

The Storm Whale by Benji Davies (Simon and Schuster)

This is the story of a lonely little boy, a whale washed up on the beach and a friendship that will change both their lives forever. Noi and his father live in a house by the sea, his father works hard as a fisherman and Noi often has only their six cats for company. So when, one day, he finds a baby whale washed up on the beach after a storm, Noi is excited and takes it home to care for it. He tries to keep his new friend a secret, but there's only so long you can keep a whale in the bath without your dad finding out. Noi is eventually persuaded that the whale has to go back to the sea where it belongs. For Noi, even though he can't keep it, the arrival of the whale changes his life for the better - the perfect gift from one friend to another.

Overall aims of this teaching sequence:

- To engage children with a story with which they will empathise.
- To explore themes and issues, and develop and sustain ideas through discussion, enabling children to make connections with their own lives.
- To develop creative responses to the text through play, drama, music and movement, storytelling and artwork.
- To compose a free verse poem.
- To write in role in order to explore and develop empathy for a character.
- To write with confidence for real purposes and audiences.

This teaching sequence is designed for a Year 1 or Year 2 class.

Overview of this teaching sequence.

This teaching sequence is approximately 3 weeks long if spread out over 15 sessions. The book offers a range of opportunity to work across the curriculum as well as in English sessions, giving children the chance to work in more depth around the themes. Benji Davies' powerful illustrations enhance and extend the text, giving a new meaning not expressed in the text and demand to be explored time and again, each time offering something new to the reader. Whilst the text is quite minimal in comparison to the complexity of the illustrations and the detail they offer, each word is carefully chosen for effect, providing superb models for children's own writing. There are plenty of opportunities to inspire authentic pieces of writing for a range of purpose and audience. Both adults and children alike will enjoy poring over this book and immersing themselves in the world which Noi and his dad occupy. The strong characterisation enables teachers to support children in developing empathy and coming to terms with the difficult themes of loss, loneliness and bereavement.

Key Teaching Approaches:

Reading aloud
 Visualising
 Drawing and artwork
 Responding to illustration
 Drama and Role-Play
 Freeze Frame and Thought Tracking
 Role on the Wall
 Writing in role
 Looking at Language
 Book Talk: 'Tell Me'
 Shared writing
 Storymapping and re-enactment
 Oral storytelling

Teaching Sessions

Before beginning the sequence:

- Take care to find out about your children's home situations and whether there are any changes in circumstances or emotional need that may demand sensitivity, such as working with a trusted adult or friend.
- Gather fiction and non-fiction books that develop children's wider understanding and enrich language around the themes of whales, seaside and island environments, storms, such as: *Big Blue Whale* by Nicola Davies and Nick Maland.
- Gather books that enable children to explore the emotional meanings in the book: loss, loneliness, relationships, parenting, keeping secrets, such as: Benji Davies' other books, *Grandad's Island* and *On Sudden Hill*, (with Linda Sarah), *How to Catch a Star* by Oliver Jeffers, and *Bog Baby* by Jeanne Willis and Gwen Millward.
- Give the children a special object, such as a pebble, to look after. Spend some time naming and stressing the importance of caring for it. The pebbles could arrive in a package or just appear in the classroom one morning with a note explaining this.
- As part of cross-curricular learning, it would benefit the children to explore the seaside environment more widely, considering local wildlife, physical and human habitats, weather patterns, and environmental issues.
- Gather props and objects that support a seaside theme and provide sensory stimulus to enrich language, such as: driftwood, rocks and pebbles, wet and dry sand, shells, seaweed, salt water and perhaps small world figures with which the children could re-enact the story. They could also create their own.
- Share poems, artwork, photographs and sound or film clips about the sea, collecting vocabulary to describe it in relation to different weather conditions.
- Children could listen to music such as Benjamin Britten's 'Four Sea Interludes' from his opera *Peter Grimes*, visualising and drawing what they imagine a particular seascape looks like:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTd2aXLTA84>
- Whale sounds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWPVJlyJkbg>

