



# LIFELINE 3 - Books for Sharing

Article Author:

[Joan Barker](#) [1]

Article Author:

[David Bennett](#) [2]

[30](#) [3]

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Chosen by **Joan Barker** and **David Bennett**.

Books for Sharing is a list of books compiled for use as class readers in Primary and Secondary classrooms by **Joan Barker** and **David Bennett**. They are avid sharers of books with their classes and both convinced of the enormous benefits of reading together. Part One appeared in July 1984.

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Part 4 offers suggestions for titles for the second half of this term along with ideas for follow-up reading and activities. We hope that readers will try out books wherever they are appropriate to their own school situation and will explore and experiment with some of the follow-up work, ideas for which are not intended to be comprehensive but more to give a flavour of what might be done to further excite and engage the readers who share the texts.

## LOWER JUNIORS

### **The Snowman**

Raymond Briggs, Puffin, 0 14 050.350 1, £1.75

A picture book without words which relates in subtle colours the story of a lonely child and a snowman who comes to life. Indoors all the ordinary equipment of the house becomes extraordinary through the eyes of the Snowman. The two have supper and then fly through the snowy evening to the sea. When they return the boy goes to bed and wakes in the morning to find that the Snowman has melted. Did it really happen? Was it a dream or just his imagination?

Although the organisation of sharing a picture book with a class of children can be a problem, this book is well worth the effort. The cost of four paperbacks wouldn't be wasted; librarians are often willing to supply multiple copies if you explain why you want them.) Because it has no text the book offers a wide range of language activities and provides a good introduction to the idea of 'reading' a picture to obtain information.

### **Things to Do**

1. Give a friend instructions how to build a snowman. Rehearse them and then try to write them down. Use the first three pages of the book to help you remember everything. Don't forget suitable clothing to wear.
2. The Snowman comes to life. Write or tape the dialogue between the boy and the Snowman when he first comes into the house, or his time in the kitchen or the playroom.
3. The Snowman's supper. Make and decorate a menu - not hot dogs but perhaps apple snow.

4. When the boy goes' to bed after his journey to the sea, what does he dream about? Can you remember a dream that you have had? In small groups, tell each other your dreams.

5. Retell the story as if you were the Snowman.

### More to Read

**Father Christmas**, Raymond Briggs, Puffin, 0 14 050.125 8, £1.50

**Father Christmas Goes on Holiday**, Raymond Briggs, Puffin, 0 14 050.187 8, £1.50

and you might like to show the film (or video) of **The Snowman** (Weston Woods).

### MIDDLE JUNIORS

#### **The Whispering Knights**

Penelope Lively, Heinemann, 0 434 94891 8, £4.95

Three children, who live in an Oxfordshire village, concoct a magic brew in a barn which had once been a haunt of Morgan le Fay. Although they only partly believe the stories that are told, that half belief is enough to invoke her evil spirit and free it to work against the village. A motorway is to be constructed through the centre of the village and Morgan le Fay intends to make it an accident black spot. With the help of an old lady and an ancient Stone Circle, the children are able to frustrate her wicked plans.

Penelope Lively is a natural story teller with a gift for holding attention. These characters become real for children; the events are vivid, exciting but always believable. Guaranteed to succeed as a gripping adventure story and well worth a closer study.

### Things to Do

1. Make up spells, potions or curses. Tape record them with appropriate sound effects or music.
2. Chapter 2. Read from, "There was a pile of hay in the far corner." to "There was absolutely nothing there." Paint the creature that comes out of the hay.
3. The local newspaper is on the side of the villagers in their fight against the motorway. Produce the edition of the newspaper published after the news of the road has become general knowledge.
4. William and Susie thumb a lift from a lorry driver. In pairs act out the scene when he gets home and tells this to his wife. She questions him to find out all the details.
5. Chapter 10. "Miss Hepplewhite listened avidly to the whole story." Write the events of Chapter 9 as though you were Martha, Susie or William telling the story to Miss Hepplewhite.

### More to Read

**The Ghost of Thomas Kempe**, Penelope Lively, Puffin, 0 14 03.1496 2, £1.25

**Over Sea Under Stone**, Susan Cooper, Puffin, 0 14 03.0362 6, £1.25

### UPPER JUNIORS

#### **The Hammerhead Light**

Colin Thiele, Puffin.

