Oliver Twist

Author: Charles Dickens (1812–1870)
Teaching Notes author: Jo Tregenza
Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

Synopsis

Oliver, born in a workhouse, but soon orphaned, asks for more food. He is sent off as an apprentice to an undertaker but runs to London where Fagin teaches him to steal. Oliver is accused of theft but taken in by Mr Brownlow. Nancy and Bill Sikes kidnap Oliver. Oliver is hurt during a burglary and taken in by Miss Maylie, who tries to find Mr Brownlow. Monks and Fagin plot to ruin Oliver but Nancy tries to save him. Sikes murders Nancy and the ‘wipe-swipers’ flee as Sikes is tracked down. At last Oliver is safe.

Social and historical context

In the mid-nineteenth century, there was widespread unemployment in England. As the use of machinery increased many jobs became obsolete. The country entered the worst depression it had ever seen. It was the responsibility of every parish to take care of its poor and workhouses were built to house them. In order for families to earn enough money to live, children were used as labour.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

(Predicting) Ask the children what they know about Oliver Twist. Have they heard his story before or seen a film or stage play? Compare what they know with the synopsis. Discuss the setting of the story. Why did Charles Dickens write his first story about a child in such poor circumstances? Predict what message about this story Charles Dickens might want to give readers.

During reading

Objective: Sustain engagement with longer texts, using different techniques to make the text come alive. Compare how writers from different times and places present experiences and use language.

Read together up to the end of Chapter 3.

(Summarising) Ask the children to describe the various settings, the workhouse, the undertaker’s shop, the streets of London and Fagin’s den.

(Clarifying) If you have an original version of Oliver Twist, read some of Dickens’ actual descriptions of these settings and compare them with the children’s own descriptions.

(Questioning) Encourage the children to question the huge differences in class between the wealthy and poor classes. Discuss different settings in the present day. Do class differences exist today? How much has changed since the 1830s when this story was written?

Discuss the author’s choice of names for the different characters – Mr Bumble, Mr Sowerberry, Mr Brownlow, Artful Dodger. Do the characters fit their names? Invent different names for some of the characters. Compare the language with Dickens’ original text. Ask the children to choose some unusual or unfamiliar words, phrases or sentences they like. They could make their own collection of ‘Favourite words and descriptions from Dickens’.

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Independent reading

- Ask the children to find and read their favourite descriptions of settings or characters. Firstly, they could read the passages silently, then read a few aloud to a partner, finally selecting one to read to the whole class.

Assessment:
- Can the children use a range of strategies to read for meaning?

Returning and responding to the text

- (Summarising) Ask the children to retell the main plot of Oliver Twist in their own words to a partner, then construct a whole class version from the suggestions. Make a list of the sub-plots.
- (Summarising) Ask the children to draw a mind map to show the main plot and all the sub-plots.
- (Clarifying) Discuss how the events and actions of the characters in the sub-plots interweave and affect the main plot.

Assessment:
- Can the children retrieve information from the text and summarise the plot?

Speaking, listening and drama activities

Objective: Improvise using a range of drama strategies and conventions to explore themes such as hopes, fears and desires.

- Ask the children to draw quick sketches of the characters from the story, labelling them with the characters’ names.
- Allow each child to choose and act in role as a character. The children playing different characters can practise and perform a scene from the story for the group or class.

Writing activities

Objective: Set own challenges to extend achievement and experience in writing.

- Ask the children to imagine a scene in which Oliver Twist has been transported to a large, modern school where he feels different from the other children.
- Invite the children to go into role as Oliver, engaging with a classroom filled with people. Ask them to freeze frame a scene at a significant moment and say what Oliver is thinking. What might the other children be saying?
- On a large piece of paper, brainstorm how Oliver thinks and feels. What does he notice about the room? How are the children different from or the same as him?
- Discuss with the children what they have achieved in this piece of writing. What would they like to improve?
- Encourage the children to set their own challenges. Then ask them to write a diary entry for the day that Oliver spent in the modern school.

Assessment:
- Can the children suggest improvements to their writing to make it more imaginative or thoughtful?
Whole class reads

Books on a similar theme:
- *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens
- *Street Child* by Berlie Doherty
- *Fair’s Fair* by Leon Garfield

Cross-curricular links

**History**
- Ask the children to find out what they can about workhouses in Victorian times on the Internet (ensure they have access to child-friendly sites only) and in the library. They could use their notes to draft a report on workhouses and the impact they had on people’s lives.

