Preparation

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

1……..	conscious	a.	when two things happen at the same time without an explanation
2……..	the subconscious	b.	a ghost
3……..	a spirit	c.	awake, thinking and aware of what is happening around you
4……..	a coincidence	d.	happening without a plan or decision
5……..	to make sense	e.	having a deeper meaning
6……..	symbolic	f.	the part of your mind that you're not completely aware of or in control of
7……..	a plot	g.	to be clear and easy to understand
8……..	by chance	h.	a story

Can you remember a time when you woke up from a fantastic, scary or strange dream? Maybe you were scared and had to turn on the light or the dream was so good you wanted to stay in it longer. Probably, in either case, you forgot most of the details before breakfast. But are dreams just dreams or are they trying to tell you something?

Do dreams predict the future?

For hundreds of years, people have thought gods or spirits communicate with us through our dreams. Even today, many people can remember a time when they saw an event, place or person in their dream and then, later, the dream came true in real life. But it's probably just a coincidence when a dream event is followed by a real-life event that's similar to it, especially if the subject of the dream is something that happens often in everyday life. Most people have four to six dreams every night after the age of ten. That's as many as 2,000 dreams per year. So, by the time they reach 80 years old the average person might have had 140,000 dreams. Even if we forget 95–99 per cent of our dreams, we will still remember a few thousand of them. And, of course, we probably choose to forget the thousands of times we dream about events but they don't happen.

Are dreams just recycled thoughts?

Around the 18th and 19th centuries two main ideas about dreams became popular. One was the idea that the things we see in our dreams are things our conscious mind is hiding from us. However, the opposite idea said that while we're asleep, the brain organises memories and events from the day. Dreams are just a random collection of these thoughts, but we try to make a story from them when we wake up.

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Are dreams messages from our brains?

But perhaps the truth about dreams lies somewhere in the middle of these two ideas. Dreams might be made from the thoughts we have during the day, but they appear in dreams with symbolic meaning. When we're awake, we mostly think in words, like we're having conversations with ourselves. But when we're asleep, the part of our brain that controls language becomes less active, while the part that controls feelings becomes more active. So, maybe we experience our thoughts as feelings and symbols instead of words with clear meanings.

So, if you can understand the symbols in your dreams, you have a window into your subconscious. Common dreams like being able to fly or falling, or having no clothes on in a public place, probably mean something similar in most people. But to understand exactly what they mean to you, you have to connect them to the events and feelings of your daily life.

How can you understand the messages?

One way to help you do this is to keep a dream diary. As soon as you wake up, write down whatever you can remember about your dreams. Use pen and paper, not your phone or computer as the light might wake you up and you'll forget faster. Be quick, as the memories will be gone in seconds. Some days you'll write with your eyes not even fully open and the result will be almost impossible to read, or it might not even make sense.

Now you can connect your dreams to the events and feelings in your daily life. Think about the people and place where the dream happened as they might have a meaning too. How were you feeling in the dream? That dream about having no clothes on in public might mean you are anxious about something you have to do, or you're not feeling confident in a certain situation or with certain people.

Can you control your dreams?

Some people think writing your dreams down can open your mind to lucid dreaming. In lucid dreams, you know you're dreaming and you can change your own plot. Instead of just working out the meaning of your dreams, you'll be creating them. That could be a lot of fun, but you might want to continue having some dreams that allow your subconscious to send you messages!

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1. Check your understanding: true or false

Circle *True* or *False* for these sentences.

1.	We don't know for sure if dreams mean something or not.	*True*	*False*
2.	Dreams speak to us in words and pictures.	*True*	*False*
3.	You can't learn much from dreams because they're totally random.	*True*	*False*
4.	It doesn't matter what method you use to keep your dream diary.	*True*	*False*
5.	Every detail of a dream might reveal something about how you're feeling about your life.	*True*	*False*
6.	Lucid dreams tell us the most about our subconscious.	*True*	*False*

2. Check your understanding: matching

Match the two parts of the sentence and write a–f next to the numbers 1–6.

1……..	People in the past thought	a.	dreams might have matched real-life events at some point.
2……..	Old people's	b.	that we can control the events in our dreams.
3……..	The first modern idea said	c.	dreams aren't messages at all.
4……..	The opposite idea said	d.	dreams contained messages from the subconscious.
5……..	The most likely idea says	e.	dreams contained messages about the future.
6……..	Lucid dreaming shows	f.	dreams show us our daily thoughts as symbols.

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