

# SCAVENGERS – TEACHER'S NOTES



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darren Simpson is in his thirties and lives with his wife and children in Nottingham. He has written numerous adult short stories, and *The Dust on the Moth*, a crowdfunded multimedia collaboration including music downloads, art and photography. This is his first book for younger readers.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Landfill has lived his whole life as a scavenger, running with woofers, swimming with turtles and feasting on fresh gull. Old Babagoo has always looked after him, on one condition – follow his rules. NEVER COME LOOKING OUTSIDE. NEVER RISE ABOVE THE WALL. But despite the dangers, Landfill longs to see Outside. And some rules are made to be broken.

## BEFORE READING

Rather than launching straight into a new novel consider how you will introduce it. Before reading think about what your readers will need in order to be able to access the text. Is the context unfamiliar? Can they draw on their background knowledge and experience? How will you capture their interest?

Here are a few ways in which you could approach *Scavengers*.

### Visualisation Front Cover

Visualisation supports prediction as well as elaborative inferences. Asking children to think about the content of the front cover illustration before they see it will initiate ideas about the possible content. Before sharing the front cover of the book, you are going to describe the illustration to build up a picture in the children's heads. Ensure they have paper and pencils to sketch the images in their mind's eye from your description.

### Vocabulary

Begin with the word 'scavenger' written in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Ask the children to look closely at the front cover illustration to see what clues they can find to the meaning of the word. Once some definitions have been established, share some dictionary definitions. The OED defines a scavenger as:

*An animal that feeds on carrion, dead plant material, or refuse.  
A person who searches for and collects discarded items.*

Use this information to make predictions about the story and why it is called *Scavengers*. Read the blurb to build on initial ideas. Invite the children to pose questions about the story and the characters, which can be recorded and referred back to as you read on.

## Think Aloud

Use this approach for piquing interest and predicting what the book might be about. Prepare a slideshow of the opening (up to 'shaggy muttler'), with each sentence on a new line. Animate so the sentences appear line by line. As each new sentence appears, stop to 'think aloud'.

For example:

'The boy growled, dropped to all fours and took one end of the stick between his teeth.'

- What impression do you have of this boy?
- What do 'growled' and 'dropped to all fours' remind you of?
- Why do you think he might be behaving like this?

As you reveal each line, have the children discuss their ideas in pairs before sharing with the class.

Make explicit how our understanding builds as more of the text is revealed.

Keep the session pacy.

## DURING READING

### CHAPTERS 1-3

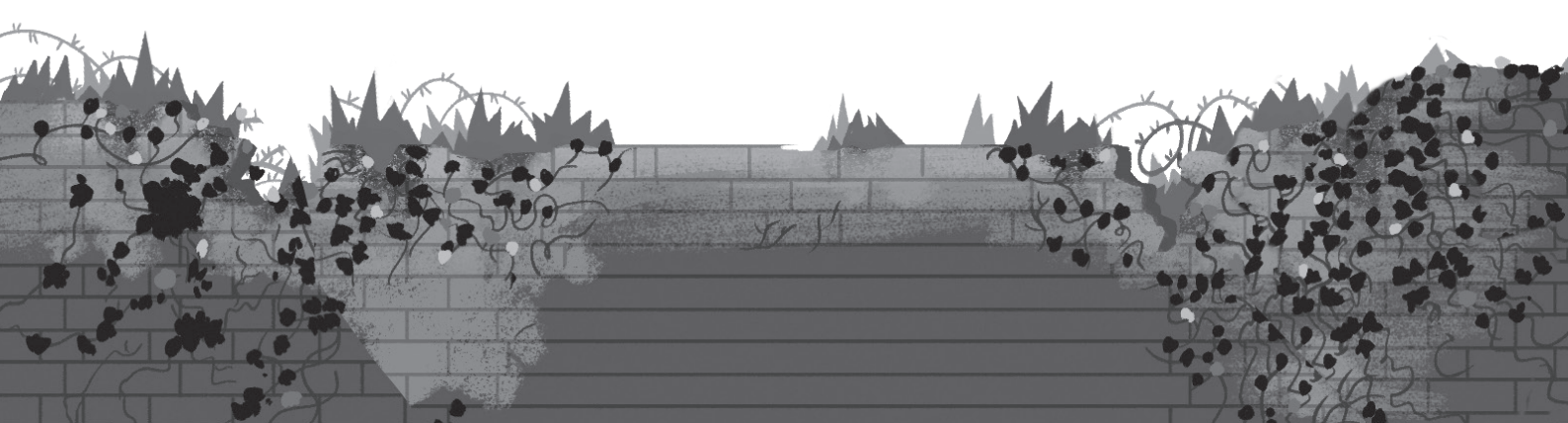
#### Discussion: First Impressions: Landfill