Session 1 Introducing the book* - Reading aloud, Artwork and Responding to illustration

**This book has been chosen, in part, because of the quality of illustrations it contains and the ways in which the illustrations work with and add to the text to create deeper meaning for the reader. Children will need time and opportunity to explore and respond to the pictures and to talk together about what they contribute to their understanding of the text. As the sessions unfold, you might wish to give the children time to look back at the illustrations and pick up on things they might have missed.*

- Without showing the children any of the book, including the cover, or sharing the title, read aloud the first sentence.
- Using chalk pastels, charcoal or drawing pencils, ask them to draw what they see in their mind's eye to illustrate this sentence. Re-read as many times as the children need for them to be able to visualise the characters in the scene.
- Invite children to annotate their artwork with further detail and description, eliciting their ideas about the weather, the type of beach, the mood of the sea, etc.
- Pin the artwork up to create a gallery and give the children time to look at each other's drawings during a gallery walk. Invite children to comment on what is similar and what is different about the way they have illustrated the opening sentence and why they think this is. They may refer to personal experience of visiting the seaside or make connections through their experience of TV, film or other books.
- How does the way in which they have drawn the pictures express the atmosphere of the seaside scene they had in mind? Read aloud some of the children's annotations, discussing particularly effective words or phrases that either confirm or add meaning to the artwork.
- Show the children the real illustration, asking them to compare it to their own interpretation. Encourage them to explore the way the characters are drawn and set in more depth, drawing out ideas about the space between the father and son, how hard it is to find all the cats, facial expressions, etc.
- Does anything puzzle them about the scene? Do the children have any questions about the book?

Session 2-3: Tell Me Book Talk*, Freeze-Frame and Thought Tracking*

* Discussion about books forms the foundations for working with books. Children need frequent, regular and sustained opportunities to talk together about the books that they are reading as a whole class. The more experience they have of talking together like this the better they get at making explicit the meaning that a text holds for them.

*Freeze-frames are still images or a tableau. They can be used to enable groups of children to examine a key event or situation from a story and decide in detail how it could be represented. When presenting the freeze-frame, one of the group could act as a commentator to talk through what is happening in their version of the scene, or individual characters could be asked to speak their thoughts out loud.

- Before beginning this session, you could create a (scrapbook sized) diary owned by Noi, in which you could write a couple of entries in role, describing his daily life on the island, such as an imagined routine, something he did on the beach, his relationships with the cats, what his dad did.
- Re-read the opening sentence aloud, then share the illustration of Noi eating his breakfast and his father collecting his coat, without sharing any text or the next illustration yet.
- Discuss with the children what they notice as they explore the illustration:
 - *What do you like and dislike about what you see?*
 - *Does it remind you of anything in real life or stories?*
 - *Do you have any questions about it? Does anything puzzle you?*
 - *How does this picture add to or change what you thought before?*
- Show the children the next image of Noi looking out of the window.
- Ask the children to show you what they think the facial expressions will be on Noi and his father's faces. Gather responses and reasons.
- Read aloud the accompanying text 'Every day, Noi's dad left early for a long day's work on his fishing boat. He wouldn't be home again till dark.' Invite the children to respond to this. Support them with language that will help them to express their emotional responses to Noi's situation.
- In pairs, ask the children to be Noi and his father and role-play then freeze-frame what happens in the next two minutes. (Does Noi stay still? Does his dad turn to look back at him?).
- How do they think Noi and his dad are feeling? What are they thinking? Ask the children to focus on facial expression and to stand in a way that conveys the mood of the characters.
- Scribe or ask the children to write a thought bubble in role as Noi or his Dad, suggesting what they are thinking. Compare responses and ask the children to justify their ideas, making reference to the illustration and the text.
- Introduce Noi's diary and read aloud the entries. Shared write a new entry with the children, based on their responses in role as Noi. Invite the children to write a new diary entry for themselves. Those that role played Noi's dad may instead wish to create a diary entry for him.
- Paste the entries in the diary and display it in the reading area for the children to explore, revisit and add to.

