

Excellence in English

Book 2

D J Brindley

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I owe a debt of gratitude to my wife for her devoted help in the preparation of this book. I should also like to thank the many friends who have given advice.

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Lesson Programme

1

WRITING

2

READING

3

LANGUAGE AND
INFORMATION

4

POETRY

SHORT
STORY

5

ORAL

6

DRAMA

A Holiday Experience

Hello there! Have you enjoyed your holiday? I hope so. Did you go anywhere special or stay at home? Did anything of interest happen to you? Did you do something for the first time or meet someone new?

Spend the rest of this lesson talking to the person next to you about how you spent the holidays. Then describe anything of interest, however small, that happened to you, or to someone you know. Finish your account at home and bring it to school to read to the class during next week's writing lesson.

Length of project: 1 week

Old Mali and the Boy *by D R Sherman*

Jeffrey has thirteen marks on his backside: he has been caned by his headmaster for stealing from the maize fields. He does not want to tell his mother, and feels he can more easily confide in his old friend Mali, the gardener.

His troubles are soon forgotten when he remembers that Mali has promised to show him a splendid hunting bow. Jeffrey is impatient not only to see the bow but to undertake an expedition with Mali, knowing that he was once a skilled hunter.

This outstanding book is about a boy who learns that life can be hard. Jeffrey's burning desire to go hunting, his lust to kill and his need to act as a man when an emergency arises, make an enthralling story that you should find hard to put down.

Heinemann Windmill 128 pages (Penguin)



This Year's Reading

Last year you kept a list of the books you read. This *Reading Record* was entered in a file in the English room. Make out a similar list for the present year. First write your name and the heading *Reading Record* at the top of a ring-reinforced page. (If you aren't sure of the layout, look at *Excellence in English Book 1*, page 3.) Enter any books you have read since the end of the last school year. Give each book you read a grading: either VG (Very Good), G (Good), or FW (Fair to Weak). Show your list to the teacher, then place it in alphabetical order in the class reading file.

Spend the rest of this lesson reading the book you have brought to school. Alternatively, take one out of the class or school library. Here are some other books you might enjoy in addition to those recommended.

For readers who like a book with humour and an uncomplicated plot, *Jim Starling* and *Birdy Jones* are ideal. Jim tracks down thieves—perhaps a bit too easily—while Birdy seeks his fortune in London as a pop whistler. The author, E W Hildick, has written a series of books about his heroes, all of which are light-hearted and very simply written.

Animal lovers should enjoy Victor Pohl's *Their Secret Ways*, a book about the author's boyhood in South Africa, hunting, fishing and warding off dangerous snakes. The last section of the book tells how an affectionate little dog called Dassie accompanies the author on his hunting trips.

Tarka the Otter by Henry Williamson is another well-written and informative book for those interested in animal habits, though many students find it gives too much detail. Also fairly difficult is Eilis Dillon's *The Island of Horses*, but the story holds the interest well. Easier to read, and more popular, are Betsy Byars' *The Midnight Fox*, about a boy who tries to save the life of a black fox, and Walt Morey's *Kavik the Wolf Dog*.

Born Free enthusiasts probably know that Joy Adamson has written several other books about lions, among them *Living Free*, *Forever Free* and *Elsa and her Cubs*. Of these the last is often enjoyed most.

One or two old favourites need explanation. *King Solomon's Mines* has been widely read in schools and is a first-rate adventure story, but it doesn't present Africa as it is today. The way the white man treats the black in the story is a result of the colonial rule of the

last century, and is offensive to many Africans. The same is true of Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain*, though this is also a gripping tale. A truer picture of African life can be found in Camara Laye's *The African Child*, which is recommended in *Excellence in English* Book 3.

The Prisoner of Zenda by Anthony Hope has been a favourite for many years. Unfortunately the first chapter is very difficult. It can be left out provided you know that Rudolf, the hero of the story, is a distant cousin of the king of Ruritania—an imaginary country in Europe. Rudolf and the king have red hair and similar looks, making it possible for Rudolf to take the King's place at his Coronation. There follows a sword-rattling adventure in which Michael, the King's cousin, tries to kill Rudolf and seize the throne for himself.

Some students still enjoy Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (a selection of which can be found in a volume entitled *Sherlock Holmes Investigates*), and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a suspense story about a supernatural hound. There is suspense of a different kind in Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, a science fiction story with some rather difficult vocabulary, and Allan Campbell McLean's *The Hill of the Red Fox*, a story about foreign spies on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. This book is easier to read, though in parts too sensational.

A more convincing book, which girls in particular should enjoy, is Judith Kerr's *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, an account of the author's flight from Germany and her upbringing in Europe during the Second World War. Another good book about the war is *The Tunnel* by Eric Williams, which describes the author's capture and imprisonment in Germany. There follows a true account of a prisoner-of-war camp from which various escape attempts are made. These lead up to the author's second and more famous book *The Wooden Horse*.

Those of you who like fantasy should read three books by Alan Garner: *Elidor*, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomrath*. In these stories myth and legend affect the lives of ordinary people, causing them to be caught up in tense battles against unseen forces.

