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.
Focus: Predicting, Questioning and Empathising

Read Chapter One and share the title of the book with the children. Once the children have heard the first part of the book read aloud, the class can begin to explore their responses to it 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 questions or puzzles as the sessions continue.
Consider the different characters introduced in the first chapter and their different personalities.

- does anyone you know ever get into trouble, then blame someone else?
- Do you have, or did you ever have, an imaginary friend? What were they like? Were they well-behaved or did they cause trouble?
- What do you think a gremlin is?
- Why do you think Alfie behaves as he does?
- Why do you think he finds it difficult to take responsibility for his actions?

Introduce the outline of Alfie, to be added to using the Role on the Wall technique. Return to pages 6-8 and consider what different things Alfie does, and what this tells the reader about his personality. For example, Alfie is described at the opening of the story as ‘always in trouble’.

- How do you know this?
- What do Alfie’s actions suggest?
- What do his mum, dad, sister Daisy and cat Caractacus think about him?

Revisit the Role on the Wall outline at key points in the story as the children find out more about Alfie.

Allow the children time and space to reflect and discuss their responses to the story so far, as well as to make personal connections to the story, such as talking about a time when they or someone they know played a practical joke and didn’t own up.

- What kind of trick was played?
- Did you enjoy it?
- What happened?
- What did your family, friends or the victim think about this?

Re-read the last line of Chapter One: ‘One sunny Monday morning in the summer holidays, it did’ (page 9). ['It’ refers to Dave appearing.]

- What do you predict will happen next?
Focus: Questioning, Clarifying and Summarising

Read Chapter Two, stopping at different points to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around the four basic questions.

Ask the children to reflect on Dave, including his appearance and behaviour. Ask them to imagine their own invisible friends, including what they look like and how they behave. Remind them that, unlike Dave, their invisible friends could be well-behaved. Stimulate the children’s imagination by listing some points to consider:

- name
- size
- colour and any distinctive features (fur, feathers, scales, horns, etc.)
- particular habits or behaviours.

Discuss how the descriptions might be laid out and presented.

- What layout could you use?
- Could you make an album of invisible friends, including illustrations?

Shared-write your own invisible friend, supporting the children in adopting a tone to fit the purpose and audience of this description. The children could go on to complete their own descriptions following this session, if they want to.
Re-read to the chapter and discuss it.

- How do you think it feels for Alfie to meet Dave, having talked about him and excused his own behaviour through him for so long?
- Do you think Dave is exactly as Alfie imagined? How do you think he might be different?
- Do you think Dave is too naughty even for Alfie? Why?
- How do you think Alfie feels about not having pudding?
- Alfie tells Dave to “Go back wherever you came from” (page 20). Where do you imagine Dave came from?
- What do you think might happen next?
SESSION 3: CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR

Focus: Clarifying, Thinking Aloud and Empathising

Read Chapters Three and Four.

• What does Dave do that gets Alfie into trouble?
• How does Alfie manage to get on the wrong side of first Dad, then Mum?
• Alfie misses out on his three favourite puddings. Can you remember what they were, in order?
• What would your favourite pudding be? Would missing pudding be an effective punishment for you?
• Do you think it is fair to punish someone by making them miss out on food?
• How do you think Alfie feels about his invisible friend visiting?
• How do you know?
• What do you predict will happen next in the story?

The children’s personal experience of puddings and of food in general may vary from household to household and depending on cultural experiences.
Revisit the text and illustrations you have seen so far, and ask the children what they have found out about Alfie and Dave. Draw a simple Venn diagram for these two characters. Write in each circle what you know about their appearance and personality, and where the circles overlap, list anything they have in common.

The children could also revisit the **Role on the Wall** to see how Alfie might be changing as the story progresses.
Focus: Questioning, Clarifying and Empathising

Read Chapter Five. Consider how Alfie could get rid of Dave, as he has decided to do.

- Why do you think Alfie now wants to get rid of his invisible friend?
- How do you think he might do this?
- What does Alfie try that doesn’t work, and why?
- How useful do you think the various pieces of advice Alfie finds on the internet are?
- What do you notice about the names of the people he consults and where they come from? (Maybe you could make up your own pieces of advice with names and places to accompany them, e.g. Dennis from Dulwich, Karen from Kirkby, Stephen from Stockton...).
- What is the dilemma Alfie faces when he comes across the solution from Gladys from Grimsby? Do you think he should disobey his mum and use his water pistol?
Explain that you would like to write a note of advice to Alfie so that he can decide what to do about Dave. Consider with the children what might be worrying Alfie. Use the children's suggestions to compose the note through shared writing. Discuss how to start and end the message effectively.

- What is most appropriate?
- What might make Alfie feel resolved and confident?

Maybe you could write your note of advice in role as one of the alliterative people from the internet. Keep returning to the focus and purpose of the writing. When it is finished, re-read the letter with the children and discuss how effective it is in advising Alfie.

- Does it offer Alfie hope, or give suggestions for how he should proceed?

Read the writing back to the children, checking for sense, meaning and flow. You could ask children to pretend to be Alfie, reading the letter and showing you how they feel after reading it.

- Why do you think Alfie promises never to blame Dave again if he can get rid of him?
- Do you think he will succeed? Why / Why not?
Focus: Re-reading, Empathising and Summarising

Read Chapter Six, stopping at different points if needed to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion.

- How did Alfie get rid of Dave? Was the solution straightforward?
- What do you think of the way in which Alfie’s problem with Dave was resolved?
- What do you think Alfie is feeling now he has got rid of Dave?
- How do you think Alfie’s family feel now he has admitted doing something wrong and promised to mend his ways?
- What do you think happened to Dave?

Having read to the end of the story, talk about the book as a whole. Engage the children in book talk, discussing how the book made them feel and allowing them time and space to tell you their likes and dislikes, referring to different parts of the text or particular illustrations.
Review the story in chronological order and consider the different emotions Alfie has felt, including his high and low points. Work collaboratively to choose words that describe his emotions at different points of the story. Write these on post-it notes and organise them to demonstrate shades of emotional intensity and create a graph of emotion.

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 in pairs ask them to identify their favourite part of the narrative. Encourage children to give reasons for their choices and invite some children to share these.
IDEAS TO SUPPORT THE SESSIONS

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**

Read and explore stories with similar themes involving invisible friends, such as:

- *Kevin* by Rob Biddulph – HarperCollins
- *Imaginary Fred* by Eoin Colfer, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers – HarperCollins
- *Leo: A Ghost Story* by Mac Barnett, illustrated by Christian Robinson – Chronicle
- *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak – Red Fox

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**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 graphophonetic).

- 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.
Vocabulary building

- Children could make **word collections** based on the text, such as a collection of unusual words including *gremlin, wart, commotion, protested, caterwauling, douse, drawer, biscuit, mousse, whirring, mallet*. 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 (*lying, rattling, coming, sitting*) to verbs; they could look at regular and irregular past tense verbs (*appeared, turned, insisted, yelled; knew, was, said, found*).

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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.
Experiences linked to the text

- Provide the children with card and resources to make their own album of gremlins or imaginary friends.
- Use recycled materials to create your own model of a gremlin and photograph it in your own sock drawer or somewhere else yours might hide.
- This is a good opportunity to talk about honesty and the importance of taking responsibility for your actions, and of forgiveness for a sincere apology.
- Encourage parents to come into the setting and talk about imaginary friends they might have had as children and how they behaved.

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

www.bloomsburyguidedreading.com
www.clpe.org.uk