

Blodin the Beast!

KS3

Geoff Smith

KS3

Introduction

'Who will overcome Blodin, a fearsome beast who stalks a timeless, faraway place, breathing fire and razing villages to the ground? Only wise old Shanga, weaving strange carpets, knows how to destroy this monster.'

This scheme of work takes students on a learning journey that aims to challenge, support and reinforce their writing and creativity at KS3. It explores the story of *Blodin the Beast* by Michael Morpurgo and offers practical opportunities to develop a range of techniques, aiming to empower students to take control over the unfolding narrative. The work weaves aspects of Citizenship and PSHCE into the drama content, supporting the creative arts curriculum and creating captivating platforms in which young people can develop skills in debating, independent thinking, self-expression and creative writing.

Learning objectives

By the end of the scheme of work, students will have been immersed in this magical and gripping story. With a range of drama conventions, the scheme develops participants' skills in storytelling and creative writing. Using a number of pre-texts and drama techniques, it encourages critical thinking, centring around the theme of home, family and community. Over the duration of the five one-hour sessions, participants develop a number of skills:

- To explore the use of a variety of drama conventions
- To respond to complex issues with an understanding of how social, cultural and historical contexts help students to explore underlying concepts
- To explore different staging methods
- To create and develop creative writing skills.

Introducing the story

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:

- To explore the concept of fear and its impact on a society
- To use tableaux and voice to start to develop a pretext
- To explore the use of different staging methods
- To be able to develop speaking and listening skills.

Warm-up and Introduction: Handout 1 (10 mins)

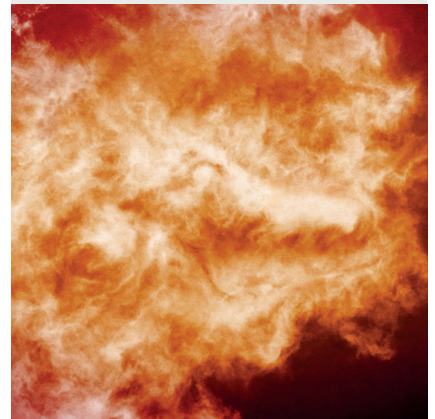
Circulate Handout 1 to students (see Resources at the end of this scheme), and work through it.

Exploring the pretext (10 mins)

Ask the students to find a partner and sit down. Introduce the OHP projector and have the first page of *Blodin the Beast* transferred onto acetate and explain that the stimulus material will be introduced and it's imperative that they look carefully at the image.

Hold the image in your hand and move the picture quickly round the group, so the class are unable to get any sense of the content of the picture. By doing this at speed the group will instantly become engaged and will want to see the image in more detail. Place the acetate on the projector and cover the acetate with a piece of paper; this is then gradually removed revealing the whole picture. The questions below are suggestions which could be introduced during the reveal:

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Resources

- Copy of the picture, book of *Blodin the Beast* by Michael Morpurgo
- Projection of the first page of the book transferred onto an acetate
- Equipment for playing music
- OHP projector
- Text
- Torches/battery operated candles.

Key questions for discussion (5 mins)

- What can you see?
- Who do you think is drawing this picture?
- If you had to give the picture a title, what would you call it?
- If we could capture a second picture three hours later, what would we see?
- How would you describe a 'Beast' to someone who has never seen one?

Creating the Beast - developing the freeze pictures (10 mins)

Ask students to get into pairs and decide who is A and who is B. Explain that the As have become directors and they must imagine that their partner is a piece of clay; their 'Mission Impossible' is to shape their partner as near as possible to the image. The directors are allowed to vocalise their ideas, demonstrate their ideas, or physically move their partner into any position.

Evaluating and offering feedback (5 mins)

Ask the directors to come to the centre of the space while the actors stay frozen. Explain that they need to go and observe each other's work and to then decide on their favourite Beast (*they are not allowed to choose their own and they are not allowed to make any physical contact*). Having chosen their favourite, they now need to sit down next to it. The image with the most votes is announced as the winner and if there is a draw, then you, of course, have the final vote.

Moving on, gather the group around the winning 'freeze picture' and draw out the reasons why this democratic decision was made.