Leon Garfield's best book is *Smith* (see page 175). His *Jack Holborn* is also exciting, though the story moves a little more slowly; and *Black Jack*, though well-written, has a difficult style for all but the more advanced reader.

An exceptionally good adventure story is *The Three Brothers of Ur* by J G Fyson. This is about a mischievous young Sumerian boy and

the trouble he gets into when he takes a morning off school. Of all these books, I think I enjoyed this the most. Let me know which you enjoy—particularly new titles not mentioned here. I shall be pleased to read and recommend them.

Guilty Conscience

I went to the shed for a cigarette. Mind, I was
not allowed to smoke, and if Dad caught me
there's no telling what would happen.

I lit it
And puffed.

What's that?

Quick as a flash the cigarette is out and I stand
with beating heart, waiting.

It was only the door, swinging and creaking in the
evening breeze.

I lit up again

And puffed.

The door opened with a push and a clatter, hitting,
storming, searching out the sinner.

Without waiting to think, I dashed out, down the
path, round the corner, and indoors.

Safe?

Safe from myself?

Rodney Sivyour

When did you last have a guilty conscience? What had you done wrong? Did you confess or were you found out? Do you feel guilty about it now? Do you think a person should be punished if he admits to having done wrong?

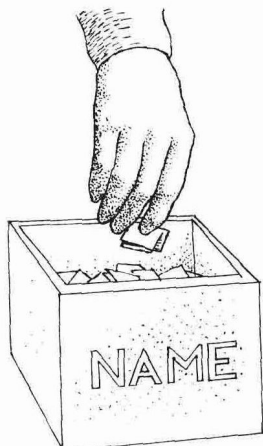
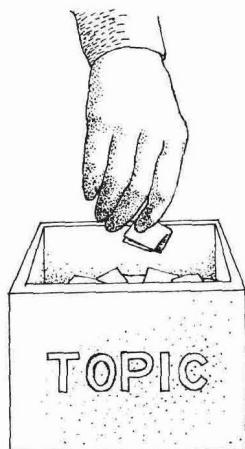
For the next five or six minutes talk about things you have done wrong and felt guilty about. Then write a short piece of free verse similar to Rodney Sivyour's describing what you did, your feelings about it, and what happened as a result. Be honest, and make your account sound true to life.

During the last ten minutes read your poem to the class if it is not too personal. If it is incomplete, finish it at home.

One-Minute Talks

Write your name on a slip of paper about 5×8 cm. Fold the paper twice. Take a second slip and without showing it to the class write down an amusing subject for a one-minute talk. (Try not to make the topic too difficult: 'The inside of a ping-pong ball' isn't easy to talk about, nor is it very interesting. 'How to live with a baby brother' or 'What a skeleton looks like' are better examples.) Hand the folded papers separately to your teacher who will place them in two boxes: one containing names, the other topics. He (or she) will shake the boxes and pick out one name and one topic at random. The person selected must speak for one minute as intelligently as possible on the topic given to him, even if it is his own.

A timekeeper should be appointed to give the signal for the start and finish of each minute. Every speaker must have a minute to think about his topic in advance. This will mean that B's topic will be given to him before A begins to speak. A speaker who cannot think of anything to say should be allowed one chance to collect his thoughts, and thereafter be eliminated. The best three speakers can challenge each other to a deciding round at the end of the contest.



Lost in the Desert

Movement

- 1 Lie on your back and gaze at the clouds: listen to the lapping of the waves, the drone of a plane, the buzzing of insects. The sun is hot: you feel itchy; scratch yourself; the itch is a fly that alights on you: flick it off; it returns: flick it off again; use your spray-gun to chase it away.
- 2 Fly a kite in a field: control its movement; the string breaks; the kite is blown into dense bushes: search for it; find it, and repair it so that it flies again.
- 3 Set out for a friend's house; you have forgotten to give him something: run back for it. You can't find it: search frantically in every possible place; ask your family: they haven't seen it. You look through your pockets and find it there.

Speech (Pairs)

- 1 Talk to each other confidentially; shout across a river on a windy day; speak to each other in a cheerful voice, a desperate voice, in a hoarse whisper of a dying person.
- 2 You are on a walking tour and uncertain of the way. Your friend would like to take one route, you another. Try to persuade each other that your route is the better.
- 3 You are a flying instructor: give instructions to your trainee, first on take-off, then in the air, then on landing.
- 4 You and your partner are looking at your distorted faces in a pool: you laugh uproariously; suddenly you become silent as you realise it has grown dark; you call for help but get no reply; you decide to spend the night where you are and curl up on the spot.

Role-playing (Pairs)

- 1 Examine your partner's hands, feet, fingernails, the size of his wrists, the lines on his face, the scars on his body. React with admiration, surprise or concern. Reverse.
- 2 Together you examine the land surface: you look for a trail, find the tracks of birds and animals; finally you discover human footprints and start to follow them.
- 3 You are together on an island: try to find your way about. Collect wood; build a fire; construct shelters; look for food; there are wild animals; invent an ending to the story.

