



Moonfleet

Author: John Meade Falkner (1858–1932)

Teaching Notes author: Jo Tregenza

Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

Synopsis

The story tells of the journey and adventures of a 15-year-old orphan boy named John Trenchard. He forms a deep friendship with the local pub landlord, Elzevir Block, who has recently lost his own son at the hands of the local magistrate, Maskew. John and Elzevir go on a journey to find a diamond belonging to Blackbeard and are unfairly imprisoned for ten years, before returning home. They arrive during a storm and Elzevir saves John from drowning, but loses his own life. It is an emotional journey as John learns about himself and develops his own moral stance about life and people.

Social and historical context

The story is set in Dorset in 1757, a time when there was great poverty throughout Britain. The town of Moonfleet is a coastal town and smuggling provides an essential additional income for the residents. It is a tale of morality in which the local vicar sympathises with the impoverished smugglers. The story also explores the emotions of John as he discovers the importance of love and friendship and comes to learn that little good comes from greed. At the end of the story we learn that John has become wealthy, but he has used all his money to build homes for the poor.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

- *(Predicting)* Look at the front cover and ask the children how the lamp and the diamond might be connected. Ask them to predict what the story might be about.
- Give children the following artefacts: a candle, a fake diamond, a locket, a piece of paper with a few bible verses written on it and toy handcuffs. Discuss with the children how these items might be linked and what importance they might have to the story.
- Take a 'picture walk' through the story. Discuss the illustrations in the book with the children and talk about what the storyline might be.

During reading

Objective: Sustain engagement with longer texts, using different techniques to make the text come alive.

- *(Imagining)* Read Chapters 1–3 with the children. Re-read the beginning of Chapter 1 and ask the children to close their eyes and imagine the scene that John imagines: the ship tossing, the men shouting, etc. Challenge them to create sound effects using their voices and body parts.
- *(Deducing)* Ask the children why they think it is not safe to 'speak your mind' in Moonfleet. What do the children think has happened to John's parents?

Assessment:

- Can the children use clues from the text to draw conclusions?



Classics

Independent reading

- Ask the children to read Chapters 4–5. As they are reading ask them to be word detectives and collect vocabulary that is unusual or interesting. They could also include technical language. Invite them to write their words on an appropriately shaped piece of paper, e.g. a ship or diamond shape, and then create a class display.
- (*Clarifying*) Ask the children to consider how John's emotions change during these two chapters.

Assessment: Check that children:

- can deduce the main character's emotions from what is said or not said
- understand why the writer has used certain vocabulary in the story.
- Ask the children to finish reading to the end of the story independently.

Returning and responding to the text

Objective: Understand underlying themes, causes and points of view.

- (*Imagining*) Ask the children to create a map of Moonfleet, using evidence from the text to decide what is in the village and its location, e.g. churchyard close to the sea, the Why Not? Inn, John's aunt's cottage, the magistrate's Manor house, etc.
- (*Questioning*) Ask the children to think of questions using: Who? What? When? Where? How?
- (*Summarising*) Invite the children to work in pairs to come up with one key sentence to summarise each of the chapters of the story.

Assessment:

- Can the children sum up the key ideas using evidence from the text?

Speaking, listening and drama activities

Objective: Consider the overall impact of a live performance, identifying dramatic ways of conveying characters' ideas and building tension.

- Ask the children to use drama techniques to recreate the scenes from Chapter 8, from when John and Elzevir arrive at the coast of Moonfleet up to the point when Grace comes to see John. Remind the children to consider how they will convey the characters' emotions and how to build up the tension of the events in their performance.
- Afterwards, discuss the effectiveness of the children's drama presentation. Which techniques were particularly successful?

Writing activities

Objective: Select words and language drawing on their knowledge of literary features.

