

## **Session Seventeen**

**16 January 2003: 9.15-12.15**

### **Devising schemes of work to teach David Almond's *Skellig* to KS3 classes: objectives, methods, and assessment.**

The focus of this session was to create a scheme of work to teach *Skellig*. P.R. informed the group that the government have promised to put a 'model' scheme of work on the DfES KS3 lit. website. However, it won't be on *Skellig*, but on other novels and we will be able to access it for a model of a scheme of work. P.R. said that if we were going to teach a scheme of work on *Skellig* we would have to read the book, talk about the book and the problems of teaching it.

P.R. asked the trainees what we thought of the book. There were various differing opinions, but the majority thought it was very enjoyable, with lots of issues such as school/home tuition, friendship, loneliness and the baby drama underplayed. It was agreed that the book worked on many different levels.

P.R. raised the question of how a book is read. He stressed that a book should be read through first, then read again to study it. We also need to know whether the class are reading it at the same level. There are also lots of other issues about reading a book including the following:

1. Some pupils dislike reading books so audiotapes are another option. They can offer a change of voice and a change of pace. They are usually an abridged version so the chapters are short which contributes to the pace.
2. Pupils like being read to.
3. There are different opinions on reading; whether the teacher should read or the pupils read some of the text.
4. Pupils can take a character and read aloud.
5. A strategy is needed when reading a text.

In a scheme of work it is not made clear how the book is to be read.

**Note:** If pupils spent the lesson reading, you would fail Ofsted. They are not allowed to read for 55 minutes, yet they can write for 55 minutes as in exams.

### **Suggested methods for reading in class.**

1. Keep a reading log.
2. Annotate text as you read the book.
3. Writing is a way of reflection.
4. Read two chapters - have open-ended questions, then pupils are doing more than just reading.
5. You can construct complex strategy for reading.
6. P.R. doesn't agree with stopping near the end of a book and thinking of a different ending.

7. The suggested model is to read the book and enjoy it, then use the book to teach some English skills - the strategy is to get pupils to re-read.
8. Use the book as a common repository.

### ***Skellig***

P.R. suggests spending a whole day in reading the book. Read the book in lessons. Have the expectation that the pupils are doing independent reading. Ask them what they are reading at the moment. Have a session about other books.

#### William Blake

William Blake's poetry is featured in *Skellig* and Mina is constantly quoting him in the book. She says of him, 'He painted pictures and wrote poems. Much of the time he wore no clothes. He saw angels in his garden.' (p.57).

- He was born in Carnaby Street, London in 1757.
- He was a poet.
- He learnt to write in mirror writing on copper plate.
- He saw angels.
- He liked children, and believed in children's rights.

P.R. asks the trainees which part of the text would they read to introduce Blake. Try and get pupils to answer question, Who is Blake? The video is useful.

#### **Points to remember.**

- If read book first consider the strategy for reading it.
- If finish book, what does the class need?
- Discussion on home tuition would cover oral work if targets need to be met.
- Encourage the pupils and say that this is such a good book and that in our strategy for reading pupils can take books home to read but they are not to spoil it for others by revealing the ending.
- Say to pupils that reading is no different to anything else in their lives. They watch a video to the end.
- Keep a workbook with open-ended questions that make you think about what the pupils have read.
- Pupils to reflect upon what they have read and what you have read.
- Keep a log of their reading.
- Website for workbook. [www.st-petershigh.gloucs.sch.uk](http://www.st-petershigh.gloucs.sch.uk)
- P.R. stated that the worse thing is to teach a book that you don't like. He thinks it is good to have a choice of two books.

## Homework

- What homework do you set? P.R. suggests staying behind after school with the pupils and reading the book or watching the video of the same, perhaps with some refreshments. (This worked for P.R. when he gave a Romeo and Juliet party for the pupils).
- Give pupils notice that in the next 5 or 6 lessons you will be reading the book. P.R. thinks it will take 5 or 6 lessons to read *Skellig*.
- It was suggested by a trainee to give research into Blake as homework before reading *Skellig*.
- look at words such as Pneumatisation, and evolution.

P.R. suggests putting text against another book and comparing. e.g. David Almond's *Counting Stars*. He is a Christian writer so you can look at a bible story, e.g. John the Baptist - he lived in the wilderness and ate locusts and honey, then compare it with *Skellig*.

## Other books to compare with *Skellig* which refer to angels.

- The Vintner's Luck - about an angel who communicates with the vintner about growing grapes.
- The Body Artist

P.R. asked trainees to put themselves into groups, and gave each group a topic. They had to decide on which objectives go with reading *Skellig* and devise a sequence of activities to meet the objectives. The topics were:

1. Descriptive writing
2. The pro's and cons' of home tuition and school uniform
3. Friendship and loneliness
4. Who is *Skellig*?
5. Family
6. Blake
7. Non-fiction

Each group read out the sequence of activities they had chosen to meet the objectives.

## **Reflection and research**

### ***Skellig* - Winner of the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year Award and the Carnegie Medal.**

Having started reading *Skellig* I found that I could not put the book down. I wanted to find out who *Skellig* was so I had to continue reading it and finished it without stopping for a break! I thought the simple sentence structure helped to keep the pace moving very quickly which therefore encouraged the reader to continue reading. It is a book that can be enjoyed by adults as well as children as it works at different levels and covers many issues which can prompt deep discussions. I totally agree with the Chair of the Whitbread Judging Panel who states, '.....*Skellig* is written with delicacy and restraint, and tells a story of love and faith with exquisite, heart fluttering tenderness. It is an extraordinary profound book, no matter how old the reader.'

I have observed lessons in Year 7 where *Skellig* was being taught. Each teacher seemed to be under pressure to read the book in the time limit given, therefore the lesson seemed rather rushed. The teacher read through several chapters and did not allow any of the pupils to read. The pupils then had to answer questions in a workbook and were given a few minutes to complete it. The pace seemed to be very quick and I thought this did not give the pupils enough time to reflect on what was read to them. Some of the pupils were very interested in the story and could follow while the teacher was reading, but others were becoming restless and playing about with pencil cases. Having worked as an LSW in a mixed comprehensive school I have observed other English lessons where all the pupils were given the opportunity to read aloud a paragraph or a few sentences from the book. I realise that this does take longer to get through the whole book but it does allow all pupils to contribute to the lesson. If books like *Skellig* are to be taught in school, I think that pupils should be given the time to read and enjoy it without being rushed. I did feel that too many chapters were read in one lesson, which did not leave enough time for discussion to help the pupils to appreciate and reflect on the story, and on the issues covered in the book.

### **Schemes of work on *Skellig* which may be of interest.**

- The English Department at St. Peter's School has a scheme of work in its 2002 handbook for Yr. 7 which includes Unit 7.5 - Modern Novel for children - shared reading: *Skellig*. It has a very informative and interesting sequence of activities for the pupils and also a Year 7 workbook designed by P.R. for pupils to use during lessons. (This was mentioned earlier and can be accessed on the St. Peter's website given).
- The other scheme of work on *Skellig* is by David Foley. I found this on [www.englishresources.co.uk/workunits/ks3/reading/yr8/dfskellig.pdf](http://www.englishresources.co.uk/workunits/ks3/reading/yr8/dfskellig.pdf)