

Alone on a Wide Wide Sea

Teacher's Resource
by Lucy English

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Introduction

Alone on a Wide Wide Sea

Eagerly anticipated by his many fans, *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea* is multi-award winning author Michael Morpurgo's latest novel for young readers. A lyrical and life-affirming story incorporating a number of challenging themes, it was described by Kate Kellaway in *The Observer* as 'his best book in years'.

The novel first tells the story of Arthur Hobhouse, shipped to Australia after WWII. Having lost his sister, his country and everything he knows, Arthur endures mistreatment, neglect and forced labour in the Australian outback before finding a home. Throughout his life, he is saved again and again by his love of the sea, and when he meets and marries a nurse whose father owns a boat building business, all the pieces of his fractured life come together. The second half of the novel tells the story of Arthur's daughter Allie, whose love of the sea is as strong and vital as her father's. She embarks on an epic solo voyage across the world's roughest seas, in search of her father's long-lost sister. Both moving and original, the novel is interwoven with Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', and tackles a number of challenging and difficult themes with gentleness and humanity.

The teaching suggestions below are designed for Year 7 students – however, the novel may be suitable for older classes as well. Students do not need to have any specific background knowledge before reading *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea*, but will need to be made familiar with 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' during their study of the book, as well as the history of child migrants.

The Author

Michael Morpurgo has written over 90 books and has an unparalleled reputation in the world of children's fiction. His works have been adapted for the cinema, TV and theatre and he has won numerous awards including the Blue Peter Book Award, the Whitbread Children's Book Award and the Smarties Prize. In 2003, he was appointed the third Children's Laureate.

Michael Morpurgo is, in his own words, "oldish, married with three children, and a grandfather six times over." After attending schools in London, Sussex and Canterbury, he went on to London University to study English and French, followed by a job in a primary school in Kent. It was there that he discovered what he wanted to do.

"We had to read the children a story every day and my lot were bored by the book I was reading. I decided I had to do something and told them the kind of story I used to tell my kids - it was like a soap opera, and they focussed on it. I could see there was magic in it for them, and realised there was magic in it for me."

Further reading

- *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo
ISBN 0 00 720548 1
- *The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips* by Michael Morpurgo
ISBN 0 00 718246 5
- *The Butterfly Lion* by Michael Morpurgo
ISBN 0 00 675103 2
- *Toro! Toro!* by Michael Morpurgo
ISBN 0 00 710718 8
- *Cool!* by Michael Morpurgo
ISBN 0 00 713104 6

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Lesson 1: Questioning the world

Framework Objectives

R6	Adopt active reading approaches to engage with and make sense of texts
R14	Recognise how writers' language choices can enhance meaning
S&L13	Work together logically and methodically to solve problems

Enlarged versions of **Map 1** and **Map 2** (A3, ideally) will be needed, as well as marker pens and a stopwatch.

Starter

- Allocate students to mixed ability groups of four or five members for a Collective Memory Game. Give each team an A3 copy of **Map 1** and a marker pen. An A3 version of **Map 2** should be stuck to a flipchart and hidden from the students' sight. They should not have access to the novel.
- Explain that they are going to work in teams to reproduce, as accurately as possible, the image you are going to show them. One person from each group comes to the front of the class in each round, where they are shown the image for 15 seconds (place the flipchart so no-one else can see it). They then go back to their group and add what they have seen and plan the next person's turn (allow 30 seconds for this). Each group member is given two chances to see the image. The whole group has three minutes to plan their strategy. Remind students not to let other groups see or hear their work.
- When the game is finished, compare results and display **Map 2**. Teams discuss what they did well and how they would change their strategy if they were to repeat the task. (This provides an excellent opportunity for discussions about team-work, as well as focused reading.)

Introduction

- Ask students to suggest what they think the novel will be about. Then display **OHT 1** and lead the class in 'unpicking' the title of Chapter 1, to work out what it might mean. Include discussion of:
 - why a capital letter has been used for 'Happening'
 - what other words could be used for 'Happening'
 - why this might be considered a strange phrase (What would one normally expect of a 'Happening'?)
 - what it might suggest about Arthur Hobhouse.

Development

- Students then formulate questions they would like to ask the author or narrator (re-cap the difference) of the story. Display **OHT 2**. Read this and give the class two minutes, working in pairs, to write a set of questions. Then take feedback and discuss the sort of things students would like to know, categorising questions into different groups. Why does the reader want to know these sort of things at the beginning of the novel?
- Students work in pairs to read the rest of Chapter 1 and write questions for either the author or narrator.