A Dramatic Scene (Fives)

Your plane crash-lands in desert or jungle; survivors emerge from the wreckage; those who are unharmed help the remaining passengers and crew; you try to repair the plane but without success; your food supplies dwindle; volunteers set out to find help; one dies, another crawls to safety and returns to revive the others who are overcome by heat and hunger. Plan the scene carefully, then act it as a group.

A Food Label

Invent a delicious new food or drink that you or your friends would enjoy. It can be as unusual as you like. Think of an effective name for it, then design a label for its container: either a jar, tin or packet. It should have on it some or all of the following information:

- 1 The name of the product and an eye-catching drawing
- 2 A list of ingredients used, with their proportions and vitamin content
- 3 Details of how to prepare it (DIRECTIONS FOR USE)
- 4 Recipes that can be made from it
- 5 The net weight in grams
- 6 The address of the factory where it was made
- 7 Your firm's trade mark

By all means examine an actual label before drawing your own, but don't use its information: rather invent something new. Make sure the name of the product stands out, and if necessary type or print the lettering. The completed label should look neat and colourful. Of course, if you want to make the product as well, you may do so—providing you are the first to taste it.

Length of project: 1 week

The Traitor Within *by Alexander Cordell*

'Looking back for almost as long as I can remember, I can see aeroplanes sweeping in over the sea . . . and saboteurs would spill out in their scores, cascading out of the sky on their coloured parachutes, their sub-machine-guns spitting fire at us even as they descended. Hitting the ground, they would roll, fling off the harness and deploy; within minutes our roads would be blown up, our powerlines cut and our bridges demolished. Then they would carry out a fighting retreat to the sea, wading into the surf and clambering into their speedboats under cover of an aerial attack . . .'

Chan Wai Ling lives in East Flower, a Chinese village that is periodically raided by enemy paratroopers from Taiwan. In a battle with the rebel forces Ling's father disappears. Some of the village boys believe that he has deserted and call him a traitor. Despite his own love of peace, Ling is forced to fight to defend his father's honour.

This is a sincere and well-written story that gives a realistic picture of life in present-day China. Though it begins quietly, the story becomes more exciting and explodes into action at the end. Through Ling's experiences we learn how fear can be overcome, and how peace is preferable to war.

Heinemann Windmill 117 pages

What is Your Name?

'There was a time in England when a Christian name would have been the only name you had; your father would have perhaps been William, and only William, and your mother might have been known as Mary, William's wife. As long as villages were small and people few and widely scattered, one name was enough. But as people became more numerous and lived closer together, confusion began to arise. There would be two Williams in a village and people would get them mixed up. After a while they would perhaps begin to call one William 'the tailor', because of his occupation, and the other William 'the stout', because of his husky frame. Eventually the 'the' would be dropped and the two men would become William Taylor and William Stout. The children of the two men would all have different first names, but would keep as second names the names of their fathers.

Or perhaps it would begin with the children. There would be two Freds on adjacent farms who played together. To prevent confusion their neighbours would call one Fred, Richard's son, and the other Fred, John's son. And by the time the two boys were old enough to be married and have children of their own, their names would be Fred Richardson and Fred Johnson. Richardson and Johnson would have become family names.

In the days when most people could not read, signs identified shops. A tavern might have a bell as its sign and be called *The Sign of the Bell*, or a locksmith might have a key for his sign, and his shop be called *The Sign of the Key*. The tavern keeper would be known as James at The Sign of the Bell, and the locksmith as Henry at The Sign of the Key. And eventually, of course, because people like to shorten things if they can, the two men would be James Bell and Henry Key . . .

Surnames were given to people for their personal characteristics—Strong, Small, Longfellow; for their occupations—Naylor (nail maker), Baker, Coward (cowherd); for the physical characteristics of the place in which they lived—Green (on or near a village green), Ridgeway (along a ridge), Beckett (near a little brook); from the name of the place in which they lived—Lincoln, Barstow, Oglethorpe; for sentimental reasons—Darwin (from the Old English *deore*, dear, and *wine*, friend); because of their station in life—Child or Childs (a well-bred youth, a young knight); or people took their

names just because they liked them—Noble, Duke, Bright. There must be hundreds of ways in which people got their surnames . . .’

H and C Laird, The Tree of Language

- 1 Try to work out the origin of your own name and those of your classmates. Then look up any difficult ones in a *Dictionary of Names*.
- 2 Draw a simple graph of the most popular names in your class or in the combined classes of your year. (If you’re not sure how to do this, ask your teacher.)
- 3 Prepare a list of the six names you like most; then write down any six you dislike strongly. Revise the lists after discussing them at home, looking up other names, and hearing further suggestions in class. Write out the final lists neatly.
- 4 What is the most common name in the world? Why? (The answer is in *The Guinness Book of Records*.)
- 5 What points should parents consider in choosing names for children?
- 6 Most people are very sensitive about their names. Nicknames especially can be very cruel. How can we discourage people from making fun of others in this way?