2 – Why does Dad think Grandad did it?

AF2 – Why doesn't Alex want to stop doing the scrapbook?  
(answer on page 112)

AF5 – Why does the author use the word '*cage*'? (bottom page 112)

AF5 – What impact do the short sentences have as used on page 113:  
'*I kicked the wall ... Not by a long way.*'

AF5 – Read the description of Mildred at the end of the chapter. Which words/phrases are used to show us that Alex dislikes her?

**Discussion** – What do you think happened in the fire on page 109?

**Reading journal** – Use a speech bubble and write what Alex feels like saying in the action paragraph on page 113:  
'*I kicked the wall ... Not by a long way.*'

## Chapter 11 - The Grandfather Clock - page 114

AF2 - What did Grandad do during the war, according to Aunt Mildred?

AF3 - What sort of a person is Aunt Mildred?

Use the text to back up your answer.

AF4 - Why have numbers been used in the text at the top of page 117?

AF3 - Why does Alex compare secrets to brambles/coffins on page 118?

**Discussion** - What would you do if you had found the key?

What do you think Alex will do? Why?

**Reading journal** - Make a time line for granddad, using the new information given in this chapter:

War

Becomes a Conscientious Objector

Takes war photos

Brother Tommie marries Freda

Dunkirk

Brother Tommie dies

Grandad marries Freda

## Chapter 12 - Photographic Memory - page 120

**Before reading** - What does it mean to have a photographic memory?

AF3 - Why doesn't Alex tell Lia about the key?

AF3 - How do we know that Alex has doubts about Grandad?

(middle page 122 'The perfect place to murder someone...')

AF5 - Why does the author use the present verb tense at the top of page 126, when Grandad talks about Tommie?

AF5 - Read through the flashback on page 129. Find the powerful verbs. How do these help us picture frantic action?

**Discussion** - If Grandad didn't fight, how could he be brave?

In partners, one of you must try to explain this as if you were talking to local people during the war, whilst the other is a local person who is against 'conchies'.

**Reading journal** - Add flashbacks to the 'memory list'.

### Chapter 13 – Cocodriles and Transhlers – page 130

**Before reading** - Why have the words been spelt in this way?  
Who used these words in chapter 1 (bottom page 7)?

AF5 - Read '*Cocodriles ... under the door.*' (top page 132)

Why has the author used the word '*scuttled*'?

AF5 - Read '*Moonlight ... like teeth.*' (bottom page 132 & top of page 133)

Which words/phrases make the room feel ghostly and secretive?

AF2 - What is the room compared to? (page 133)

AF3 - What evidence is there that there has been a fire here?

(page 133 from '*I touched* to page 134 '*had come from.*')

AF4 - Why has the font style changed on page 134?

**Discussion** - (AF7) Alex is somewhere he shouldn't be, doing something he shouldn't be doing.

Have you ever been in a similar situation to Alex?

Did you react in the same way when you were about to be discovered?

Would you have taken the diary to read more?

Why didn't Alex take the diary?

**Reading journal** - Imagine Alex had been discovered in the room.  
Rewrite the end of this chapter.

### Chapter 14 – The Conchie – page 136

AF3 - What kind of a person is Miss Kirby? Find evidence in the text.

AF3 - Why did Grandad react badly to the white pillow feathers in chapter 6?

AF2 - How had local people treated Grandad?

**Discussion** - Apart from what he faced at war, how else was Grandad brave? (standing up for what he believed, facing bullying at home)

**Reading journal** - Write a paragraph where Alex explains to Lia what he has found out so far from Miss Kirby.  
What would Lia advise him to do next?

### **Chapter 15 - May 13<sup>th</sup> 1941 - page 145**

AF2 - What do we find out about Freda and Grandad in the newspaper article?

AF3 - What connection do the headstones in the graveyard in Chapter 5 have with the events in the newspaper article?

AF4 - Why are capital letters used on page 145?

AF4 - Make a list of the font styles used here and the different types of writing that they're used for.

(e.g. bold - newspaper article, capitals - title, gravestones, italics - the book's author.)