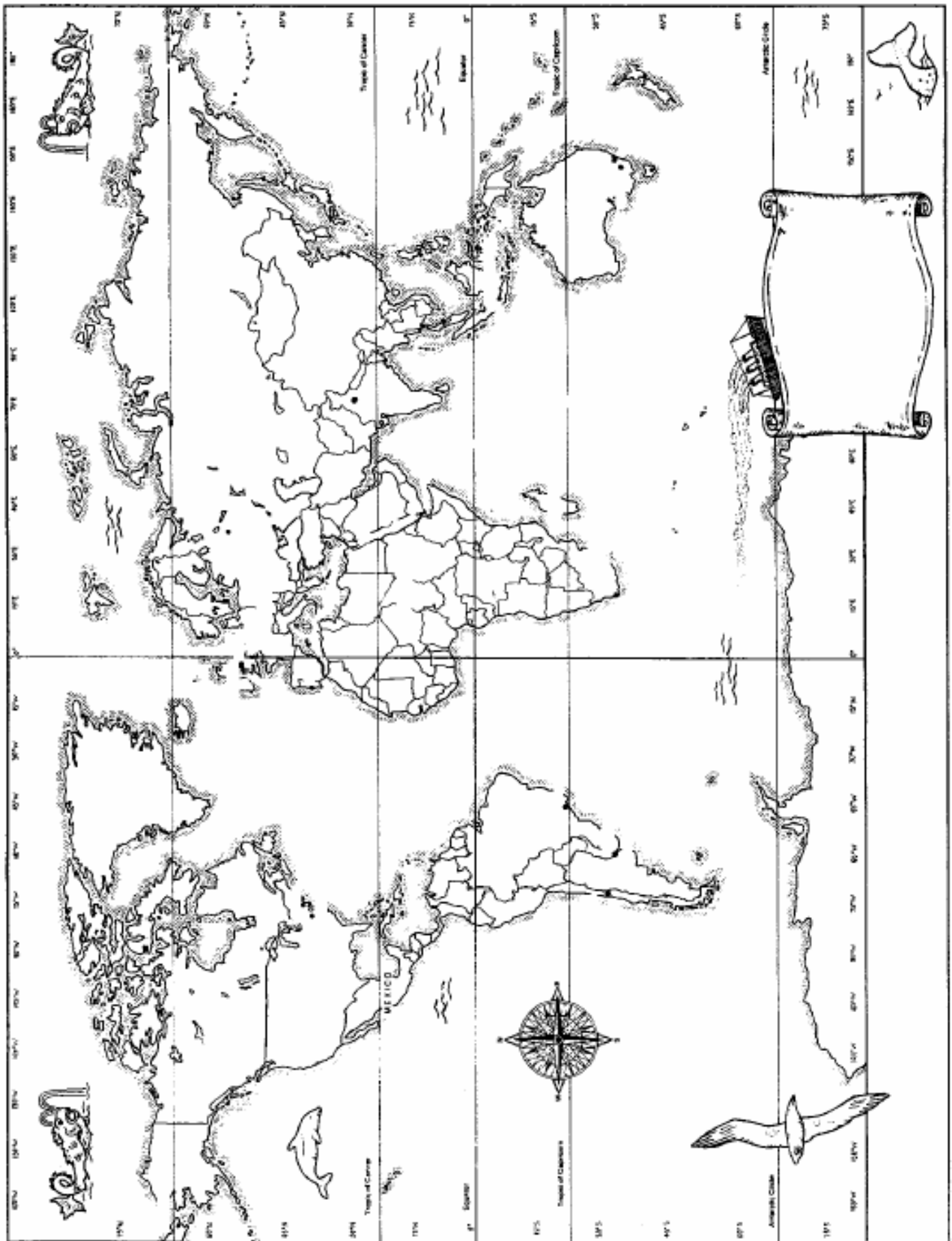
Plenary

- Draw the class's questions together, categorising them as appropriate. Ask students why they think the author has written an opening that raises so many questions. Why is it good writing to make an audience ask questions? (Aim at the idea of engagement and 'captivating' the reader).

