



by Nat Luurtsema - UKS2 Lesson Pack

THE LESSON PLANS IN THIS RESOURCE DRAW ON MATERIAL FROM THE WHOLE BOOK, SO HAVE LOTS OF FUN READING AND TALKING ABOUT OPIE JONES BEFORE YOU START!



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

This pack focuses on Opie's superpower: her ability to read minds and talk to animals. It explores monologues and dialogues through reading aloud, roleplay and imaginative writing, and asks children to find evidence in the text, make inferences and summarise what they've learned. Children are invited to join the Resistance by developing their own superhero-style mind-powers and using them to boost wellbeing, face challenges and help others.

By taking part in the creative cross-curricular activities in this pack, children will...

- Deepen their experience of the text and interrogate it to extend understanding, infer meanings and summarise what they've learned
- Explore monologues and dialogues through discussion, drama and creative writing
- Learn new skills to help with public speaking and performance
- Develop concentration, mindfulness and relaxation skills for wellbeing and confidence
- Use mindfulness, observation and discussion to promote positive thinking, empathy and personal responsibility
- Receive a certificate for successfully completing an Opie Jones-inspired challenge



GETTING STARTED

Refresh your memories by revisiting your *Opie Jones Talks to Animals* reading experience. Ask questions:

- What did the children like about this story?
- Which was their favourite incident, and why?
- Did anything surprise them about this book?
- Does it have something serious to say, as well as being funny?

Talk to the children about pets or farm animals they know well, or creatures they've seen in their gardens or local park. Ask questions:

- How do these animals behave?
- Can people communicate with them? How?

Talk about telepathy. What did children know about mind-reading before reading *Opie Jones Talks to Animals*? What questions do they have now? Establish a distinction between scientific research and fictional explorations as you pool your knowledge and find answers.

Explain that you're going to look more closely at the way Opie communicates with the animal characters in this book, and what she learns about (fictional) mind-power as a result. With care and hard work – just like Opie – this will help children develop special mind-skills of their own!

PART 1

LISTENING TO THE ANIMALS

In their own words

"It's a lot of eat mud, eat mud, eat mud, to be honest..."



Opie's amazing superpower means that she can't help overhearing creatures as they go about their daily lives. The black pages in this book record their thoughts, so we can eavesdrop, too.

Working as a class, re-read these monologues. What do you notice about the way they've been written? What do they tell us about the characters involved?

Use **Downloadable Activity Sheet 1** to collect evidence from the monologues in the text about these characters. As a class, share your evidence, and discuss what it tells you about each character.

Opie's parents, Harvey and Violet, are actors who believe in thorough preparation, and work hard to 'get inside' each role.

| Animal character | What they say in this book | What this tells us about them |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| A large cat called Margo von Catton | "I'm gonna push something off a shelf. Hope it smashes." | Margo is bad-tempered. She likes to be the centre of attention and doesn't care if she causes trouble. |
| | | |
| | | |

As a class, discuss the following: if Harvey and Violet were going to perform one of these animal monologues and really capture the essence of that character, what would they do? Consider:

- how they would use their voices: high, low, loud, soft...
- how fast they would speak, and when they would pause for breath (or leave a gap)
- the emphasis they might put on particular words or phrases
- their facial expressions and mannerisms
- the props they might need
- ways they might boost their confidence

Choose one of the monologues from the book. Practise reading it in-role, drawing on Harvey and Violet's toolkit of skills and tricks, then perform your monologue to the whole class.

Write a monologue about an animal you know well (or one you've invented...). Build on what you've learned to develop your animal's character. Practise reading it in-role, then perform it.

What's the difference between a monologue and a dialogue? How are the 'Opie-Animal' dialogues recorded in the book? Find them and read them aloud.

What do you notice about these dialogues? Do all the animals sound the same, or are their voices distinctive? Can you pick out any phrases that really seem to capture a particular character?

In pairs, re-read the monologues you wrote earlier. What would your characters say to each other if they met? Would they get on well, or have an argument? Roleplay their conversation, then work together to write and perform a dialogue, using what you've learned to give each character a distinctive voice – both in your writing, and as you perform.



Who's your sidekick?

“...a very large cat with an unfriendly face that matched her personality...” p24

Many superheroes have a companion who is always there with help and support. When Opie discovers her mind-reading skills, she thinks her sidekick will be an insect. By the end of the story, it's beginning to look as though Margo van Catton will play that role. Do you think that's a good idea? What skills or attributes should a sidekick have, in your opinion?