Session 4: Designing a game for Noi – Writing lists and instructions

- Before beginning this session, gather a range of resources that the children are going to create a seaside game.
- Re-read from the beginning until 'He wouldn't be home again till dark.'
- Explain to the children that Noi needs to entertain himself for the day. Gather the children's ideas about what he could do and how he could make use of the natural resources around him, without resorting to watching TV or playing video games for hours on end.
- You could make available other texts in which characters entertain themselves by the beach. You might show a clip from CBeebies' adaptation of Mairi Hedderwick's Katie Morag books which provides a good starting point for entertainment on an island such as Katie's or Noi's.
- Ask pairs of children to make up a game for Noi to help him while away the hours alone. Return to the first illustration to provide stimulus for ideas and to reference some of the natural and manmade resources Noi would have access to.

- Children could write a list of these in order that you can provide them with what they think they will need to devise the game. This could include: shells, rope, netting, stones, a windmill, a bucket, sticks, string, pegs, bunting, plant pots, baskets etc.
- Once the pairs have had ample time to design then take turns to play and refine their game, support one to take photographs with which they can explain how to play the game to another child. As they orally rehearse, support children to make precise language choices, including adverbial phrases, that enable the listener to play the game as intended.
- Drawing on the oral rehearsal and using the photographs as stimulus, ask pairs to collaborate to write the instructions in sequence. You can model this as shared writing.
- Make the children's work into a games instruction book and keep with the accompanying props in the classroom so that the children can have a go at playing each other's games.
- You could suggest sending the instructions to Noi, with a covering note, so that he can try out the games. You could have a thank you card from him scheduled to arrive in the post a few days later, to enhance the authenticity of the writing experience.

Session 5: Role on the wall*

**Role on the wall is a technique that uses a displayed outline of the character to record feelings (inside the outline) and outward appearances (outside the outline) at various stopping points across the story. Using a different colour at each of the stopping points allows you to track changes in the character's emotional journey.*

- Create large pictures of Noi and his Dad and display on flipcharts or the wall.



- Re-read the book and explore the illustrations again from the beginning until '...home again till dark.'
- Following discussion, scribe what the children know about the characters' outward behaviour or appearance on the outside of the pictures and what they think they are feeling or thinking on the inside.
- Display these on the working wall to refer back to and revisit later as the events of the story unfold.

Sessions 6-7: Visualising, Movement and Poetry

**Asking children to picture or to 'visualise' a character or place from a story is a way of encouraging them to move into a fictional world. Children can be asked to picture the scene in their mind's eye or 'walk around it' in their imagination. Once they have done so, they can bring it to life by describing it in words or recreating it in drawing or painting.*

- Without sharing the illustration, read aloud 'One night, a great storm had raged around their house.'
- What images does this conjure up in children's minds? Which choice of words or phrase helped them to see the extent of the storm? Ask the children to talk about what they imagine is happening, clarifying, recasting and enriching their descriptions and drawing on those in the sentence.
- You could show children with less experience of storms footage of a seaside storm, e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kL_Pz0-V2UQc
- Provide the children with chalk pastels and dark coloured sugar paper to draw what they are visualising. Play Benjamin Britten's storm interlude of the 'Four Sea Interludes' from his opera *Peter Grimes*, to aid their visualising and inspire expressions of mood and atmosphere: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTd2aXLTA84> [from 12:00 minutes].
- Encourage children to talk about and annotate their storm drawings with choice words, phrases or sentences that

add detail and description.