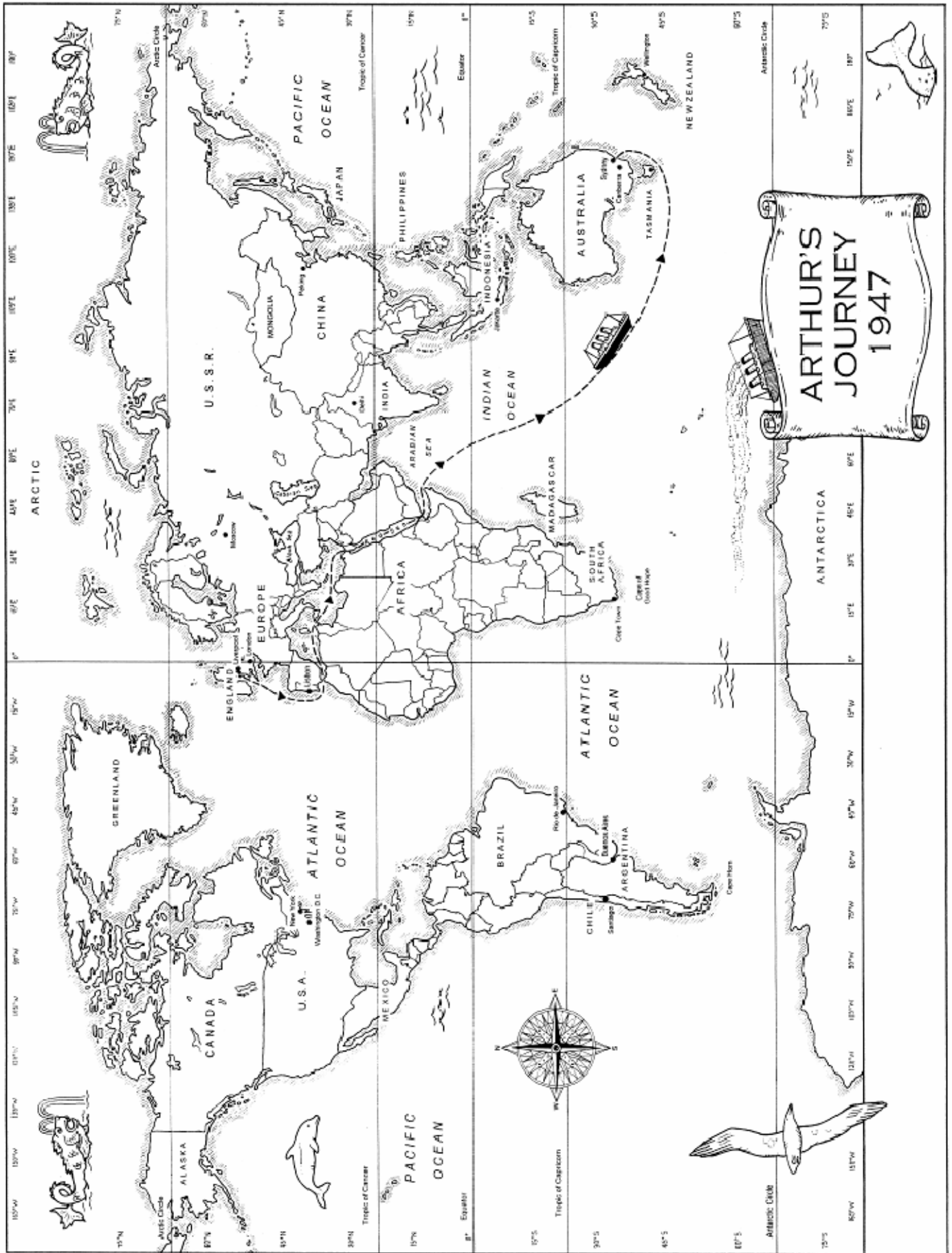
Homework

Ask students to think of their first 'real' memory and write notes about it.

Map 1



Map 2



Arthur Hobhouse is a Happening

OHT 2: Opening paragraph

I should begin at the beginning. I know that. But the trouble is that I don't know the beginning. I wish I did. I do know my name, Arthur Hobhouse. Arthur Hobhouse had a beginning, that's for certain. I had a father and a mother too, but God only knows who they were, and maybe even he doesn't know for sure. I mean, God can't be looking everywhere all at once, can he? So where the name Arthur Hobhouse comes from and who gave it to me I have no idea. I don't even know if it's my real name. I don't know the date and place of my birth either, only that it was probably in Bermondsey, London, sometime in about 1940.

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Lesson 2: Hook that reader!

Framework Objectives

Wr1	Plan, draft, edit, revise, proofread and present a text with readers and purpose in mind
Wr5	Structure a story with an arresting opening, a developing plot, a complication, a crisis and a satisfying resolution
Wr7	Use a range of narrative devices to involve the reader
S&L1	Use talk as a tool for clarifying ideas

Thesauruses and dictionaries should be available to students in this lesson.