If you could talk to animals, which animal would you choose as your sidekick, and why?

Using **Downloadable Activity Sheet 2**, draw your animal sidekick in the first box. In the second box, let your sidekick introduce themselves by writing a monologue.

MY ANIMAL SIDEKICK
Draw your superhero animal sidekick!

INTRODUCING...

Will you be a superhero, or a supervillain?

“So,” said Varley. “She’s playing with cats right now. When she joins our side, we’re going to give her wolves, tigers, bears... Think of any animal that scares you... then imagine a pack of them, hunting you, controlled by her.” p304



Choose an animal, then imagine you can read its mind and talk to it.

- What do you want this animal to do, and why? How will it respond?
- Will you be like Max Inkelaar, supporting the evil schemes of Hugo Varling?
- Or will you be like Mulaki and Xu, resisting him?



Write a story about using your powers for GOOD.... or

Write a story about using your powers to do something BAD!

Share your stories. How many superheroes are there in your class, and how many supervillains?

PART 2

EXPLORING THE POWER OF OUR MINDS

In this book, Opie and the other mind-readers use their superpowers to discover information and control others. Using their skills in this way takes lots of energy, attention and practice, and Opie has to undergo training and try hard to improve. Mind-readers must decide whether to use their skill for good or evil, and members of the Resistance have to learn how to protect their minds from invasion by Varling's employees, who will be 'pushing rage' at them and trying to make them behave badly.

Moments of awe and wonder

Working as a class, revisit your discussion about 'mind-power' and the way it is described and used in this book.

"A really powerful mind reader could walk down the road and cause a riot behind them. Or, by the time they looked back, hundreds of people would be singing, dancing and hugging." p100

Discuss how members of the Resistance spend their time 'chasing away gloom' and creating 'moments of awe and wonder.'

Ask questions:

- Why do they think these things are important?
- What makes you feel better on a bad day?



“But what was the point?” Cillian asked, “No offence, but...” “Wonder,” Mulaki told him firmly. “Moments of wonder and awe that make people look up from their lives and feel amazed at the natural world.” **p180**

“Chasing away gloom. It’s not flashy but it’s important.” **p173**



Do Hugo Varling’s mind-readers work the same way? What are their aims? Find examples.



“It was like the air was full of rage...”

Is there any way to stop the ‘mind-bullying’ that comes from Varling’s baddies?

“We’ll be sending happy thoughts instead. We have to hope your schoolmates choose to be kind over angry.” **p176**

In this book, Opie must train her mind to be strong, so that she can attract the attention of the animals she wants to talk to, face scary challenges AND keep Varling’s baddies away.

How and when does Opie do these things? Find examples.

Here are some to get you started:

- When Opie calls the geese to protect Olive, she has to be assertive or they won’t respond. *“She thought about what she needed, in one clear thought.”* **p144**
- When Opie learns to protect her thoughts from other mind readers, she imagines *“inflating a balloon inside her head, then blowing it up slowly and pushing everything out of her brain. It was very relaxing.”* **p114**
- When Opie has to talk to the whole school in assembly she is very nervous, but she stands up straight, imagines she is Violet and *“speaks clearly...”* **p230**
- Discuss the examples you’ve found. Do they show Opie using magical superpowers? Or are they mind-powers that anyone could develop?



Even if we don't have Opie's superhero powers, our minds can do amazing things...

Make a list of all the things your mind can do: remember things, visualise something that's not there, solve puzzles, empathise with others...

Build on your existing skills by training your minds, like Opie. Here are some ideas:

- Develop memory skills by playing games (e.g. Kim's Game)
- Use Opie's balloon technique to develop concentration and a sense of calm
- Explore mindfulness exercises to help you relax and reduce anxiety
- Notice moments of wonder and awe
- Borrow ideas from Opie and her parents (standing up straight, rehearsing, adopting a role) to boost your confidence
- Find imaginative and creative ways of 'chasing away gloom'

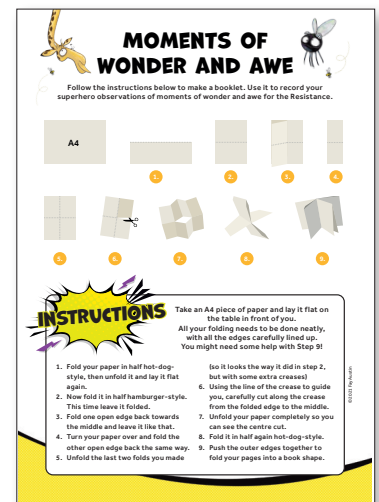
Could you join the Resistance?

