The Butterfly Lion

Subjects: Art and English
Age range: Lower KS2

What they’ll learn
• To discuss a rich text, exploring ideas and themes from literature
• To write creatively, following the conventions of a diary entry
• To develop their ability to write in role, capturing a character’s thoughts and voice
• To use collage techniques to create a picture

Michael Morpurgo’s beloved tale of Bertie and the orphaned lion cub he rescues makes the perfect starting point for writing diaries in role and collage in art.

Discussion and booktalk

1. Once you’ve read The Butterfly Lion together as a class, look at PowerPoint slide 3 and discuss ideas from the book together, using the following questions as prompts:

• Who is the boy in the story who runs away from his school? How do you know?
• Looking back, what do you think is the worst moment for Bertie in the story?
• What is ‘the butterfly lion’ in the story? Do you think this is a good way to remember The White Prince?
• Do you think there is a message or moral to the story? If so, what do you think it is?
• Do you think The Butterfly Lion is a good title for the story? Why / why not? Can you think of another good title?
2. Next, organise the class into an even number of small groups (with 4-6 children in each group). Using PowerPoint slide 4, share the following statement with the children:

“It is always right to take an animal from the wild if it needs rescuing

Ask the children whether they agree with this statement with a show of hands, then tell them they will be debating the statement. Tell half of the groups they will be supporting the statement and tell the other half they will be challenging it. Give the children time to work as a group to compose their arguments. The children can then debate the statement, either as a whole class or with two opposing groups debating against each other.

Once the debate is over, ask for another show of hands. Ask the children if they have changed their minds. If they have, can they explain which arguments persuaded them to think differently?

3. Finally, ask the children if they think Bertie definitely did the right thing in rescuing his lion from the hyenas in the story. What would they have done if they were him? How do the arguments they used and heard in their debate relate to what happened in the book?

Creative writing

1. Tell the children they are going to write a series of short diary entries in role as Bertie.

2. Read the extract from page 20 of The Butterfly Lion (see PowerPoint slide 5) and discuss how it is written (past tense; third person narrator). Ask the children how this might be different if the extract were a diary entry, with Bertie describing the things that happened to him (writing in the first person).

3. Draw children’s attention to how Michael Morpurgo includes small details about the
scene and how Bertie feels to give an insight into the character and bring the scene to life. You might comment on:

- The detail that Bertie was “high up in the branches of his tree”
- That Bertie was thinking of giving up and going home
- That the lion cub walked “on unsteady legs”

4. Next, in pairs or small groups, ask the children to work through the extract, retelling it as if Bertie was speaking in the first person.

5. As a whole class, brainstorm the other features of a diary extract and compare these with the list on slide 6 of the PowerPoint.

6. Ask children to choose two or more moments from Bertie’s early life in the story and write entries from Bertie’s diary for those days. Remind the children to try to use the ideas from the PowerPoint and those they have shared to make their writing as effective as possible.

7. Once they have finished, ask the children to share their writing with a partner, proofreading together and working to identify strengths and possible areas for development. You could also share some examples of great writing or good ideas with the class by reading aloud or sharing on the whiteboard. Then, give children an opportunity to return to their work and make changes in the light of feedback and other ideas they’ve seen.

Creativity and arts

1. Ask the children to describe the waterhole that Bertie can see from his compound (use the extract on PowerPoint slide 7 to prompt children’s thinking if necessary).

2. Show the class some photographs of the South African veld and some different waterholes (a quick search online will provide plenty) and discuss some of the features that the children can see, including the plants and trees, the animals, the land and the sky. Draw children’s attention to the colours (possibly the sandy brown of the soil, the dark greens and browns of the trees and bushes, and the blue of the sky).
3. Give each child a piece of paper and ask them to lightly sketch in pencil what they think Bertie’s waterhole might look like.

4. Next, tell the children that their sketch is going to become the basis for a collage of the scene. Provide the children with a selection of different materials to use, including:
   - coloured paper
   - tissue paper
   - fabric
   - cotton wool
   - string
   - small sticks and leaves

5. Put out anything else that might be useful, too. Encourage them to work slowly and carefully, thinking about how they could use different materials to create different features. Remind them to think about the textures they use, as well as the colours, as they work.

6. Once they have finished, ask children to share their work with a partner and identify any features that they are particularly pleased with.

**Putting it all together**

Once everyone has finished their diary entries and collages, they could be combined and shared by:

- Making a class wall display. Children’s diary entries could be cut out or redrafted onto tea-stained paper to make them look authentically old and then displayed alongside the collages.
- Creating a whole-class book. Children’s collages could be scanned or photographed and made into a book alongside children's diary entries.