BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION

ALFIE TAKES ACTION

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BOOK BAND: WHITE

BEFORE YOU START

Prepare a group journal to help you record group discussions and responses to the text as you work through the book.

Prepare an outline of the character Alfie, ready to complete using the Role on the Wall technique.

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Focus: Predicting, Questioning and Thinking Aloud

Before revealing the title, show the children the illustration of Alfie on the front cover and ask them to give their initial responses to the image.

- Who do you think this character is?
- Based on appearance, facial expression and body language, how would you describe the character?
- Do you know what sort of animal this is?
- What else do you notice?
- Do you have any questions?

Read the title of the book to the children.

- What type of story do you think this will be? Why do you think that?
- Do you know of any other stories that have an animal as the main character?

Encourage the children to make intertextual connections by drawing on their existing knowledge of other books.
Ask the children to predict what the story could be about. Ask them to justify their responses, drawing out any connections they make to other stories. Record the children’s responses in the journal. Once you have recorded their predictions you can return to these as you read the book, comparing the children’s initial thoughts to how the story actually unfolds.

Read Chapter One and ask the children to share their initial responses.

- What more have you discovered by reading this chapter?
- Is it the type of story you were expecting? Why / why not?

Discuss what you have learned about the character of Alfie so far and how he relates to the other members of his family.

Introduce the outline of Alfie to be added to using the Role on the Wall technique. Ask the children to come up with words or phrases to describe Alfie’s feelings and personality or his outward appearance or behaviour. For example, they might talk about how they know he has a large family, that everyone has a job to do and that he tends to daydream.

- How do you think Alfie feels about his family and their situation?
- How do you think he might feel when his dad says “AND NO DAYDREAMING!”?

Discuss the term ‘daydream’ to help clarify its meaning.

- What does to daydream mean?
- Do you daydream?
- Is daydreaming a good thing to do? Why / why not? Does it depend on the situation?

Revisit the Role on the Wall outline at the points indicated in the sequence and add reflections on how Alfie has changed over the course of the story.

Ask the children to make predictions about what could happen next based on what they’ve discovered about Alfie and his family so far. Ask them to draw on their prior knowledge of meerkats and where they live in the wild, if they have any. If not, you may want to ask the children to do some research on meerkats. Later on, they can add to this by investigating the other animals featured in the story: scorpions and painted wolves.

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Focus: Questioning, Empathising and Predicting

Re-read Chapter One and read on to the end of Chapter Two.

Return to the Role on the Wall notes to continue to explore the character of Alfie.

- How do you think Alfie feels when his sister tells him he isn’t a proper meerkat?
- Why do you think she might say that?
- What is the consequence of his behaviour?
- How do you think Alfie might feel about this?
Explore some of the techniques used by the author, Karen Wallace, to help the reader understand how Alfie feels at various points in Chapter Two.

- How does Alfie feel about what's happened with his family?
- How do you know he feels that way?

Karen Wallace doesn’t tell the reader that Alfie feels sad or guilty or lonely. She allows the reader to infer this from Alfie and others’ behaviour, the things he says and what is said by others. The children can add their observations to the Role on the Wall poster to help draw these threads together.

Begin to explore the children’s responses to the start of the book with the help of the four basic questions. These questions can be used as a basis for discussion throughout the sessions.

- Tell me… was there anything you liked about this text?
- Was there anything that you particularly disliked… ?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Were there any patterns… any connections that you noticed… ?

As children respond it can be useful to write down what they say under the headings ‘likes’, ‘dislikes’, ‘puzzles’ and ‘patterns’. Record the children’s responses in the journal and return to any queries as the sessions continue.

Ask the children to consider what impact they think that the two new characters – Bongo and Snapper – will have on Alfie.
Focus: Re-reading, Clarifying and Empathising

Read Chapter Three, stopping at different points, to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around the four basic questions. Return briefly to the Role on the Wall created earlier for Alfie and add to this, reflecting on his response to the concept of friendship. You might also discuss the children’s understanding of the moments when ‘Alfie’s eyes lit up’ and when he falls ‘back with a thump’.