Begin by asking what has been learned about Landfill in the opening chapters.

What do you **know** about him? (The answers should refer to the text and information that can be directly retrieved. This will help you establish if your pupils are able to understand the surface level of the text).

Next ask, what do you want to find out or what are you curious to discover about Landfill? Create a list of questions which can be referred back to as you read further in the story. You might ask the pupils if they think we will find answers to these questions. Which are likely to be answered in the story and which do you **anticipate** might not be answered? Make explicit the point that some questions might be left unanswered as writers do not set out to tell us everything about a character. Only what is needed for the story.

Finally ask, what inferences can you make about Landfill? The types of responses you might expect would refer to the text and use 'because' to justify the response. They may also draw on their background knowledge. Be alert to this and make the point that some inference is contingent upon us connecting what we already know with what the text tells.



## Responding to Literature: Hinterland

Creating mental images of the setting enhances understanding of the text and brings the story to life. Hinterland is an unfamiliar setting and the language used by the author is crucial to combine with background knowledge to build the picture. Re-read the initial chapters noting the names of the places and the words used to describe them.

Working in pairs, ask children to describe the setting as they have imagined it. Next, working in pairs or fours, ask them to collaboratively create a map of the setting with key places such as;

- The Ivy Stack
- The Pale Loomer
- Muttbrough
- The Gully
- The Nook
- The Rippletop

Which language is used to create the images of the setting? Label the map with these.

## Language Study: Neologisms

Both Babagoo and Landfill use neologisms (a new word or a new meaning for an existing word). Some examples are;

- Gandering
- Jabberhole
- Skulk
- Grudging



Can you use the context to work out the meaning of these?

Keep a log of any further neologisms as you continue reading.

Perhaps you can invent some neologisms of your own? Why not have a class contest to see who can come up with the best neologism of the week. Remember it should be a useful word rather than a nonsense word.

## CHAPTERS 4-5

### Discussion: The Rules

*"To worry you have to care, and if you cared you'd respect the rules."*

- Do you agree?
- Does questioning rules show a lack of respect?
- Is it healthy to blindly obey rules without ever questioning them?
- By questioning the rules is Landfill showing disrespect to Babagoo?
- Do you think Babagoo is fair to say that Landfill doesn't care?

Look for evidence that Landfill cares about Babagoo. Keep a note of the rules as you come across them in the story. As you collect the rules consider what they tell you about the character of Babagoo.

Why do you think societies make rules?

Are there different reasons?



Sometimes rules are made in response to people's fears.

## **Responding to Literature: Babagoo and Landfill**

What kind of relationship do Babagoo and Landfill have? Consider what you know about the way they came to be together. Look for examples of dialogue and action that give you clues to the way they get on. How old do you think they are?

## **Language Study: Landfill: Boy or animal?**

'He cackled as warm water pounded his skin, and with the gutter bubbling behind him, loped on all fours to the Gully.'

In this sentence, what impression do you get of the way Landfill moves?

Can you find any other examples of language used to describe Landfill which gives the impression of him being animal-like in his behaviour? Discuss the reasons why he might behave like this.