Starter

- Look back at **Lesson 1** and remind students of how they formed a number of questions about the first chapter of the novel from reading the opening. Recap the discussion from the Plenary, and note that making a reader ask questions is one of several key ways to hook them into a story.
- Put students into pairs or groups of three. Give each pair or group a set of cut-up cards from **Worksheet 3**. They can then work to match each of the hooks with an example. Take feedback and write the seven different kinds of hook on the board.

Introduction

- Explain to the class that different writers and readers prefer different narrative hooks. However, they will need to try all different kinds of opening if they are to develop as writers.
- Distribute **Worksheet 4**. Using the notes they made about an early memory for **Lesson 1** homework as a basis, students write opening sentences using each style of narrative hook. (The number of styles they are asked to attempt can be differentiated according to ability.)
- Students share their work within their previous pairs and groups. Then, as a class, discuss their findings. Which openings did they think were most successful, and which were particularly difficult or easy to write?

Development

- Students develop one or more of their styles into an opening paragraph, story outline and, if time allows, a full story. (Higher ability students could be encouraged to develop more of their openings.) Before they begin writing, point out that what informs a writer's decision when choosing how to open a piece of writing is their consideration of purpose and audience. The purpose of narrative writing is to entertain and inform. The audience, in this case, will be their classmates (however, language should be kept formal rather than colloquial).

Plenary

- Students read their work to each other in their pairs/threes and discuss. Gather feedback from groups to identify which styles suited which writers/stories.
- Ask students how they will use these ideas in future writing? (Aim to discuss purpose and audience again).

Worksheet 3: Narrative hooks

Narrative hook	Example
The Puzzler – raises questions that puzzle the reader	<i>I'm never really sure if it's a real memory or just something that's become more solid over time. But I'm sure that my brother once tried to murder me.</i>
The Salesperson – stops the reader in their tracks and addresses them directly	<i>So you want to know all about me? Well, stay there and I'll begin...</i>
The Hinder – the subtle approach, drops hints so the reader has to put the pieces together	<i>It wasn't as if we hated each other. I don't really think he knew what he was doing. I wasn't much better.</i>
The Weatherman – sets the atmosphere	<i>The sky was dark, the pavements shining with drizzle and reflected lights from lamp-posts and car headlights. I splashed along in my cosy wellies.</i>
The Painter – paints a visual image of the scene	<i>My bright red wellies shone as they splashed through the puddles on the black tar pavement. Multi-coloured cars raced past, cutting through the drizzle and the dark of the winter...</i>
The Comedian – the funny approach	<i>Being splashed by a car so comprehensively that you are soaked to your underwear is really funny. Unless it happens to you.</i>
The Interrupter – brings you in during a conversation	<i>"I can't believe he did that! What happened next?" Liz demanded...</i>

Worksheet 4: Opening lines

Have a go at using each Narrative Hook by writing an opening sentence in each of the different styles. You may find that you need to change your opening focus as well as your style.

The Puzzler – raises questions that puzzle the reader

The Salesperson – stops the reader in their tracks and addresses them directly

The Hinder – the subtle approach, drops hints so the reader has to put the pieces together

The Weatherman – sets the atmosphere

The Painter – paints a visual image of the scene

The Comedian – the funny approach

The Interrupter – brings you in during a conversation

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Further teaching suggestions

Word level

- **Unpicking meaning:** Select a phrase such as: *It was a grey day with drizzle in the air, the great sad cranes bowing to the ship from the docks as we steamed past.* Put this onto an OHT and lead the class in ‘unpicking’ the meaning and connotation of individual words to lead to an understanding of the whole phrase. Discuss the impact of key words – how would the phrase change if one of them changed? As students get more confident working in this way, they can select the phrases to use and can eventually write an analysis of them.
- **Recognise how word choices such as alliteration can enhance meaning:** Look at examples such as *Mighty Marty* or *Lady Luck* and discuss the impact the alliteration has on our understanding. Students can then make up their own alliterative names for themselves or other characters in the novel.
- **Using a dictionary:** Look at the diagrams of Kitty IV on pages 214 and 215; students should look up any unfamiliar words in a dictionary.
- **‘Marooned in a sea of serpents’:** Read this section on page 268 and the relevant stanzas of ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’. Students should imagine they are sea-snakes, and write the chant they might say as they writhe around Allie’s boat. They should think about the sort of vocabulary and sounds that would go with this – maybe lots of long vowel sounds and sibilance?