In groups of three, ask the children to revisit the chapter and rehearse a reading of the dialogue in this section.

- What clues are there in the text that might help you know how Alfie is feeling?
- For example, what can you infer from the repeated first letter at the start of Alfie’s dialogue on page 17?
- What does the term ‘spluttered’ tell you about how you might speak those words aloud?

Depending on the time available, the group might only have the opportunity to rehearse the brief exchange on page 17. Allow time for children to consider and practise different expressions and voices before inviting them to share their reading. Afterwards, discuss their process and reasoning around the decisions they made.
Focus: Close Reading, Questioning and Empathising

Read Chapter Four and, as before, pause to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around the four basic questions.

Consider Alfie’s reaction to the filming crew and their equipment.

- Has Alfie ever seen people and trucks before? How do you know?
- How do Ellie O’Shea’s illustrations help us to understand what Alfie is reacting to?
Run through the things Alfie sees and describes, and ask the children to discuss what he is actually seeing – e.g. the ‘herd of monsters’ is actually a group of vehicles.

- How might Alfie describe some of the other objects the crew have brought with them (e.g. mobile phones, ice, bottled water, etc.)?
- Why do you think Karen Wallace made the decision to describe the film crew like this?
- What else could she have done? After a quick discussion, explain to the children that she could have just written something like ‘Alfie saw a circle of trucks grouped together. He’d never seen anything like it before.’ Would that have been as effective? Why / why not?

Read on until page 28, ‘Snapper told him about films and television and cameramen.’

- Why might this camera team have come to Alfie’s home?
- Have you ever seen any film or television programmes featuring wild animals like this?

Allow them to make links with any nature documentaries that they might have seen at home or at school, online or on television. Programmes such as *Planet Earth* and *Blue Planet* have ‘making of’ films online where you can see the camera operators in action, if children are unfamiliar with the process.

Read to the end of Chapter Five. Clarify the children’s understanding of what the two men want to do. Look back at the illustration on pages 30 and 31.

- What might each of the characters in the illustration be thinking at that moment? Ask them to justify their responses, making links with what they know and understand about the character so far, and drawing evidence from the text and the illustrations.
Focus: Summarising, Empathising and Re-reading

Ask the children to summarise the story so far and suggest what they think might happen and how the story could end.

- Do you think that Alfie's relationship with his family will change? If so, how / why?
- What about his new friendships with Bongo and Snapper?
- Do you think the television company could make him ‘a star’?
- What would be a happy ending for Alfie?
- What might the good and bad things be about becoming a star?

Read Chapters Six and Seven, pausing where necessary to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around the events and the reactions of the characters.

- Why does Alfie’s mum react the way she does to the news that there are humans nearby (pages 36-37)?
- Do you think Alfie’s mum has seen humans in the past?
- Why might she think they are dangerous?
Snapper suggests that Alfie is a future film star because he is ‘different’ and has ‘got what it takes’.

- Do you agree? Why / why not?
- Why might Snapper feel that these are good qualities for a ‘star’?

Read the rest of the book and discuss children’s responses to the ending.

- Were you satisfied with how the story ended?
- Was it similar to the ending you predicted?
- Why do you think Alfie’s mum and sisters changed their minds about him?
- Do you think Snapper and Bongo expected Alfie to flip over backwards, walk on his hands and wave his legs in the air?
- What might happen next to Alfie?
- What might happen after the film crew leave?

Through modelling, ask the children to describe their favourite part of the story. Provide the children with an oral scaffold, for example: the most memorable part of the story was... because...; my top moment in the story was... because... and ask them to identify their favourite part of the narrative in pairs. Encourage children to go back through the book and to give reasons for their choices, then invite some children to share these with the wider group.

Return to the Role on the Wall for Alfie and add any additional information in another colour to show how his personality has changed and how he has repaired relationships with his family.