**The Hammerhead Light** is a stone lighthouse standing like a great white monument on the headland in Snapper Bay, a remote area of Australia. It changes character with the weather and to the local people it symbolises safety and strength.

The book tells the story of Tessa who is twelve and growing up in Snapper Bay, her friendship with an old man Axel and how both their lives are affected by an injured bird. It lends itself well to an exploration of emotional and social problems but there are also aspects of environmental and technological studies which are too good to miss and seem to occur very naturally. It offers lots of opportunities for art work and creative writing but as these are quite obvious I have concentrated on the other aspects of the book.

### **Things to Do**

1. "It would be better to put him away than let him starve to death". (p.16) Have any of the children had to have a pet put down? Discussion.

Act out the scene in fours where you and your mum and dad have to break the news to a younger brother or sister that a family pet has to be put down.

2. Use Chapter 3 to introduce a study of the properties of wood/aluminium/plastics. Collect and examine under a hand lens examples of each. Which material is best for which job? Investigate how man-made materials have taken over from natural materials.

3. "Her mother had ... old men in lighthouses." (pp. 53, 54).

Discuss which of your habits your parents disapprove of. How do you convince them that these habits are not really wrong?

4. " ..time to think her own thoughts". (p.77) Put your head on your arms, close your eyes and think your own thoughts for five minutes. Secretly and in disguised handwriting write them on a thought bubble. Distribute bubbles randomly and let each child try to pair the bubble with the person who wrote it.

### **More to Read**

**Marianne Dreams**, Catherine Storr, Puffin, 0 14 03.0209 3, £1.50

**Goodnight Mr Tom**, Michelle Magorian, Puffin, 0 14 03.1541 1, £1.50

## **SECONDARY**

### **YEAR 1**

#### **The Eighteenth Emergency**

Betsy Byars, Puffin, 0 14 03.0863 6, £1.10

It amazes me that there are teachers left who have not yet encountered Betsy Byars' work. This story of Benjie Fawley being hunted by bully Marv Hammerman on a point of honour is arguably one of her best. Mouse, as Benjie is known, and his friend Ezzie derive much comic pleasure from concocting improbable solutions to the even more improbable emergencies that might confront them in urban America. When Mouse, a compulsive and impulsive writer of graffiti, inscribes Hammerman's name under a picture of Neanderthal man there is a real-live emergency with no easy solution. In the end Mouse must face the consequences and the painful solution alone.

The serious issue of bullying and its causes and effects are dealt with in an entertaining and humorous way. It's the sort of book that tends to echo around for along while and, despite its brevity, does challenge the reader to think long and hard.

### **Things to Do**

I. Illustrate your favourite emergencies or graffiti sequences and think up some of your own to describe and draw.

2. Examine in story Mouse's ideas of "Smartness Potion", "liquid in the water to make kids behave" and "X-ray vision".
3. Drama. After the fight with Hammerman how did Mouse explain his bruises to his mother and what did his father decide to do?
4. Discuss how you rate Ezzie as a friend. What do you look for in friends and how far are you prepared to be a friend? Where does honour come into it?
5. How might Hammerman have described the fight to a friend and what might Peachie have had to say about this version? - Write the script or tape the conversation.

### **More to Read**

I'm plumping for my four favourites:

**The Midnight Fox**, Puffin, 0 14 03.0844 X, £1.10, (another good class reader)

**The Pinballs**, Puffin, 0 14 03.1121 1, 95p

**The House of Wings**, Puffin, 0 14 03.0887 3, £1.25

**The Night Swimmers**, Puffin, 0 14 03.1409 1, £1.00

### **YEAR 2**

#### **My Side of the Mountain**

Jean George, Puffin, 0 14 03.0363 4, £1.25

Back to earth after Grinny with a tale of the great outdoors - running away to live for a year in the Catskill Mountains.

Sam Gribley's claustrophobia in his New York home is soon forgotten when he holes up in a tree on land formerly farmed by his grandfather and attempts to live off the bounty of the land like a latterday Thoreau. He fails at some things and at others he is miraculously successful but above all he is tenacious, not least in the training of Frightful, his duck-hawk, who is one of the co-stars of the book.