Evaluating the physical representation (5 mins)

- In your opinion why was this image chosen?
- What aspect of the picture was most impressive?
- How does the image make you feel?
- If you had to bring the picture to life, what advice would you give the actor?
- If you had to change one aspect of the image, what would you change and why?
- Having now looked at an example of best practice, what have you learnt from the experience?
- How can you tell if something is beautiful?
- Was the Beast born basically good or basically bad?

Development (10 mins)

Repeat the exercise again, but switch the roles, and this time the directors are not allowed to talk. They must communicate their ideas through mime and facial expressions. I would suggest atmospheric music is played to heighten the drama. On completion of the task ask the directors to join you in the centre of the space; again they must go around the room and choose their favourite beast. When they have chosen their image, bring the whole group together and reintroduce the beast from the first exercise and compare the two physical representations. Draw out student feedback using the questions below.

Evaluation and feedback (5 mins)

- What are the comparisons between the two images?
- What are the differences between the two images?
- How did you implement the feedback from the first exercise?
- If you had to decide on one of these 'frozen' images to sit in the museum of 'excellence', which one would you choose and why?
- If you were to do the exercise again what would you do differently?

Lesson 2: The community under attack**Learning objectives**

- To contribute to group discussion or planning
- To participate in problem-solving and decision making
- To co-operate to plan and present drama
- To negotiate with others in initiating, accepting and shaping ideas
- To adapt one's own approach in order to work with a range of peers
- To shape a piece of work for performance
- To develop persuasive language.

This exercise can be introduced individually or in pairs.

I would suggest you use 'Teacher in Role' to demonstrate the concept, as this gives the students the confidence to immerse themselves in the exercise. Also request that the directors make sure that their actors are situated around the edge of the space and are facing inwards, towards the centre.

In terms of logistics, you could capture the image with a camera and project the image on the screen. (*Be aware of your school's GDPR policy.*)

Resources

- OHP projector
- Torches
- Music player
- Material.

Warm-up: Handout 2

Circulate Handout 2 to students (see Resources at the end of this scheme) and work through it.

Introducing the text (25 mins)

Ask the group to return to the pairs from last lesson. Explain that last week they created representations of the Beast and were given the opportunity to direct and act. Reintroduce the acetate of the Beast, but quickly remove it and replace it with the text that accompanies the image in the book. Then read out the story and emphasise key words. You should try to encapsulate the horror and fear that the Beast creates.

Next, and having now read the text, explain that the directors from last week's final exercise will now be able to direct and bring their frozen images to life. Explain that they will use the text to help them animate their piece and the spoken word will come later. Ask them to imagine that they have been given a 'remote control', which is voice activated. When the director speaks the Beast will move, and the control commands are as follows:

- Freeze
- Animated tableaux (this is when the figure can move one frame at a time)
- Slow-motion (forwards and backwards)
- Normal speed
- Fast-forward and fast-rewind (be careful with this instruction and reiterate the importance of control and keeping your Beast in your area)
- Repeat (when a single gesture can be repeated to highlight a key moment)
- Zoom-in, zoom-out (this is when you might want to enlarge or reduce a key moment, to heighten a key physical characteristic).

Moving on, explain that this is a really important moment in the story and our objective is one of control and resilience and persuasion. The pairs' 'Mission Impossible' is to create a thirty-second sequence that shows the 'Beast' moving towards the village; emphasise the importance of teamwork and having a starting freeze position, and the end freeze position with a clear focus on the use of physical theatre.

After a few minutes, ask the actors to prepare their starting positions and then to move into their final freeze positions. I usually ask the actors to switch from their start freeze and end freeze positions a few times; this offers a clear framework for the performers to work within, and if you do it quickly it can be a lot of fun. Next, explain that the whole group will run their thirty-second sequence all at the same time, directors need to observe as they will offer final suggestions, then run the sequence all together. (*I will leave the timing sequence for you to decide.*)

Assessment and evaluation (15 mins)

Allow the directors one minute; to make any final adjustments and to help with communication, throw in a caveat that they are not allowed to speak. Next explain that the actors playing the Beast will stay where they are and the directors will move clockwise to the next actor. Next, run the sequence again and ask the directors to observe their Beast, this time with a specific focus on facial expression, but as the exercise continues the students can be given a different focus. This is a really nice way of developing their work and helping them learn how to give and receive feedback. The exercise is, in a sense, a rotary improvisation, but by using the same task it gives them the chance to develop their negotiating skills. Allow the rotation to take place a few times and then change and allow the directors to become the performers.