## **CHAPTERS 6 – 8**

## **Discussion: Landfill Lies**

At the end of Chapter 8, Landfill agrees to be 'a careful, obedient, respectful boy.' Do you believe him? Do you think Bagaboo believes him?

Working in small groups, ask each member of the group to make a prediction about what Landfill might do next. Ask them to write a sentence justifying their prediction using evidence from the text.

These can be written down and placed in a sealed envelope to be opened at the end of Part Two.

## **Responding to Literature: Readers' Theatre**

Readers' Theatre helps create a dynamic reading and gives readers the opportunity to hear as well as see the text.

Procedure: Prepare photocopies of chapter six for two characters and a narrator.

Take the first copy and highlight the dialogue spoken by Landfill. Highlight the second copy with the dialogue spoken by Babagoo. The narrator will read everything apart from the dialogue.

First read the chapter aloud to the class to model expression.

Ask the children to highlight or use sticky notes to identify examples of body language. In this chapter it seems as if more truth seems to be spoken through body language than the words the characters say. Can this be conveyed through the dramatic reading?

Working in groups of three, have the children practise reading the readers' theatre.

Select one or two groups to read aloud their prepared readers' theatre to the class.

Final reflection: invite the children to consider how reading aloud in this way has helped them redefine their understanding of the characters.



## Language Study: Hunger's Eye

Re-read the section on pages 66-67 beginning;

*'Landfill gawped and moaned...' to 'fading into the night.'*

Landfill comes up close to Hunger's Eye for the first time. How does the author use language to convey Landfill's responses, in particular his inability to move?

What do we learn about Hunger's Eye? Are there clues that help the reader work out what Hunger's Eye actually is?

## CHAPTERS 9 – 11

### Discussion: How can knowing make danger?

Babagoo tells Landfill that he has lied about the swelling to protect him.

- Can you understand why Babagoo has lied to Landfill?
- Is it always wrong to tell a lie or can you think of times when telling a lie leads to a better outcome?

Landfill confides in Longwhite about breaking the rules and the lies he has been told.

Fill in a table like the one below to think about the consequences of the truth:

The lie	Consequences of knowing the truth
The swelling is an illness	Landfill questions where he came from
The blood in the urine is nothing to worry about	Landfill may worry about Babgoo's health

Finally discuss who is most in danger from Landfill knowing the truth. Are there any other lies that Babagoo may have told to protect Landfill (or himself)?

### Responding to Literature: Outside

Re-read the section from p101-107 where Landfill first goes Outside. He goes through a series of emotions as he sees what lies beyond Hinterland. Share the following emotions and sort them according to whether they fit with Landfill's feelings during the chapter. More than one emotion may be relevant.

- Excited
- Overwhelmed
- Terrified
- Exhilarated
- Apprehensive
- Fearful
- Nervous
- Uneasy
- Agitated
- Confident
- Calm
- Composed





- Content
- Cheerful
- Jubilant
- Elated



Match the emotion to specific incidents Outside.

Encourage responses which refer to the text by using language such as:

“Landfill seems overwhelmed by the amount of space outside **because** it describes him swaying ‘when vastness engulfed him’”

Final reflection: Is it be possible to experience more than one emotion at any one moment?

### Language Study: Longwhite

We don’t know at this stage what kind of creature Longwhite is. Review the chapter collecting language used to describe Longwhite. Write and display language snippets.

- What can you say about this creature?
- Do you know enough to guess what it is?

Make specific references to words to back up your ideas.

## CHAPTERS 12 – 14

### Discussion ‘Too much space even for rules’.

What does Landfill mean when he says this?

### Response to literature: ‘A crack in Bagaboo?’

Bagaboo is persuaded to take Landfill to the Spit Pit. There could be many motives for this. Share the following reasons and ask the children to order them to show the most relevant:

- He is getting older and needs to teach Landfill how to scavenge
- He wants to please Landfill
- He wants Landfill to enjoy himself
- He wants to share the beauty of the Spit Pit
- He wants Landfill to see that the Spit Pit isn’t a nice place to visit

What could happen when they visit the Spit Pit? Think about what you already know about the characters as you make your predictions.

