

THE GOLEM – A TALE OF MAGIC (KS2)

Concept – Protection

Design (and model) your own fantasy 'protector'. If it was alive, how would its presence reassure you?

The Christian persecution of Jews in the 16th Century created this remarkable myth that anticipates later tales of robots.

In the city of Prague, Rabbi Loew was seriously worried. His people were being attacked in the streets by their neighbours, for being 'different'. Every day was worse. Rabbi Loew prayed to God for help – and then the idea came: "If the Jews need someone to shield them from harm – then create him."

He asked some friends to help. That night they crept down to the river and gathered clay which they mixed, forming it into the shape of a giant man, chanting holy psalms as they did so. Rabbi Loew placed a small piece of paper bearing the secret name of God into the creature's head as they recited the words from the book of Genesis:

"The Lord formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

And as they did the creature started to breathe, and then its eyes opened. Golem had come to life!

"Get on your feet!" commanded Rabbi Loew, and the clay statue slowly came to life moving, stretching, staggering until it stood tall. "Golem," said Rabbi Loew, "your mission is to protect the Jews from persecution. You must obey my commands no matter what I tell you."

And that is what Golem did. From that day on, the Jews of Prague had a powerful helper, for Golem was amazingly strong and powerful – but not very intelligent. When told to fetch water, he would keep on doing it, even if it flooded the house. He would only stop if someone commanded him to. But Rabbi Loew did not mind. Golem patrolled the streets well because that was what he had been told to do, and no-one bullied the Jews any more.

Now one day, an army general came to visit Rabbi Loew. "I have heard of your servant!" he said. "Your creature could be a powerful weapon of war. Please, sell him to me. Just name your price and I will pay." Rabbi Loew thought deeply. His Golem had been created to do good, not evil. If he said no to this general, then before long there would be others who would ask, or demand, exactly the same thing. They would want to use Golem – not to protect, but to destroy. He was too powerful and too strong to fall into the wrong hands! Rabbi Loew knew what he had to do.

That night he called his friends together again. He removed the name of God from Golem's head, and as he did, the creature became lifeless clay once more. Together, they returned it to the river and watched as the water washed, and dissolved, and returned Golem to the earth he sprang from.

He was gone – but not forgotten.

Explore pupils' fears, bearing in mind some may not want to share them.

Visitors to the Jewish Cemetery in Prague still leave written requests for help on Rabbi Loew's grave. Are there any secret wishes pupils would like God to answer? (Written responses to this should be private and confidential.)

Many people with religious faith claim their God protects them. Discuss how.

Nowadays, Science provides us with many powerful mechanical servants. What does this story say about how we should use technology?