**Geography**
- Find a map of a section of modern day London and ask the children to draw comparisons with a map of the same section of Victorian London, e.g. an Edward Stanford map. What part has changed? Can they find out what were the key events that created the changes?
Oliver Twist (Oxford Level 17) curriculum coverage chart

Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:
- Can read aloud with pace, fluency and expression, taking into account a wide range of presentational devices and punctuation. (READ) [ORCS Standard 6, 1]
- 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 infer and deduce meaning based on evidence drawn from different points in the text. (D) [ORCS Standard 6, 16]
- Can justify preferences in terms of authors' styles and themes. (E) [ORCS Standard 6, 21]
- Can identify why a long-established novel, poem or play may have retained its lasting appeal. (E) [ORCS Standard 6, 23]

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

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)
|                 | Pupils should be taught to select and use appropriate registers for effective communication (SpokLang.12) |

| Reading: Word reading | Pupils should be taught to apply their growing knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes (morphology and etymology), as listed in Appendix 1, both to read aloud and to understand the meaning of new words that they meet (Y5/6 ReadWord.1) |

| Reading: Comprehension | Pupils should be taught to maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions (Y5/6 ReadComp.1iii)
|                        | Pupils should be taught to maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by making comparisons within and across books (Y5/6 ReadComp.1vi)
|                        | Pupils should be taught to understand 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)
|                        | Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by predicting what might happen from details stated and implied (Y5/6 ReadComp.2iv)
|                        | 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)
|                        | Pupils should be taught to discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader (Y5/6 ReadComp.3) |

| Writing: Composition | Pupils should be taught to plan their writing by noting and developing initial ideas, drawing on reading and research where necessary (Y5/6 WritComp.1ii)
|                     | Pupils should be taught to evaluate and edit by assessing the effectiveness of their own and others' writing (Y5/6 WritComp.3) |

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### 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)  
I am developing confidence when engaging with others within and beyond my place of learning. I can communicate in a clear, expressive way and I am learning to select and organise resources independently (LIT 2-10a) |
| --- | --- |
| Reading | 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)  
I can discuss the writer’s style and other features appropriate to genre (ENG 2-19a)  
I regularly select and read, listen to or watch texts which I enjoy and find interesting, and I can explain why I prefer certain texts and authors (LIT 2-11a)  
I can select and use a range of strategies and resources before I read, and as I read, to make meaning clear and give reasons for my selection (LIT 2-13a)  
Using what I know about the features of different types of texts, I can find, select and sort information from a variety of sources and use this for different purposes (LIT 2-14a)  
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) |
| Writing | Throughout the writing process, I can check that my writing makes sense and meets its purpose (LIT 2-23a)  
I can use my notes and other types of writing to help me understand information and ideas, explore problems, make decisions, generate and develop ideas or create new text. I recognise the need to acknowledge my sources and can do this appropriately (LIT 2-25a) |

### WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 5

| Oracy | Learners are able to speak clearly, using formal language and projecting voice effectively to a large audience, e.g. event for parents/carers, presentation to visitors (Y5_OracSpea.2)  
Learners are able to explore issues and themes through role play (Y5_OracSpea.5) |
| --- | --- |
| Reading | Learners are able to show understanding of main ideas and significant details in texts, e.g. mindmapping showing hierarchy of ideas, flowchart identifying a process (Y5_ReadComp.1)  
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)  
Learners are able to use a range of strategies to make meaning from words and sentences, including knowledge of phonics, word roots, word families, syntax, text organisation and prior knowledge of context (Y5_ReadStrat.1)  
Learners are able to read extended texts independently for sustained periods (Y5_ReadStrat.2) |
| Writing | Learners are able to use techniques in planning writing, e.g. mindmapping, sequencing, placemat activities (Y5_WritMean.4)  
Learners are able to revise and improve writing, explaining why they have made changes (Y5_WritMean.7) |

### 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)  
Pupils can use language techniques and register to engage the listener (L4_com_talk.5) |
| --- | --- |
| Reading | Pupils can show understanding by identifying and summarising information (L4_com_read.1i)  
Pupils can locate relevant information and use it appropriately (L4_com_read.2)  
Pupils can recognise main features and understand how these are linked to form and purpose (L4_com_read.4i)  
Pupils can understand explicit meanings and recognise some implicit meanings (L4_com_read.4ii) |
| Writing | Pupils can plan and make use of planning (L4_com_writ.1i)  
Pupils can express thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions, giving reasons when appropriate (L4_com_writ.2i) |