Skellig by David Almond

CLPE (www.clpe.org.uk) is sharing this educational resource to mark and honour the 2017 CILIP Carnegie Medal 80th anniversary and the CILIP Kate Greenaway 60th anniversary celebrations.

This teaching sequence was designed to support the exploration of the novel in a Year 5/6 class. The approaches advocated are drawn from the principles of our highly successful Power of Reading Programme. The programme is delivered in settings across the country with implementation complemented by our website which includes, a bank of over 150 teaching sequences ranging from Early Years through to Y7 as well as over 1500 examples of practice. To enquire about training or website subscription contact us at por@clpe.org.uk

Michael moves to a new house, with his mum and dad and his new baby sister. But soon his sister is ill in hospital, and Michael feels helpless. He explores a broken-down garage in the garden and makes a discovery that will change his life: Skellig, a creature covered in dust and cobwebs. Michael is not sure what this creature is. The only person he can confide in is Mina, the girl across the road. Together they move Skellig from the dangerous garage and an astounding story unfolds.
Overall aims of this teaching sequence.
- To engage children with a powerful text that they will enjoy
- To discuss the themes and issues that arise, enabling children to make connections to their own lives
- To explore, talk and write about emotions
- To develop creative responses to the text through discussion and role-play
- To analyse the author’s style and study how effects are achieved through word choice and structure
- To write in role, in order to explore a character and to learn about writing in other voices

This teaching sequence is designed for a Year 5 or Year 6 class.

Overview of this teaching sequence.
This teaching sequence is approximately 3 weeks long if spread out over 15 sessions. Before beginning this teaching sequence you will need to consider how you might allocate time for reading the novel aloud. The book supports teachers to teach about emotional response to strong themes in narrative fiction. The narrative structure is carefully crafted to be thought-provoking and the characters and settings are developed. The book deals with some very emotional issues including change and illness of a sibling.

National Curriculum 2014 Links

Reading: (Word reading / Comprehension)
- Increase familiarity with a range of books;
- Identify themes and conventions and compare these across books they have read;
- Prepare play scripts to read aloud;
- Show understanding through intonation, tone, volume and action;
- Discuss words and phrases that capture readers’ interest and imagination;
- Draw inferences about characters’ feelings, thoughts, emotions and actions.
- Apply their growing knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes, both to read aloud and to understand the meaning of new words that they meet.

Writing: (Transcription / Composition)
- Plan writing by identifying the audience for and purpose of the writing, selecting the appropriate form
- Note and develop initial ideas, drawing on reading
- Draft and write by selecting appropriate grammar and vocabulary
- In narratives, describe settings, characters and atmosphere, integrate dialogue to convey character and advance action
- Use a range of devices to build cohesion within and across paragraphs
- Evaluate and edit by proposing changes to vocabulary, grammar and punctuation
- Proof-read for spelling and punctuation errors
- Perform their own compositions, using appropriate intonation, volume, movement so that meaning is clear

Speaking and Listening:
- Maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, responding to comments
- Ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and build vocabulary and knowledge
- Listen and respond appropriately to adults and peers
- Articulate and justify answers and opinions
- Use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, imagining and exploring ideas
- Participate in discussions, presentations, performances and debates
- Consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to the contributions of others
- Select and use appropriate registers for effective communication
- Use spoken language to develop understanding through imagining and exploring ideas in discussion, role-play and drama
- Consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others

Cross Curricular Links
Maths
Children could survey different kinds of birds found around their homes and the school. This data could be fed into Excel or similar spreadsheet to produce charts and graphs and give further cross curricular links.

Science:
The story has strong links with many areas of Science; these include skeletons, bones, birds, classification, evolution, life cycles and flight. Children could research the many birds referred to in the book and collect information about the different aspects as they progress through the story. If possible children could visit a bird sanctuary or dissect owl pellets.