- Provide groups of children with swathes of blue fabric then play the music again, asking them to move to the music as a great storm raging around Noi's house.
- Collect vocabulary to describe the storm and ask each child to write a word, phrase or sentence on a strip of dark coloured paper to describe the storm as they see it. As a group, organise the strips to create a verse of a poem; refining and making decisions based on how the words and phrases impact on the reader when they are read aloud and performed, e.g.:

*Raging, crashing waves
Howling wind rattling the windows
Sea charging up the beach
A deafening roar of waves.*

- Now, share the illustration of the following morning (taking care to conceal the text) and, after discussing and collecting vocabulary, ask the children to write a word, phrase or sentence to describe what they see in this picture. How does it compare to the storm that raged the night before? You could play Britten's first 'Sea Interlude, Dawn' (at 0:00 in the clip) or show them calm sea film clips or photographs to further support their visualisation.
- Ask groups to organise their strips to create a new morning verse of the poem which can follow on from their storm verse, e.g.

*Calm and quiet
Sea lapping gently on to the shore
Stillness
Birds calling a new day*

- Model how to text mark a class version of the two verse poem so that it can be developed into a performance reading, inviting them to consider vocal expression and intonation, actions or sound effects, as well as how it will be performed as a group – chorally or through individual parts; all of which will impact on the audience experience of the contrast between the raging storm and calm dawn.
- Ask groups to rehearse then perform their poem, inviting comments from the class on the impact of each performance.

Session 8: Looking at language* – Shades of intensity

* Making word collections is a way of focusing on the language of a story or poem. Children can make collections of words that describe a place or situation. Collecting words in this way helps children to have a more focused awareness of the ways language affects our perceptions and understandings of character and the ways in which the author creates the readers' response.

- Read aloud from the beginning to where Noi is running towards the whale, stopping at 'It was a little whale washed up on the sand'.
- Discuss with the children how they think Noi felt as he realised what was there and as he got closer and closer to the whale. Collect words from the children to describe Noi's emotions.
- Create stepping stones with (paper or real) pebbles to depict the escalation in emotion from the first moment Noi spotted something to realising it was a whale to kneeling beside it. Read on to 'I must be quick'. What is the emotion Noi is left with?
- Ask groups of children to collaborate to choose words that describe Noi's emotions as he races across the beach. Have children write these on their set of paper pebbles then organise them to demonstrate shades of emotional intensity.
- As a class, you might have groups bid for their word to be included on the working wall pebbles, justifying their language choice and the position in which it could be placed.
- At this point, share the front cover and title of the book, *The Storm Whale*.

Reading for information and research

- You might want to deliver the following sessions as part of cross-curricular work or even return to these once the children have experienced the whole text, if you don't want to break their connection with the emotional journey experienced in the story.
- Suggest to the children that they might be able to help Noi work out what to do with a beached baby whale
- Collect what children already know about whales and their basic needs. You could record their ideas in a chart through which they can continue to record what they are finding out, having discussed what they think they could find out, e.g.:

What I already know about whales:	What I would like to find out about whales:	What I have discovered about whales:

- Explain that the children are going to create a film/book about looking after beached whales, so that they can advise Noi on how to deal with this situation.
- Provide a range of texts for children to research answers to their questions and that provoke further thinking, such as Nicola Davies' *Big Blue Whale*. You might want to share some clips from BBC wildlife documentaries or newspaper cuttings about beached whales and read Julia Donaldson's and Axel Scheffler's *The Snail and the Whale*.

Information writing – Shared Write a script for a TV Nature Narration

Nicola Davies, Zoologist and author, advises that we 'make the words as delicious as can be...' when writing non-fiction and in engaging and inspiring a reader of our writing.