**Discussion** - What was the significance of the date in the chapter's title?

**Reading journal** - Add these events to Grandad's timeline.

### **Chapter 16 - War Crimes - page 149**

AF2 - What reasons do Dad and Grandad give for and against Leonard becoming a soldier?

AF5 - Why is the weather warning repeated throughout this chapter?

AF7 - How would you feel if a person you'd saved treated you the way Dad treats Grandad?

**Discussion** - Why doesn't Grandad tell Dad about his role in the war and how he'd saved him as a baby?

**Reading journal** - What are the 'war crimes' in the chapter heading?

(what humans do to each other, Dad's unfair treatment of Grandad, TV news).

What could be an alternative chapter title?

### Chapter 17 - Playing With Fire - page 159

AF2 - What advice does Lia give Alex in this chapter?

(show family the scrapbook, read diary)

AF3 - Why does Alex feel 'queasy'? (middle of page 160)

AF5 - What words and phrases does the author use to show us that Alex is uneasy about going back to the locked room?

**Discussion** - Have you ever been persuaded to do something that you don't want to?

**Reading journal** - Write down 5 adjectives to describe how Alex feels at the end of this chapter.

### Chapter 18 - Grandma's Diary - page 162

AF2 - Compare the start of the diary on page 163 to the front of the book on page 1. How is the passage different?

AF4 - Why use a diary entry within the chapter?

How does it affect us when we read it?

AF4 - Why is the line '*William tried to save Tommie*' (top of page 165) repeated?

**Discussion** - How is Alex like Grandad? (tried to save brother but didn't, feels like an outsider, struggles to contain awful memories)

**Reading journal** - Add events from the diary to Grandad's timeline:

War

Becomes a Conscientious Objector

Takes war photos

Tommie marries Freda

Tommie injured

Dunkirk

Tommie dies

Grandad marries Freda

Peter Webb tampers with Grandad's dark room

Grandma dies

## Chapter 19 – Some Things Best Forgotten – page 168

**Before reading** – Compare this chapter heading to that for chapter 5.  
How are they different?

AF2 – What has happened to Peter Webb?

AF3 – How do you think Alex's 'bad opinion of Mr Webb changed a bit...'  
(top of page 171) after reading the letter?

AF2 – Which events did Reverend Posselthwaite say affected Peter's  
mind?

**Discussion** – Do you think Peter was sorry?

Why had he kept what he had done a secret until now?

**Reading journal** – Write dialogue between Peter Webb and Reverend  
Posselthwaite. What might Peter have said in addition  
to what was in the letter?

## Part 3 – Grand Finales

### Chapter 20 – Red Carnations – page 177

AF2 – What did Alex find out when he looked at the gravestone again?

AF2 – Who had put red carnations on Grandma's grave in Chapter 5?  
(middle of page 46)

AF3 – Why had Grandad vandalised Freda's grave? (answer on page 181)

AF3 – Why did Mildred tell lies about Grandad?

**Discussion** – How are the ways Grandad and Aunt Mildred deal with grief  
different?

**Reading journal** – Write an alternative view of Grandad that Aunt  
Mildred might have told Dad.

## Chapter 21 - The Front Line - page 187

AF3 - What had Tommie meant when he told Grandad to keep shooting?

AF3 - Why had Peter Webb wanted to destroy the photos?

AF6 - What effect does the description of soldiers in the middle of page 190 have on you as a reader, and on your attitude towards war?

AF3 - Grandad did shoot and fight in the war. Explain how.

AF5 - What effect does the last sentence have on both Alex and on us as readers?

**Discussion** - Everything rests on whether Alex can develop the photos.  
Have you ever been in a situation where everything depends on what you do?

**Reading journal** - Write a description of the photo of Tommie.  
(middle of page 191)

## Chapter 22 - Dunkirk - page 193

AF2 - Why had Sophie got on to the boat?