- Revisit Chapter 1 in which John helps to carve the poem for David's tombstone.
- Talk about Elzevir and his characteristics. Discuss the important events in his life, e.g. loss of his son, befriending John, losing his home to Maskew, giving his life for John, etc.
- Share examples of epitaphs and different poetic forms with the children.
- Ask them to write a poem that could be an epitaph for Elzevir.

Assessment:

- Can the children write original pieces using a range of stylistic features?



Classics

Whole class reads

Books on a similar theme:

- *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson
- *Plundering Paradise* by Geraldine McCaughrean

Cross-curricular links

Mathematics

- Review imperial measurements and their metric equivalents with the children.

Geography

- Engage the children in mapping the village of Moonfleet and tracking the journey of the two main characters.

Art

- Choose dramatic sections from the story to reproduce as comic strips. For example, illustrate a storyboard from when John hears about Blackbeard's diamond through to when he finds his coffin.

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Moonfleet (Oxford Level 16) curriculum coverage chart

Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:

- Can skim and scan to identify key ideas in a text. (R) [ORCS Standard 6, 3]
- Can use inference and deduction skills to discuss messages, moods, feelings and attitudes using the clues from the text. (D) [ORCS Standard 6, 8]
- Can discuss how an author builds a character through dialogue, action and description. (D) [ORCS Standard 6, 11]
- Can identify and discuss where figurative language creates images. (E) [ORCS Standard 6, 14]
- Can justify and elaborate on thoughts, feelings opinions and predictions, referring back to the text for evidence. (R/D) [ORCS Standard 6, 19]

Comprehension strategies

- Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the Teaching Notes to enable pupils to understand what they are reading in books that they can read independently. In these Teaching Notes the following strategies are taught: *Predicting, Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising, Imagining, Deducing*

ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: Years 5–6

Spoken language	Pupils should be taught to participate in discussions, presentations, performances and debates (SpokLang.9)
Reading: Comprehension	<p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context (Y5/6 ReadComp.2i)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence (Y5/6 ReadComp.2iii)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas (Y5/6 ReadComp.2v)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by discussing and evaluating how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader (Y5/6 ReadComp.3)</p>
Writing: Composition	Pupils should be taught to plan their writing by identifying the audience for and purpose of the writing, selecting the appropriate form and using other similar writing as models for their own (Y5/6 WritComp.1i)

SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes – Second level

Listening and talking	When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking (LIT 2-02a)
Reading	<p>Through developing my knowledge of context clues, punctuation, grammar and layout, I can read unfamiliar texts with increasing fluency, understanding and expression (ENG 2-12a)</p> <p>To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own (ENG 2-17a)</p> <p>To help me develop an informed view, I can [...] discuss the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre (ENG 2-19a)</p> <p>To show my understanding across different areas of learning, I can identify and consider the purpose and main ideas of a text and use supporting detail (LIT 2-16a)</p>
Writing	By considering the type of text I am creating, I can select ideas and relevant information, organise these in an appropriate way for my purpose and use suitable vocabulary for my audience (LIT 2-26a)

WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 5

Oracy	Learners are able to explain information and ideas, exploring and using ways to be convincing, e.g. use of vocabulary, gesture, visual aids (Y5_OracSpea.1)
Reading	<p>Learners are able to infer meaning which is not explicitly stated, e.g. what happens next?, why did he/she do that? (Y5_ReadComp.2)</p> <p>Learners are able to use a range of strategies for skimming, e.g. finding key words, phrases, gist, main ideas, themes (Y5_ReadStrat.5)</p>
Writing	Learners are able to write with a clear purpose, showing consideration for the reader, e.g. by choosing appropriate vocabulary and presentational devices (Y5_WritMean.1)

NORTHERN IRELAND Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 4

Talking and listening	Pupils can develop a role (L4_com_talk.1ii)
Reading	Pupils can show understanding by identifying and summarising information (L4_com_read.1i) Pupils can understand explicit meanings and recognise some implicit meanings (L4_com_read.4ii)
Writing	Pupils can choose from and use a range of forms, as appropriate (L4_com_writ.3)