The idea of running away from it all is close to most hearts, but I am principally, interested in its form and style, which break away from traditional beginning, middle and end narrative. Lots of incident and closely observed natural detail but it can move slowly so I recommend a brisk reading. No girl characters but I promise to rectify that in the next choice!

### **Things to Do**

1. Imagine running away from your home and holing up in a local beauty spot near you for two or three days. Write your own journal of events with diagrams like Sam Gribley's. Use the same structure if you can.
2. Instruction writing - how to light a fire using tinder; how to train a falcon etc. These could be presented both in list form and cartoon form.
3. Write a menu for the "Catskill Mountain Restaurant".
4. Drama! The scene in the Gribley flat when father has returned from visiting Sam and suggests that the family move up to join him.
5. Draw Sam's den in cross-section and label; similarly a map could he made of the Gribley farm land.

### **More to Read**

The author who is a naturalist and an authority on woodcrafting has also written **Julie of the Wolves**, Puffin, 0 14 03.0832 6, £1.25

### **YEAR 3**

#### **Buddy**

Nigel Hinton, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.1571 3, £1.25

A suspicious bunch of men, a mysteriously boarded-up house with a grim history, a bitter old lady in a wheelchair and three kids, two of them black, sounds like a conventional enough yam; but then add a jail-bird dad who still lives in his teddy-boy youth, and a mum who left in order to "find herself" and you are straying into another dimension.

The crooks and the decaying house framework are necessary to give the book its pace and incident, but only serve as a backdrop to the characters and their dilemmas. Nigel Hinton has produced a tale which is at its best when exploring Buddy's rational and irrational fears and his relationships, especially with his dad, where love, hate and exasperation mingle, with love always rising to the surface.

Interesting to compare the parent/child relationship in **Nobody's Family is Going to Change** (shared in the first half of term) and later in **Your Friend, Rebecca** (see below).

#### **Things to Do**

1. Write the estate agent's blurb for selling the house, 5b, Croxley Street, just as it stands. He will of course attempt to make it sound far more interesting to prospective buyers. (Chapter I D).
2. News reports of either the trial of Buddy's father or else the murder and suicide of Ralph's parents..
3. Collect the various references to Buddy's fear of the dark. Represent these graphically or poetically.
4. Buddy's dad says you "Gotta take a few risks" and in General Studies Buddy's class talk about crime. How do your class feel about these issues? Could they conduct a survey and present their results?
5. Mr. Normington's interview with Julius's parents and then his verbal report to the Head afterwards on his impressions of Mr. Clark and The Rybeeros.

#### **More to Read**

Also by Nigel Hinton: **Collision Course**, Puffin, 0 14 03.1169 6, £1.35

### **YEARS 4/5**

#### **Your Friend Rebecca**

Linda Hoy, Sparrow, 0 09 931280 8, £1.25

This is a first person narrative by the rebellious girl of the title, (the statutory male groans rapidly decrease after it has been introduced to a mixed class). Rebecca is a very strongly identifiable character for many young people, who are struck by her familiar predicament, her feelings of hopelessness and isolation and, I suppose, her justifiable bitterness.

Rebecca tries to solve her problems by visiting a Meeting House, where she eventually gains a more balanced impression of her dead, Quakerly mother. But it is through the more unexpected channels of a lunchtime drama workshop that she gradually increases her sense of self-esteem and acquires the confidence to face the future more positively. Through the improvisation of "King Lear" she begins to perceive parallels to her relationship with her drunken father and sees that she, not he, must change if they are to unite in their shared grief.

It may sound heavy but it was written with very appealing humour and flair and not a little ingenuity.

## Things to Do

1. Enlist the help of a Humanities teacher to explore the Quaker connection, although very capable pupils might be able to research it themselves. How is this aspect reflected in the title?
2. Write Rebecca's school-leaving reference and a selection of the notes in Miss Hoggit's dossier on Rebecca. These may have been collected from other teachers.
3. Imagine that it is a year after the novel ended. Record an interview with Rebecca and her father. Re-read the last page first.
4. Examine the "Lear" tie in, possibly working out some of the improvisations yourself before you read them in the book.
5. Try to construct a flow diagram which leads from the elements and events which contribute to the mutual isolation of Rebecca and her father, through to their final pact of solidarity.

## More to Read

Another novel by Linda Hoy is: **The Damned**, Bodley Head, 0 370 30520 5, £4.50

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