Performance (20 mins)

Finally, ask the pairs to go back to their original partners and then produce a short piece of performance demonstrating collaboration, physical movement, facial expression; they also must be able to give feedback on how their piece was constructed and how the rotary feedback exercise helped to develop this final exercise. The sequence must last no longer than twenty seconds and it's up to the group to manage the time-frame and then share the performance and feedback with the rest of the group.

I would suggest projecting the instructions for this exercise, or alternatively print them out and place them on the floor in front of the director.

Lesson 3: The Beast is created

Learning objectives

- To be able to control movement to suggest quality rather than literal interpretation
- To demonstrate an awareness of focus and tension
- To be able to use a piece of text and use the skill of re-enactment, showing particular attention to tension, climax and resolution
- To use voice appropriate to the character.

Developing the voice (10 mins)

First, ask the group to pair up and hand them out copies of the first page of the book. After they have read the text, allow a brief discussion on their initial thoughts. Next ask them to read the text again with the following variations:

- Each student reads as much as they want and then partner takes over
- Each student reads as much as s/he likes, but in a 'pleading' manner and partner takes over
- The story is told as if sitting around a camp fire and as a scary story and the partner takes over.

Physicalizing the Beast (pairs) (10 mins)

The pairs work together and use the first page as a stimulus. They must now use all the drama elements explored so far and their 'Mission Impossible' is to show the moment when Blodin moves towards and then enters the village. It's important that the students are allowed to experiment and explore their work and below are a few framing suggestions to help them get started:

Suggested movement patterns to be explored

- The actor moves as the Beast and the director creates the sound effects
- The actor moves as the Beast and both the director and actor create the sound effects
- The actor moves as the Beast and the director uses sound effects and narrates the story
- The actor moves as the Beast and the director and actor both use sound effects and text
- Both participants become the Beast and they work together using physical movement, sound effects and text to create a joint performance.

Developing the work for a group performance (20 mins)

Next, expand the work and ask the pairs to get into groups of six, as they will be creating an original piece of performance. Ask the students to think about the physical size, sound and shape of this animal and how they would describe the Beast and capture the ferocity of the moment.

Hand out six strips of paper per group. Explain that each member of the team, on the single strip of paper, will be required to write a line of text. They will then put the lines in order of importance, which will then become a collective piece of writing. The objective of the writing exercise is to try and capture the moment when the Beast enters the village.

Explain that before they do this they must agree as a whole group which individual body-parts they will focus on. Allow a few minutes for discussion and then ask the students to find a space on their own and write the line of text.

After a few minutes, students must move around the space and share their line of text with other people in the class. Explain that they are not allowed to share their line with their original group. When they have shared their work they return to their starting position and are allowed to make one final adjustment to their text.

Moving on, they then join their group and democratically decide the sequencing of the lines. When they are happy with the sequence, they must then find a way of moving the text from the page to the stage. Explain that they must create a ninety-second performance using at least three of the drama conventions/items below. The aim of the performance is to show the Beast entering in the village for the first time:

- Start on a freeze and end on a freeze
- Narration
- Choral speaking
- Physical movement
- Torch
- Drum
- Single piece of material
- Text.

Resources

- Lighting
- OHP with coloured gels
- Atmospheric music
- Battery operated candles.

I have allowed the pairs to play 'fear' ping-pong. The objective of the game is catch-out your partner with the varying speed of delivery. One person starts and can use a single word or a sentence from the opening page. However, when they decide to pause, the text is sent across the room to their partner, who then continues with the dialogue, until sending it back once again. If the player makes a mistake or pauses too long, they lose a point.

(You can add battery operated candles and music to add atmosphere. When they become confident they can then add a physical gesture to the word or phrase.)

Perform and feedback (20 mins)

Allow the groups to perform and then use the questions below to evaluate the work:

- Which drama was most effective and why?
- Why is physical theatre a useful technique?
- What do you think happened next?
- If you had to change one aspect of your work what would it be and why?

Lessons 4 and 5: Creating a final performance

These final two lessons conclude the scheme, providing students with an opportunity to develop and tell a story and demonstrate their learning. It also provides you with an opportunity to assess the students' understanding of the themes and techniques.