Sentence level

- **Use speech punctuation accurately to integrate speech into larger sentences:** Provide students with a passage from the novel that includes speech, but remove the punctuation. Ask students to work out where it should go.
- **Conventions of non-fiction:** Revise how dictionary entries are written. Ask students to select a new word from the text and write the dictionary definition for it.
- **Analyse the use of a sentence to hook and lead the reader on:** Look at the following sentence on page 132: *When she told us, she told us straight.* Ask students to outline why this is a successful sentence and predict what might happen next. They should provide evidence for their ideas (such as how Aunty Meg always returns her animals to their natural habitat).
- **Use of sentence length to create pace and emphasis:** Look at the sentence lengths in the first paragraph of the chapter “You’re my Boys, Aren’t You?” (pages 133–134). What is the effect of starting so many sentences with ‘She’? What is the effect of the short sentences?
- **Mixing metaphors:** Ask students to compile a bank of clichéd metaphors, such as: *the icing on the cake* or *the cat that got the cream.* Discuss why they are used and what they mean. Can students invent some new ones?
- **News headlines:** Look at some of the ones Allie mentions on page 209. How are headlines different to sentences? Why is this? Ask students to make up headlines for other events in the novel.
- **Stylistic conventions of email:** Give students a copy of Allie’s first email on pages 216–218 and ask them to highlight all the errors and then explain why they are errors to a partner.
- **Fog and mist:** Look at the fog and mist stanzas in ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’. You might also like to look at the opening of *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens. How have sentence structures been manipulated to reflect and represent the fog?

Reading

- **Research:** Students research the child migrants (see the Afterword for a useful web address to start your research; also try *www.naa.gov.au* or type ‘child migrant’ into a search engine).
- **Lucky key:** Explore the power of symbols. Ask students to make a thinking map of all that the key means to Arthur. To extend this, students can make their own symbol thinking map.
- **Understanding the author’s craft:** Look at Piggy’s ‘welcome speech’ on pages 31–33. Unpick this to work out the techniques used to support his ideas. Include analysis of repetition, the use of the collective pronoun ‘we’, emotive language and cliché.
- **Active reading:** Read the descriptions of Cooper’s Station and The Ark; students make collages of each to highlight their differences. They should pick out key quotations to layer over the top of the collage.
- **The power of the image:** Show the class some recruitment posters and discuss how each image works and how it is still referred to today. Students can make their own recruitment posters using digital cameras and ICT photo manipulation programs. They will need to consider purpose and audience if these are to be effective.
- **War:** Use ‘What were they like’ by Denise Levertov to introduce the Vietnam War. Ask students to read the poem and use Bloom’s taxonomy of thinking skills to write questions about the poem. The photograph referred to in the novel (page 174) can also be used (search for ‘Kim Phuc photo’ online).
- **Reading pictures:** Look at the diagrams of Kitty IV on pages 214–215 and use them to explore Allie’s character. What can we learn about her from these diagrams?
- **The Ancient Mariner:** As students encounter the poem in the text you might like to provide the missing stanzas. With each stanza they should dramatise or storyboard what is happening.
- **The Storm Blast:** unpick vocabulary to check understanding and then create a picture or cartoon of this stanza.
- **Shooting the albatross:** (page 238) Remind students of the way the key became a symbol of hope for Arthur. What does the albatross symbolise for Allie? In the Coleridge poem the Ancient Mariner shoots the albatross – students should predict what will happen next in the poem and the novel.

Writing

- **Writing a letter to persuade:** Students should imagine they are one of the social workers trying to obtain a placement for one of the immigrant children, and write a letter to persuade a farmer to take a child. Recap conventions of letter-writing as well as persuasive techniques with the class.
- **The policeman’s report:** Aunty Megs takes the boys to a police station to tell their story. Recap conventions of a formal report. Students write the report.
- **Conventions of formal writing:** Outline conventions of obituaries (include purpose and audience). Students write an obituary for Aunty Meg.
- **Conventions of newspaper articles:** Students write the newspaper report of Allie’s departure.

Speaking & Listening

- **Hot-seat:** Using the research on child migrants, set up a hot-seating activity. To prepare, students write questions they would like to ask the children, the authorities sending them and the people receiving them. These characters can then be hot-seated. To extend the activity, roles such as ship passengers, workers on the ship, the people re-housing the children and other people in the places the children end up can also be hot-seated.
- **Persuasive speaking:** Recap persuasive techniques and split students into two groups. One group should write and perform speeches persuading Arthur to join the Navy, while the other should persuade him not to join.
- **News interviews:** Students role-play Allie, Grandpa and the news team as they interview Allie about her forthcoming adventure and her search for Kitty. Remember all the participants will have a different message they want to focus on!