- Look closely at the illustration of the mother and baby whale in Nicola Davies' *Big Blue Whale*. Talk to the children about what they notice in the picture, scribing their observations around a copy of the illustration.
- Read aloud the narrative along the top of the page: '*And there the blue whale gives birth to her baby, where storms and cold weather can't hurt it. The blue whale's baby slithers from her body, tail first. Gently she nudges it to the surface to take its first breath. Then the baby dives beneath her to take its first drink of milk.*' Then swiftly re-read, asking the children to reflect on and pick out words and phrases that they think best describe the whales, their movement and their relationship. Scribe these on strips of paper and display on the working wall so that the children can refer to them later.
- Show the children the documentary film clip of the baby whale's search for its mother:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00jz248>
- Ask the children to listen to language used (both descriptive and scientific) and support them to reflect on the way in which the narrative is structured; where the narrator pauses, vocal intonation, how music is used for effect, etc. Again pick out memorable words and phrases that can be displayed for the children to revisit.
- Using the same style of language and structure, share writing a script for a nature narrator using the image in *The Storm Whale*, from the endpapers at the front of the book, of the baby whale being left behind its group. Read aloud with the children in the voice of a wildlife documentary presenter, refining the writing to reflect the purpose and audience.
- Groups of children can write their own scripts then rehearse the oral presentation, using digital equipment to record the voiceover. Children can create artwork or film to accompany the narration.

Session 9-10: Storymapping* and Oral Storytelling

* Making a story map is a way of retelling the story. It is a graphic means of breaking a story down into episodes and sequencing its events. This kind of graphic representation helps children to hold on to the shape of the story more confidently so they can re-tell it orally or in writing. Children can also make story maps as a form of planning, to prepare for their own writing.

- Prior to this session, ensure that the children have had read aloud and had time to explore a range of texts that will support ideas about Noi's island life, such as: *Katie Morag Island Stories* or *Selkie Stories*

(<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandstories/aselkiestory/selkiestory/index.asp>).

- Re-read to 'He told stories about life on the island. The whale was an excellent listener.'
- Show the children the picture of Noi telling stories to the whale. *Why do we think Noi needs someone to be an excellent listener? What might he need to talk about?* You might choose to make Noi's missing mother more explicit, directing them to the clues that there are only three out of six cats not in the shadows, two other bowls stacked by the stove, only two dressing gowns hung in the bathroom, etc.
- Children can share ideas and create storymaps to help them to tell their island story orally to the whale. You could provide a toy whale to which they could tell their stories, even create a model bath and cushions where the children can tell their stories.
- Children could write stories to entertain their pet pebbles. These stories could be written in their personal journals / diaries and will not be marked. It is important the children are provided opportunity to write creatively and imaginatively.

Session 11-12: Discussion and Debate – Conscience Alley* to prepare advice for a character

**Conscience Alley is a useful technique for exploring any kind of dilemma faced by a character, providing an opportunity to analyse a decisive moment in greater detail. The class forms two lines facing each other. One person (the teacher or a participant) takes the role of the protagonist and walks between the lines as each member of the group speaks their advice. It can be organised so that those on one side give opposing advice to those on the other. When the protagonist reaches the end of the alley, they make their decision.*

- Re-read and read aloud to 'Noi was worried that his dad would be angry about having a whale in the bath', pausing at this illustration. You might want to create a word collection reflecting the shades of intensity in Noi's anxiety as his dad draws closer to the house. Children could write and organise words similar to 'worried' on paper clothes hung on a washing line, e.g. 'anxious', 'nervous'...
- Ask children to consider whether Noi should tell his dad about the whale, encouraging them to discuss and justify their ideas.
- Read aloud 'Somehow, Noi kept his secret safe all evening.' and show them the image of the two having their tea.
- Ask pairs of children to role-play the conversation that the pair might be having.
- Ask children to freeze-frame this scene and, when tapped on the shoulder, ask the children unfreeze and to articulate what they are thinking in role as either Noi or his dad. You might want to model this with an additional adult or confident speaker in the class.
- Ask children to write or have scribed speech and thought bubbles for the two characters.
- Read on to 'He even managed to sneak some supper for his whale.' While his dad sleeps, ask the children if they think Noi should tell his dad?
- Scaffold with arguments for and against that can be modelled by adults and confident children, gradually inviting others to voice their opinions.
- Children can create a Conscience Alley through which a child can walk in role as Noi while the others quietly offer their advice, choosing for or against telling his dad. At the end of the line (perhaps denoted by an image of the whale in the bath on the IWB), 'Noi' can share his decision and any arguments offered that led him to this decision.
- Write a note of advice to Noi to which you could ask other children respond in role.