Warm-up: See Handout 3 (15 mins)

Circulate Handout 3 to students (see Resources at the end of this scheme) and work through it.

Reflection and feedback (10 mins)

- Did you manage to capture the moment of fear within the community?
- What words, sounds, noises were the most effective?
- When using a soundscape, what effect does this have on the audience?
- How did you create your final performances and what drama elements did you decide to use and why?

The second page is introduced (10 mins)

Next, introduce the second page of the book and discuss the illustration using the questions below:

- What is their way of life?
- How do they survive?
- What moment is the artist trying to capture?
- If you had to give the picture a title what title would you give it?
- What questions would they ask to each other?

The conversation in the community (10 mins)

Ask students to work in a group of four and pick four people from the illustration and physically recreate this moment, using a whole group tableau. Next they need to decide what the characters would be talking about and what would they want from each other. Explain that they need to develop an improvisation bringing this moment to life and are looking for a twenty-second sequence.

Teacher in Role (10 mins)

Use the technique of Teacher in Role. Tell them that you are a successful Merchant who has been away for a few weeks and have just returned from a great trip. As the Merchant enters the village, they instantly see that the community is in crisis. Explain that they will go to each group and their improvisation will come to life. They must prepare well as the Merchant might ask questions and interrogate them.

Teacher enters the village in role (10 mins)

Ask the students to sit down, and explain that you will move towards each group, and as you do this they will stand and create their opening freeze picture. The rest of the groups must try and guess what moment the students have tried to capture. Next, move to another group and the exercise will then be repeated. Then ask for all the groups to re-establish their images and explain that you will be going into role and will initially walk through the route as a dummy-run. The students need to memorise the Merchant's route so that they know when they will be asked to improvise with you.

Dummy-run

Put on a piece of costume and go into role as the Merchant entering the village. Walk through the route they will take in the final piece. Having gone past the groups' frozen images, place an old piece of parchment in the centre of the space. You should have a small amount of flour in your pocket, which you reveal and then sprinkle over the parchment. This can be heightened by music and lighting. The students should be intrigued and excited for the next phase of the work.

Resources

- Music
- Flour
- Lighting
- Battery-operated candles
- Pre-prepared parchment
- Material
- Flip-chart paper and pens.

If you are able to work with a technician I would suggest a change of lighting when the flour is sprinkled on the parchment.

[Re-enactment] Narration (5 mins)

Your scene is re-wound and the Merchant enters and narrates the story:

‘The Merchant entered the village having been away selling his oils in the souks of Egypt. They couldn’t believe what lay before them. The whole village was in complete turmoil and the people were terrified. He/she moved into the centre of the space and listened to the villagers’ concerns.’

You should click your fingers and each group should bring their ‘freeze’ to life. While in role you should side coach and ask questions, the exercise continues until the final group has finished.

TIR: Questions

- What’s been going on since I’ve been away?
- Will you stay in the village and fight?
- Have you asked for help?
- Have you told your family and friends?
- What does your home mean to you?
- Where shall we go?

The merchant meets the old man (10 mins)

You then go up to the parchment and narrate the next section.

‘The Merchant now knew why the old man on horseback had stopped him going towards the village which was situated across the other side of the mountains. He now turned and could see the dark acrid smoke reaching towards the sky. The old man had taken out an old piece of parchment [you look down and touch the piece of paper covered in flour, lifting the parchment and brush off the flour revealing the text]. As the old man placed this piece in the Merchant’s hand, he/she looked deep into the Merchant’s eyes and in that instant the Merchant knew that life would never be the same again. Keeping eye contact the old man spoke softly. “Our village was full of laughter, colour and love.” He paused. “Nothing remains!”’

In role as the Merchant, brush off the flour and move slowly to each group revealing the text for the first time:

‘The Fire Raged! Night was forgotten and Day was Reluctant. We watched a young man moving quickly towards the barricades.’

Teacher out of Role: Performance brief, Handout 3, planning and development

Stop the drama at this point and keep the groups as they are. The next task is to become playwrights and finish off the story. (*The text on the parchment should be written on the top of each piece of flip-chart paper.*) Introduce the plot structure and explain that they need to write the text in the third person. You should emphasise the importance of the plot structure and for their assessment task they need to write the story using this process. When completed the text can be sent on or kept by the group then it needs to start to build a performance using all the drama conventions used in the scheme.