PSHE
There are a number of themes which could be developed and discussed further related to PSHE – friendship, illness, loss,
### Teaching Approaches
- Reading aloud and re-reading
- Reader’s theatre
- ‘Tell me’
- Writing in role
- Visualising
- Shared writing
- Drawing
- Annotating
- Dance

### Writing Outcomes
- Descriptive writing
- Writing in role as Michael, Mina or Skellig
- Letter writing
- Poetry writing
- Creative writing of prequel/alternative scenes in the story in the style of the book
- Diary writing
- Character description
- Playscript
- Personal response
- E mail

### Links to other texts and resources.

*My Name Is Mina* by David Almond (David Almond wrote this book after Skellig but the story is the prequel to Skellig)

**Web Resources**
- **Information on birds**
- **Images of angels**
  [https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=images+of+angels&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=fBo3UoMUx92zBsqGgZAI&ved=0CC0QsAQ&biw=1440&bih=703&dpr=1](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=images+of+angels&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=fBo3UoMUx92zBsqGgZAI&ved=0CC0QsAQ&biw=1440&bih=703&dpr=1)
- **About the author**

### Links to other resources on the Power of Reading Website
- Tell Me
- E mail template
- **Look at teaching approach section for explanation of terms such as Readers’ Theatre**

### Teaching Sessions

**Session one: Tell me and reading journals.**

**Learning Objectives:**
- Children will be able to participate in discussion about a text that is read to them;
- Children will learn to draw inferences, justifying these with evidence.
  - Read the first chapter to the class, which introduces the family moving into the new house, the baby being born and Michael finding the creature in the garage. We get a real sense of Michael being overwhelmed by events. Talk about initial responses to the book.

  *Tell me what you think this story is going to be about.*
  *What suggests that to you?*
  *How might Michael be feeling?*

**Making Skellig Journals**
- Each child makes a special A4 book to use as a mini-reading journal just for this novel. These will be used throughout the reading of the book to record events as well as for children to respond to text and draw relevant images that the children may ‘see’ through the reading of the text.
- Ask children to design their front cover and jot down their responses to the first chapter in these books.
Session two: Visualisation

Learning Objectives:
- Children will be able to discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering impact on the reader;
- Children are able to use art to visualise a setting after reading.

- Read chapters 2 and 3, and then get the children to close their eyes as you reread the descriptions of the inside of the garage.
- Ask them to turn to a partner and tell what they saw. Invite some children to describe what they could see for the class and, using an enlarged version of the text, ask the class which parts of the text helped them to see the images most clearly. Highlight these parts.
- Ask children to write a phrase or sentence that ‘sticks’ in their mind on a Post-it. These can be stuck to a display board / learning wall and added to as the story develops, the Post-its can then be used to inform children’s descriptive writing.
- Children could then go on to draw the scene in the garage or make it into a story box to return to later in the story.

Descriptive Writing

- Reread the chapters and then ask children to write their own descriptions of the first time Michael enters the garage for their Skellig journals. What did he see, hear and feel as he ventured in?

Session 3: Writing in role

Learning Objectives:
- Children will be able to draw inferences, such as inferring characters feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, justifying these with evidence from the text;
- Children will be able to portray the perspective of a character through writing in role.

- Read chapters 4, 5 and 6. Discuss what Michael has to deal with at this point and how he is feeling.
- Draw a chart on the IWB to allow children to consider all the events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baby</th>
<th>New home</th>
<th>Creature in the garage</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
- Under these headings ask the children to offer suggestions as to what Michael may be thinking / feeling about each of the events.
- Children then write in role as Michael, writing in a diary. You should remind children of the conventions of diary writing and the language used. The diary would be a place for Michael to express his innermost thoughts and feelings about what was happening to him.

Session 4: Drawing and annotating

Learning Objectives:
- Children will be able to draw inferences, such as inferring characters’ actions, thoughts and motives from their behaviour, justifying these with evidence from the text;
- Children will be able to select appropriate vocabulary to describe a character, understanding how choices can enhance meaning.

- Read chapters 7 to 10 aloud, and talk to the children about what they now know about the creature in the garage. Ask the children to back up their answers with examples from the text.
- Brainstorm some of their words and phrases onto a flip chart or IWB through shared writing. Working in groups or pairs, on a sheet of A3 paper children draw an outline of the character in the garage and using some of the phrases from shared writing (and their own ideas) that best describe the creature in the garage; they fill in the outline with their suggestions.

They might suggest:
- dead bluebottles scattered on his hair and shoulders
- his voice squeaked like he hadn’t used it in a hundred years
- He laughed, but he didn’t smile
- Things that he says could be written around the outline, for example
  - Got an aspirin?
  - What do you want?
  - Nothing, nothing and nothing

Place these diagrams on a display board or learning wall for use in future sessions.
Session 5: Poetry
Learning Objectives:
- Children can discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader;
- Children select vocabulary for precision to create a picture in a reader’s mind.
- Children write poems, selecting vocabulary for precision.