### Language Study: Outside: Punctuation

At the beginning of Chapter 12, Landfill describes Outside to Longwhite. His manner of speaking is somewhat tentative and unsure as he explores his own reactions to the experience. Spend time re-reading the section noting the way punctuation is used to reflect Landfill’s feelings. In particular highlight the use of ellipses and dashes. Often an ellipsis is associated with building suspense but here it conveys uncertainty.



## CHAPTERS 15 – 19

### Discussion: The Spit Pit

Begin by asking pairs to talk about their impressions of the Spit Pit. Use the following prompts to structure thinking:

- Sounds
- Smells
- Sights
- Taste
- Feelings

Use the following questions to discuss further what the Spit Pit is like:

- Would Landfill feel differently about what he sees in the Spit Pit if he hadn't already been Outside?
- How did you feel about the treasures they find, in particular the black pudding and the toothbrush?
- Why is Babagoo so afraid of magazines and books?
- What does the visit to the Spit Pit teach Landfill?
- How do you think Babagoo feels about the experience?
- Have you visited anywhere like this?

### Language Study: The Outsider Visualisation

Before you read this section, did you have any ideas about what an Outsider would be like?

Re-read the section from p149-154. Note any key words and phrases which are used to describe the Outsider. Pairs of children can work together to describe what they think the Outsider looks like. The emphasis here is on building a shared understanding while acknowledging that we all visualise things differently. Once you have finished describing, draw a sketch of the Outsider. Compare sketches, referring to the text to check if any details have been missed.

Which words and phrases were most effective in helping build a picture of the character?

### Response to literature: Longwhite

What role does Longwhite play in the story?

- Confidant
- Devil's advocate
- Conscience
- Ally
- Friend
- Enemy
- Antagonist



Check that everyone has a shared understanding of the different terms by inviting contributions from the group. Dictionaries can be useful to clarify understanding.

Allow discussion time for pairs to decide which of the roles fits best. It may be that more than one role is relevant because Longwhite takes on different roles at different times depending on Landfill's needs.

Encourage responses which refer to specific moments in the story, e.g.

Longwhite acts as a confidant when Landfill talks about going Outside for the first time.

# CHAPTERS 19 –24

## Discussion: Babagoo Outside

We get hints as a reader about Babagoo's life before he came to Hinterland. Scan back through the book to find any evidence of Babagoo's life before.

Use the table below to record ideas, both those explicit in the text and your own speculations, about Babagoo's life Outside.

Family	
Friends	
Job	
Home	

How do you think Babagoo came to Hinterland? What could have happened to lead him to reject Outside? There could have been a whole sequence of events. Give time for group discussion before sharing different possibilities.

## Response to literature: Viewpoint of the Outsider

What does the Outsider think of Landfill? Identify instances in the text that reveal the Outsider's thoughts.

If she was going to record her impressions in a diary what would she write?

Explore the contrasting perceptions of the meetings by writing diary entries from the point of view of Dawn and one from Landfill.

## Language Study: Names: Vocabulary

'Your name's Landfill? As in rubbish?'

'As in *precious*.'

When Dawn finds out Landfill's name she makes the same association that most people would. Who do you think has told Landfill his name means 'precious'?

Landfill and Babagoo refer to everyone else as Outsiders. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an outsider in three ways:

*A person who does not belong to a particular organization or profession.*

*A person who is not accepted by or who isolates themselves from society.*

*A competitor, applicant, etc. thought to have little chance of success.*

Do any of these apply to Babagoo's definition?

Is there a different, perhaps more literal, meaning not used in the dictionary?

Teaching point: note that dictionaries are useful for helping us check definitions, but we have to apply contextual knowledge too.





## PART FOUR



### Discussion: The Past

Landfill asks Babagoo: *'If the past is like light from the stars, does that mean it always reaches you in the end?'*

This prompts Babagoo to talk about omens and to tell Landfill, *'there's no escaping what's owed to you.'*

What do you think of this? Is Bagaboo talking about himself here?