- Will Alfie now be a better member of the team?
These are areas you could further develop depending on your professional judgement of the children’s learning needs and their interests.

**Developing wider reading experiences**

- Investigate non-fiction texts and information about the animals in the story. The following websites could be explored on class devices:
  - www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/animals/general-animals/meerkat-facts
  - https://kids.sandiegozoo.org/animals/meerkat

**Supporting reading fluency**

- While reading with the group, model skills and strategies such as predicting, sampling, confirming, self-monitoring, self-correcting, ‘thinking aloud’, interpreting things which are only implied, and the full range of cueing systems (semantic, syntactic and graphophonic).
- Occasionally, you could hide some words with a post-it note, asking the children to refer to the illustration for ideas. You could give another clue by revealing the first syllable or letter.
• You could make a pairs game to develop visual memory and book language, creating cards using laminated images from the book. Make pairs of cards, one card for an illustrated location or character and one for matching words from the story. Spread these out face down. Children take turns to turn over two cards. If they match, they can keep them. If not, they have to turn them back over again. The game proceeds until all the pairs have been found.

• You could create a simple jigsaw by writing questions with corresponding answers directly underneath on one side of a piece of paper, then printing an illustration on the reverse and cutting the sheet of paper up to separate the questions and answers. The children lay out the questions and answers in order. They can check their layout by turning them over to see if they have created the illustration correctly.

• You can explore different ways of representing the /iː/ (long vowel ‘ee’) phoneme, such as in Alfie, meerkat, every, family, she, enemies, eagles, beaks, teeth, team, feet, daydream, actually, he, nasty, eat, cheer.

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**Vocabulary building**

• Children could make **word collections** which describe a particular character and their feelings or a place, event or situation.

• The text could also be used to investigate the structure, impact and placement of prefixes and suffixes. For example, children could investigate any patterns in adding –ing to verbs (babysitting, digging, making, watching, daydreaming, running, peering); they could look at regular and irregular past tense verbs (laughed, pointed, spluttered, climbed; woke, ran, fell, ate).

• Children could also explore compound words, such as babysit, daydream, cameramen and moonlight.

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**Opportunities to revisit the text independently**

• With the children, make a set of magnetic or stick story props to use in a retelling of the story and to support children in their own independent retellings. If possible, provide extra copies of the book to support this.

• If the children have a good memory of the text through repeated readings, they can be given copies of the story to read to partners. This helps children to see themselves as readers.

• Allow the children to re-enact the story through play. Revisiting stories through a range of play-based experiences helps children to step into the world of the book and to explore it more completely.
• Create **freeze frames** of key events or scenes in the book. When presenting the freeze frame, one of the group could act as a commentator to talk through what is happening, or individual characters could speak their thoughts out loud.

• Use **hot-seating** to explore the main character further. One member of the group role-plays a character and is interviewed by the other children. This activity involves children closely examining a character’s motivation and responses.

• Make a **story map** as a way of retelling the story. This breaks the story down into episodes and sequences its events. This kind of graphic representation helps children to hold on to the shape of the story more confidently.

• Encourage the children to take the book home to read alongside a parent or carer and suggest that they use the ‘Tips for grown-ups’ pages to support their discussions.

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**Experiences linked to the text**

• Share videos of meerkats in the wild to help children to understand how meerkats behave within their family groups and how some of the descriptions in the book mirror meerkats’ actual behaviour, such as caring for each other’s children, digging tunnels and keeping lookout. Some videos you could use include:

  - *Meerkat pups explore their new surroundings at Chester Zoo* – Chester Zoo: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8swukY15td0
  - *Spy meerkat helps babysit* – BBC: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeY1kwZcWVs
  - *Magic meerkat moments* – BBC (including footage of the camera operators): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drzq1x0mqjo

• If children are able to visit a zoo, conservation centre or farm, they might be able to film and narrate their own mini wildlife documentary featuring meerkats or other animals.

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These resources were created by Bloomsbury and The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). For more teaching resources, visit:

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