- Give the children a few minutes at the start of this session to look at the diagrams from yesterday, discuss the language and some of the words and phrases from the text that were used.
- Tell children that today they will write their own poetry.
- During shared writing demonstrate using some of the words and phrases to write a class poem, looking at editing and changing sentences around to enhance the flow and effect of the finished piece of writing.
- Invite the class to write their own poems depicting the creature in the garage, drawing on some of the language recorded in their diagrams from yesterday and in shared writing. Suggest that they choose a repeating line as a chorus to the poem.
- Ask some children to share their poems with the rest of the class.

Read on to chapter 19, in separate read aloud sessions.

Session 6: Role play and hot seating
Learning Objectives:
- Children will be learn to adopt and sustain roles, responding appropriately to others in role;
- Children will be able to change narrative text to a play script, including narrator’s role and stage directions.

- Read chapter 20, and ask the children to work in threes to write up as a play script
- Children then role-play Michael taking Mina to see Skellig.
- They should try to think and move as their character would. For example, children playing Michael should ‘walk across the room like Michael’, and they should react to the creaking garage and falling dust.
- Give children time to rehearse their scene.
- Each group will show their role play to the rest of the class, who can put questions to the characters (hot seating). This enables children to voice their thoughts and feelings in role.
- Children write in their Skellig reading journals in role as Mina – What are her thoughts and reactions to the creature in the garage.

Session 7 and 8: Reader’s Theatre
Read on to the end of chapter 22.
Learning Objectives:
- Children understand how language contributes to meaning.
- Children are able to annotate text, separating different elements.
- Children reread writing to check it makes sense and make revisions.
- Children will be able to evaluate their own and others’ performances.

Scripting
- Mark up the text to show the parts that the narrators will read, and the parts that the characters will say.
- Use an enlarged version of the text so that the whole class can collaborate with you in this.
- This process involves children in thinking about how the text needs to be performed.
- Once the text is marked up (coded with initials to show who is speaking), make copies for each group, who can mark each reader’s lines with a highlighter.

Eg:
Narrator 1: Then I heard the hooting of an owl. I opened my eyes.
Narrator 2: Pale light was glowing at my window.
Narrator 1: I looked down and saw Mina in the wilderness with her hands against her face.
Mina: Hoot. Hoot hoot hoot.
Narrator 2: I tiptoed out to her.
Michael: I didn’t sleep all night. Then at the very last minute when the night was ending I did.
Mina: But you’re awake now?
Michael: Yes.
Mina: We’re not dreaming this?
Michael:  We’re not dreaming it.

- Give time for the groups to rehearse their readings.
- Each group then performs their reading to the rest of the class considering how they use their voices and techniques such as repetition. (See POR website for more ideas and information about Readers Theatre).
- Take photographs of the groups, you can then add speech or thought bubbles for each character at a particular point - the children can then add the speech or thoughts of their character and add these to their reading journal.
- Talk with the class about their response to this activity, and whether it helped them to think about how David Almond builds an atmosphere.

Session 9: Discussion and Responding to text.
Learning Objectives:
- Children will be able to consider how authors have developed characters in a text;
- Children are able to infer a character’s feelings, actions and motives.
- Children use appropriate vocabulary to describe a character and his behaviour.

Read chapters 23 and 24 to the class.
- Reread chapter 24 asking children to think about the way David Almond reveals more about Skellig.
- Discuss our changing view of Skellig. Remind children of the pictures they drew in Session Four. Look at some on display and ask the children how their pictures of Skellig might be changed.
- Ask children to think about what we now know about Skellig and what Michael and Mina know. How do Michael and Mina feel about what they have seen?
- Look at the last sentence of Chapter 24 ‘Making sure the world’s still really there’. Discuss this phrase. What does Michael mean by this sentence?
- Ask children to write their personal response to this chapter – They may wish to include a description of Skellig, what they think he is, what Michael meant by this comment about the world still really being there and the reasons for Skellig crying. These can be written in their learning journals.
- Some children may wish to share their writing at the end of the session.

Session 10: Tell me
Learning Objective:
- Children will be able to participate in discussion about a text that is read to them;
- Children will learn to draw inferences, justifying these with evidence from the text.
- Children will discuss patterns and recurring themes in text.