### Responding to Literature: The Outsider's Mask

With the class ask, 'What were your thoughts as you read the section when Landfill finds the mask and outfit?' Briefly discuss.

Explain that interior monologue is a technique that allows us to hear the thinking of characters at key moments. If this is a new idea model for the children. Language and register may be modelled by the teacher: eg. 'At first I can't take in what I'm seeing. I saw this that day in the Spit Pit when the Outsider attacked me. How has it got to be here?' and so on.

Next working in pairs, ask the children to express the interior speech of Landfill. Share one or two with the class.

Make it explicit that the interior monologue provides a different view of the action, deepens response and contrasts what is said with what is meant.

### Language Study: Creating mood and atmosphere

'The sky had been swallowed by seething clouds, which raced across the sky with disorientating haste.' (p250)

- What impression of the sky does this sentence give?
- How would you describe the mood at this moment?

Rank the following words from most to least descriptive of the mood:

sinister	hostile	threatening
foreboding	ominous	violent

Is there a specific word which gives this impression?

Children may pick 'seething' as a key adjective. Explore the reasons behind this word choice by exploring synonyms and considering why those have not been used.

Is it significant that seething describes an intense but unexpressed anger?

Some synonyms to explore are:

raging, smouldering, fuming, ranting, furious

Are there any others you would want to add?



## PART FIVE

### Discussion: Outsiders

Landfill has been told throughout his life about how dreadful the Outsiders are. They seem to have no redeeming qualities.

- When Landfill goes Outside, what does he find?
- Can you find evidence for the Outsiders being good and for being bad in this final part?

### Responding to literature: Dawn

Dawn is very concerned for Landfill's wellbeing and feels that he is a victim and in danger from Bagaboo.

- Do you think Landfill sees himself as a victim?
- Is his life in Hinterland as bleak as Dawn seems to think or have you seen moments of joy and happiness, safety and security?

Use the table below to record your ideas and evidence from the story.

Landfill is in danger	Landfill is not in danger

- Does Dawn make the right choices? How could she have acted differently?

### Language Study: Naming Objects

When Landfill ventures Outside he sees many new things which he does not have the names for.

How many can you find? List them in a table like the one below. You could add some new ones too, e.g. what would he make of a television or computer?

Mobile phone	Small, plastic rectangle emitting a small shifting light



# AFTER READING

## Walls

The title page has the following author dedication:

For the children taught to build walls, and the children put behind them. Discuss with the children.

Possible prompts:

- What kind of walls is the author talking about here?
- Can you have more than one kind of wall?
- Are there walls that we are unable to see?
- How can a child be taught to build walls?

Make explicit that 'wall' can be used as a metaphor

- Can you think of any instances where children or adults have 'built walls' that are not physical walls?
- Challenge the children to think of as many different ways that 'wall' can be used as a metaphor.

## The Ending

At the end of the book it seems as if Landfill has made a decision to seek help from the Outsiders.

- What helps him come to this decision?
- What will happen to Landfill?

Explore the events after the story through discussion.

- What would happen where you live if Landfill appeared on the streets?
- How will Landfill adjust to life Outside?

This could be followed up through writing in role as Landfill one year later.

Text to world discussion: Are the children aware of the safety nets that exist to support the vulnerable? Share information about relevant organisations.

## The Rules

Look back at the rules created by Babagoo. Use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- Which rules would Babagoo have said were the most important?
- Which rules do you think were the most reasonable?
- What do you think the main purpose of the rules was?
- How do you think Landfill felt about the rules by the end of the story?
- How would the story have been different if Landfill had followed the rules?
- Is it better to do what you think is right or follow the rules?

## RELATED RESOURCES

Elizabeth Laird *The Garbage King*: A coming of age story based on real life events. Mamo is a destitute orphan who forms an unlikely friendship with a rich runaway.

Rudyard Kipling *The Jungle Book*: The classic adventure story of the man-cub Mowgli trying to find his place in the world.