AF3 - What does Grandad mean when he says "*We've got to get our boys out.*" (bottom of page 194)

AF5 - Look at page 194 from after '*The swollen river looked like it was boiling*' to page 195 '*I took hold of the rope attached to the tree.*  
Make a list of all the words used instead of 'said'.  
What do these words tell us about how the characters feel?

**Discussion** - Several 'rescues' are mentioned in this chapter.  
Can you find them?  
(rescue of soldiers in Grandad's mind, the flashback rescue of Nicu and the real time rescue of Sophie)

**Reading journal** - How has Alex and Leonard's relationship changed since chapter 1?



## Chapter 23 - Telling the Truth - page 203

AF3 - What has Grandad won his medal for?

AF3 - Why doesn't Alex feel like a hero?

AF3 - What stopped Grandad from jumping off Doverham cliff?

AF5 - What does the author do on page 209 to show that Alex doesn't want to listen to Miss Kirby?

AF4 - Why do you think the author sets out the last 7 lines in this way?

**Discussion** - Truth changes our opinion about situations and people.  
How is this true in this Chapter?

**Reading journal** - Add to the events in Grandad's timeline:

War

Becomes a Conscientious Objector

Takes war photos

Brother Tommie marries Freda

Tommie injured

Dunkirk

Brother dies

Grandad rescues soldiers

Awarded medal for bravery

Has book of photos published

Grandad marries Freda

Peter Webb tampers with Grandad's dark room

Grandma dies

Depression. Contemplates suicide

Aunt Mildred offers to look after baby

## Chapter 24 - Canute's Sandcastle - page 210

AF4 - '*One big happy family.*' (top of page 211)

Why has this been written on a separate line?

AF2 - Why had Leonard messed up the dark room?

AF4 - Read the bottom of page 216-217, after Alex has told them about Grandad: '*Victoria still had ... a lone seagull shrieked.*'

What do the longer sentences do to the pace of the action?

AF5 - How does the author use the setting to convey Alex's feelings? (top of page 221: '*The clouds ... hidden underneath.*')

**Discussion** - King Canute can't stop the tide coming in. What have Alex and Grandad realised they can't prevent by the end of this chapter?

**Reading Journal** - Write a paragraph where Dad tells Mum how he feels about the events that Saturday.

### **Chapter 25 - Pandora's Box - page 226**

AF3 - What happened to Alex's first family?

AF5 - Why is there a repeat of the front of the book at the end?  
How is it the same and how is it different?

**Discussion** - Can children explain the links between Pandora's Box (mustn't open box, contains bad things, at the end hope for the future is left) and Alex's box (bad memories, his identity recovered and his ability to move on, accept memories are part of him so he can participate in life again)?

## Once the book has been read – Extra Activities:

AF5 - Throughout the story there are links to plays:

- The scene setting at the start of each chapter (except 5 and 25).
- Page 202 - Leonard takes his '*disguise*' off.
- Page 217 - '*I felt like I was watching the two of them in a play.*'
- Page 219 - '*The relief. Like the curtain coming down at the theatre.*'

Why do you think the author did this?

What does it reveal about how Alex feels about his life at the start of the story? (he is acting a part, not revealing his true identity/feelings about the past)

AF6 - What was the most exciting part of the story?

Explain your choice.

AF6 - How have the views about facing the truth, even if it is painful, affected your own views?

AF6 - Why do you think the author chose the title '*The Memory Cage*'?

AF6 - What do you think the writer might feel about war?

Why do you think that the writer holds this opinion?

AF6 - How has the book been successful in making you care about the main characters Alex and Grandad?

AF7 - Have you read a book with a similar theme or issues to this one?

AF7 - Does this story remind you of any of your own experiences?

Describe them.

AF7 - Would you have hidden or buried your memories if you were Alex?

AF7 - How is the story structure similar to others that you've read?

### Reading journal:

- Write a book review explaining why you'd recommend this book.
- Design an alternative front cover and blurb.
- Create a place map charting where the action takes place.  
Label the relevant places and note which chapter they feature in.

*S.Brennan 2010*

**for more about Ruth Eastham, visit her website:  
[www.rutheastham.com](http://www.rutheastham.com)**