Read chapters 25 to 30 in one complete session.
- Ask the class to note down, in pairs, any patterns they have noticed so far in the novel. Are there any patterns or connections that you have noticed in this story? Are there any ideas or themes that you have noticed?
- The range of themes that recur through the story might include:
  - Birds
  - Angels
  - Sickness and death
  - Ageing
  - Dreams
- Record these categories as headings on a flipchart.
- Children copy these headings into reading journals.
- Under each heading children note the parts of the text referred to, or record a quote.

Session 11: Composing an E mail
Learning Objectives:
- Children can write for a range of purposes using appropriate format and language.
- Children can write a recount based on a fictional first person experience.

Reread chapter 29.
- Look at the text together and discuss the argument between Michael and Mina. Did they mean what they said to each other?
- Can the children think of a time that they had an argument with a friend? Did they say things they didn’t mean? Why? How did the argument make them feel?
- Tell the children that today they will be writing an email from one of the characters to the other discussing the argument and why they feel like they do (see blank e mail template).
- Discuss language and conventions that we might use in an e mail to a friend.
- Children decide whether they wish to be Michael or Mina and compose an email in role to the other character.

Session 12: Visualisation and Drawing
Learning Objective:
- Children will be able to discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering impact on the reader;
- Children are able to use art to visualise a setting after reading.
Read Chapter 31

- Re read from ... Moonlight came through the arched window to ... Skellig bent forward again. He chewed.
- Discuss the scene. What can the children see? Ask them to share the images they see with a talk partner.
- Ask the children to visualise the scene and draw a picture to represent their visualisation using charcoal on white paper or chalk on black paper,
- Ask children to think about how to create the silhouette of Skellig against the moonlit arched window.
- Read the rest of Chapter 31.

Session 12 and 13: Dance
Learning Objective:
- Children will be able to compose dance movements inspired by description in the text.
  For this session you will need to work in the hall or large space.
  - Begin by rereading chapter 31, and ask the class to think about what they could see while you were reading.
    When you were listening, did you see the scene happening in your imagination?
    Tell us about that...
  - Ask the children to imagine what they would hear if they were in the room with Skellig. They may suggest the creaking, breathing, squeaking, heartbeats, the hum of distant traffic... list these different sounds and think together about how you could make them with percussion instruments.
  - Give one group the opportunity to develop these ideas into music, remembering that the sounds are very soft, hardly audible.
  - While this group plans and practices, talk to the others about the dance Skellig does with the children. Discuss the moment when they lift up from the ground and what that would feel like. They will be working in groups to interpret that moment through dance.
  - Allow children time to compose movements and their dance sequence. Perform to the rest of the class.

Session 14: Writing in role - Letter writing
Learning Objectives:
- Children are able to infer a character's feelings, actions and motives.
- Children can write a letter, using appropriate layout and language.
- Children reread writing and make changes to grammar and vocabulary.
  Read to the end of chapter 38
  - Discuss how Michael is feeling about the baby.
  - How does he react to the fact she is going to have an operation? Allow the children to talk with a partner about the baby and how Michael can feel her heartbeat in his.
  - Tell the children that today they are going to write a letter to the baby in role as Michael, telling her his hopes and fears and sharing his news about Skellig and Mina.

Session 15: 'Tell Me' Discussing meanings
Learning Objectives:
- Children will be able to summarise the main ideas from a text, identifying key details that support the main ideas;
- Children will understand how authors develop characters.
- Children will be able to comment on characters' roles and actions through inference in the text.
  Read to the end of the story.
  Tell me....
  - Who is Skellig? Why was he so important in Michael’s story? How did your feelings about this character change in the course of reading the book? Was there anything that puzzled you about the text?
  - After a discussion, invite the children to write their own answer to the question ‘Who is Skellig?’ in their learning journals.
  You could display these journals in the writing or book area, with other work around Skellig.

Further writing opportunities around this book could include:

- Read the ‘note from the author’ at the end of the novel. Ask the class to complete their journal with their own ‘note’ about writing and stories.
- Children could also research David Almond on the internet and write questions they would like to ask about the story or the author. They could work in groups asking each other their questions (hot seating) and answering in role as David Almond.
- Write an entry in Mina’s diary – what does she feel about her new friend Michael and their discovery?
- Write a description, sighting Skellig in the sky either in role as a character or as a passerby – it could even make the news as a sighting of an unidentified flying object.
• Write a chapter from the past about Skellig and his relationship with Ernie, the man who used to live in the house.
• Write a fact page about particular breeds of birds for a class book.
• Compare the book with the film and write reviews.
• Research the many different images and book covers of Skellig as well as the images in the film or in plays - design their own cover.