

# BOOK STUFF

#27

*"A writer only begins a book. A reader finishes it."* Samuel Johnson

**Island Man** by Grace Nichols

*(for a Caribbean island man in London who still wakes up to the sound of the sea)*

Morning  
and island man wakes up  
to the sound of blue surf  
in his head  
the steady breaking and wombing

wild seabird  
and fisherman pushing out to sea  
the sun surfacing defiantly

from the east  
of his small emerald island  
he always comes back      groggily groggily

Comes back to sands  
of a grey metallic soar  
to surge of wheels  
to dull North Circular roar

muffling muffling  
his crumpled pillow waves  
island man heaves himself

Another London day



## Snap quizzes

Dogs are our best friends! Can you guess which countries these breeds originate from?

1. Shiba Inu
2. Chihuahua
3. Pug
4. Doberman pinscher
5. Labrador retriever

There are over 7,000 islands in the Caribbean archipelago. Can you match these capital cities to some of its 26 countries?

- |                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| 6. Haiti               | i. Havana          |
| 7. Barbados            | ii. Santo Domingo  |
| 8. Cuba                | iii. Bridgetown    |
| 9. Jamaica             | iv. Port au Prince |
| 10. Dominican Republic | v. Kingston        |

## The Mice by Lydia Davis

Mice live in our walls but do not trouble our kitchen. We are pleased but cannot understand why they do not come into our kitchen where we have traps set, as they come into the kitchens of our neighbours. Although we are pleased, we are also upset, because the mice behave as though there were something wrong with our kitchen. What makes this even more puzzling is that our house is much less tidy than the houses of our neighbours. There is more food lying about in our kitchen, more crumbs on the counters and filthy scraps of onion kicked against the base of the cabinets. In fact, there is so much loose food in the kitchen I can only think the mice themselves are defeated by it. In a tidy kitchen, it is a challenge for them to find enough food night after night to survive until spring. They patiently hunt and nibble hour after hour until they are satisfied. In our kitchen, however, they are faced with something so out of proportion to their experience that they cannot deal with it. They might venture out a few steps, but soon the overwhelming sights and smells drive them back into their holes, uncomfortable and embarrassed at not being able to scavenge as they should.

## Identity and change

*My car has had a lot of problems over the years and most of it has had to be replaced: a new engine, a new braking system, new doors, new wheels and more. Is there any sense in which it is the same car?*

This may seem like a trivial question but what if we think about it in relation to ourselves?

'As we go through life, the cells in our body continually die and are replaced.

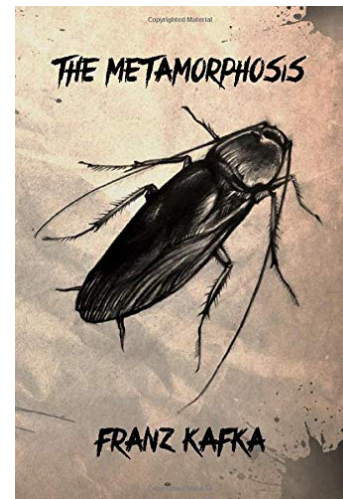
Our thoughts too change, so that little of what was in our heads when we were ten years old remains when we are twenty, and these thoughts, memories, convictions and dispositions are in turn replaced as we grow older.' (Julian Baggini)

If we have an essential identity that survives all this change, what is it?



For a brilliant short story that explores this idea, have a look at Franz Kafka's '**Metamorphosis**'. It starts like this:

'As Gregor Samsa awoke on morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were, armour-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed-quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared with the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes. What has happened to me? He thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, only rather too small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Above the table on which a collection of cloth samples was unpacked and spread out-Samsa was a commercial traveller-hung the picture which we had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put into a pretty gilt frame.'



*With many thanks to our volunteer Remi*

### Answers

- |            |                   |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1. Japan   | 6. Port au Prince |
| 2. Mexico  | 7. Bridgetown     |
| 3. China   | 8. Havana         |
| 4. Germany | 9. Kingston       |
| 5. Mexico  | 10. Santo Domingo |

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