Session 13: Role on the Wall and personal writing – 'Goodbye'

- Read on to 'back to the sea, where it belonged', showing the children the illustration of the whale in the boat.
- Return to the two Roles on the Wall. In a different colour write what is different for Noi and his Dad now. You could have them displayed close together now rather than widely spaced on the board as before. How are they both feeling? What are they thinking about?
- What could Noi say as he gives the whale back to the sea? Share and scribe ideas to help Noi.
- Explain that there will be a ceremony to give their pebbles back and they have to write some goodbye words. The children could write their words privately on a piece of paper that they could then turn into a paper boat and, having dropped their pebble back into the sea (a water tray), they can have their boats set sail onto the water.
- Finish reading the story to the end.

- How do the children feel? Can they add something else to the Roles on the Wall now?

Session 14-15: Storymapping, Shared Writing and Bookmaking

**Making a story map is a way of retelling the story. It is a graphic means of breaking the story down into episodes and sequencing events. This kind of graphic representation helps children to hold on to the shape of the story more confidently so that they can retell it orally prior to writing. Children can also make story maps as a form of planning, to prepare for their own writing.*

**Shared writing is possibly the most important way a teacher can help all the children to experience what it's like to be a writer. Acting as a scribe, the teacher works with a group of children to create a text together. Teacher and children work as active partners, talking together to share ideas while the teacher guides the children through all the descriptions that writers need to make and helps them shape their thoughts on paper.*

**publishing their work for an audience helps children to write more purposefully. Bookmaking provides a motivating context within which children can bring together their developing understanding of what written language is like; making written language meaningful as they construct their own texts. The decisions that all writers have to take and the processes of redrafting, editing and punctuation can be demonstrated and discussed as teachers and children write together in shared writing.*

- Re-read the whole story to the children.
- Summarise the key events with the children, swiftly creating a story map that can be used for the children to retell the story. Discuss with the children which words and phrases in the book help us to sequence the story, e.g. 'As he got closer...' or 'The night was drawing in...' and where detail and description can be added, perhaps drawing on work done around the storm.
- Ask children either to storymap and write a simple retelling of the story or retell the story from the Dad's viewpoint or even the baby whale's. You could even use the story to innovate and re-imagine a new one involving a different child, setting or animal or extend the story to explore an adventure that Noi and his Dad have together on the island after the story ends.
- If retelling the story from a different point of view, you will want to scaffold the children's writing by preparing effective questions with which to interview or hotseat the character, eliciting responses that can feed into the narrative. This can be overlaid on to the children's original storymaps.
- Either immediately or after working with response partners, children can write, illustrate and publish their stories in handmade books. Children can illustrate in the style of Benji Davies and think about how to organise the text and pictures on the page for effect.
- Display their handmade books in the reading area, so that they can revisit and read aloud to each other (or to the whale).

Other ideas to use across the curriculum:

Science

- Find out about whales, their behaviour and their habitats.
- Investigate waterproof materials for Noi and his Dad to wear in a storm.
- Investigate levers and other ways of lifting a heavy load.
- Explore and investigate the natural features and wildlife of a seaside environment.

Geography

- Learn about physical, environmental and human features of a seaside location.
- Investigate Island life, comparing it to other human settlements – focus on a child's perspective.
- Find out about fishing, a fisherman's lifestyle and impact of trawler fishing on livelihood and the environment.

Maths

- Shape, scale and measurement
 - Measure and map out the size of various whale species with chalk in the playground. Compare the whales with each other and humans as well as exploring birth weight and length.
 - Investigate how large a bath would need to be to hold a baby Minke whale?

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- If the whale is an excellent listener, then what else might Noi tell it? How does it feel not having the words to describe how one might feel? How can we help him?
- Explore feelings of loss and loneliness.