This can be a short project; alternatively it can become part of a significant piece of drama and performed and evaluated. On completion of the scheme complete the ‘student evaluation’ sheet.

Handout 4: Student self-evaluation

Circulate Handout 4 and ask students to complete.

The End! I hope you have enjoyed it! **D&T**

Resources

Hand out one piece of paper per group and one pen per group.

RESOURCES

Handout 1: Warm-up, Lesson 1

This is introduced at the start of the lesson:

Warm-up and introduction

Have the students walk randomly around, aiming to constantly fill any empty space that appears to 'keep the floor alive'. This gets the blood flowing and helps raise awareness of their surroundings. Explain that when you say 'freeze' they must stop moving completely; when you say 'move' they do exactly that, and continue moving around the space as they were before. After a few repetitions of this, leaving various intervals between commands, explain that the commands will now get a little harder.

Development of the warm-up

- Stand motionless when you hear me shout 'freeze'.
- Keep/begin moving when I shout 'freeze', but stop when I shout 'move'.
- Sit on the floor when I shout 'up' and raise your hands high and go onto tip-toe when I shout 'down'.

In this variation, always encourage students with a generous round of applause as they leave the game. Test the concentration of *frozen* students by making silly noises or pulling faces. Enforce a '2 metre rule' when frozen, which means that no one is allowed to be within 2 metres of another. A breach of this rule results in elimination. This is a good test of awareness and concentration.

RESOURCES

Handout 2: Warm-up, Lesson 2

This is introduced at the start of the lesson:

Warm-up

The students can be in pairs or threes. Choose one of the following scenarios for improvisation. It is important that the characters are naturalistic:

- a A teenager asks his/her parent(s)/carer if he/she can stay over at a friend's for a sleep-over. It is near exam time and the parents are worried and therefore refuse. The teenager becomes defiant and upset. The scene's climax is up to the performers.
- b An old man who lives with his family suffers from memory loss. He has invested his life savings in adapting their house for his needs. Unfortunately he is now causing problems and embarrassment for his family. His future becomes the subject of heated discussion.
- c Tempted by the opportunity to sell illegal ivory, a smuggler from Africa arrives at Heathrow airport carrying ivory carvings. As he passes through the 'Nothing to Declare' exit he fears that he may be found out by a customs officer, and so he slips the illegal goods into the shopping bag of an innocent bystander.

The outcome of these improvisations is to develop strong communication and be able to co-operate, plan and communicate their ideas. The above scenarios can be switched around and shown if required. I usually switch and may show 20-second moments of best practice.

Warm-up: Dialectic - 'Getting your message across'

Divide the class into groups of four or five. I would suggest you give each group a different scenario and to emphasise the importance of the message.

Ask the group to make two contrasting freeze pictures of the following:

- a A picture entitled 'Conflict, The Maker of Heroes' and a picture entitled 'The Loss of Conflict'.
- b A picture showing one person as the most respected member of the community and a picture showing the least respected member of the community.
- c A picture entitled 'The Politician of the People, Always Tells the Truth' and a picture entitled 'The Dark Face of Politics', or 'It's All About Me'.

RESOURCES

Handout 3: Planning and development

(This will help the students plan their script ready for performance.)

- 1 Introduction of the characters and situation they find themselves in
- 2 Conflict: Central problem is introduced
- 3 Complication: Where the difficulties become more complex
- 4 Climax: Where the tension builds
- 5 Denouement: Where the complication is finally resolved

Plot Structure

- 1 Exposition: Where we are introduced to the characters and the situation in which they find themselves (this often makes reference to what has taken place beforehand).
- 2 Conflict: Where the central problem is introduced which the protagonist must deal with.
- 3 Complication: Where the difficulties become much more complex.
- 4 Climax: Where the tension builds towards a crisis that must be dealt with.
- 5 Denouement: Where the complications in the plot are finally resolved.

RESOURCES

Handout 4: *Blodin the Beast* Student self-assessment sheet

NAME _____

FORM _____

DATE _____

Understanding and Knowledge

What drama words have you learnt during the scheme?

Performance Skills

Can you describe a moment in the drama when you or other people in your group performed well? What made this a strong performance?

Reflective writing

Describe a moment when you were developing your final script which was particularly effective?