If you want to join the Resistance, you'll need to be super-good at spotting moments of awe and wonder, and even better at finding ways to chase away gloom.

Talk about wonder and awe. What do these words mean? Share memories of things that have made you feel awe or wonder. How could you bring more special moments like these into your everyday life, or share your experiences?

Start by noticing things that have made you feel happy, or brought a smile to your face. They can be little things – and once you start looking, you'll find them in the most unlikely places!

Keep a record of your observations in an origami-fold booklet: you'll find instructions on [Downloadable Activity Sheet 3](#).



When Volume 1 of your diary is full, you can make another volume. Give your observations extra status by keeping your diary in a special box!

Could you work together as a class to chase away gloom? How?

Share ideas (painting a picture to brighten a corridor, setting up a friendship bench, sending a letter to somebody who's lonely..) then choose your challenge and get busy...

Once you've faced your challenge and collected your evidence, present it to the Resistance. Those who are admitted will receive a special certificate ([Downloadable Activity Sheet 4](#))!



PART 3

EXTENDING THE LESSON

As well as writing children's fiction, Nat Luurtsema is a BAFTA-nominated screenwriter, director and actor who worked for many years in stand-up comedy. This brings extra realism to the subplot in *Opie Jones Talks to Animals* – Opie's journey from being too shy to speak up, to being able to command attention and take the lead. Opie's parents are actors, and "natural show-offs," whereas Opie is the opposite. But she has learned a trick or two by watching her parents, and when she has to step up, she finds the courage to do so – and succeed.

"There was no way to do it that didn't involve her standing up and talking in public – her stomach lurched – in front of hundreds of kids."
p203

How does Opie address her anxiety about speaking up and taking the lead? Here are some quotes to help you, but you will find other examples too:

- When Opie has to train the whole school during assembly, she prepares thoroughly by making flashcards and rehearsing. *"Opie looked at her flashcards, glad she'd spent most of the night rehearsing. Her parents always rehearsed."* p231
- When Olive faces danger on the railway line, it gives Opie the



push she needs to step up. *"Opie couldn't mumble this in her usual way. She had to be assertive. She thought about what she needed, in one clear thought."* p144

What do you think this book is telling us about bravery and courage?

"The key to a good assembly is structure. Keep it moving, keep it snappy. Don't mumble, don't tell them off for longer than ten minutes and always begin with a song." p221

As a class, re-read the chapters dealing with Opie's school assembly.

According to the rat who lives in the school hall, what are the ingredients of a really good assembly? What advice does he give Opie? Is it helpful?

"Oh, he's good, he's very good. Watch and learn, kid."

Why does the rat think Xu is a good performer? Working together, can you identify the actions and attitudes that enable him to succeed?

For example:

- Xu raises a problem that everyone knows about (a rise in fighting and bad behaviour)
- He grabs attention (by pushing a thought into people's heads)
- He gives people something eye-catching to look at (his cape)

A FINAL CHALLENGE

Work together to plan and present a school assembly about *Opie Jones Talks to Animals*.

- Use everything you've learned from the book to help you structure your assembly so it grabs attention and is really interesting. Could you teach everyone in your school a mind-power technique?

OR

- Challenge yourselves to do something that feels a little scary, and use Opie's practical tips and mind-strengthening exercises to help you succeed.

When you've finished, you can apply for membership of the Resistance... and a certificate!





IN THEIR OWN WORDS

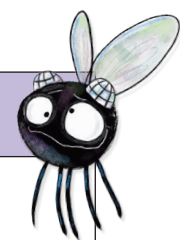
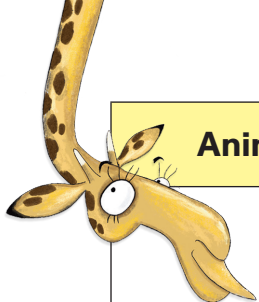
What do we learn about the animals in this book from their thoughts and conversations?



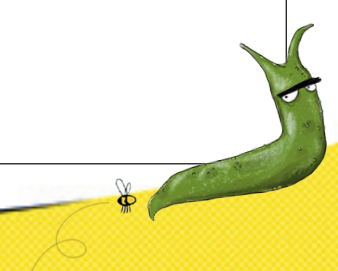
READ THE BLACK PAGES TO FIND EVIDENCE. RECORD YOUR DISCOVERIES ON THIS TABLE. AN EXAMPLE HAS BEEN FILLED IN-FOR YOU.

| Animal character | What they say in this book | What this tells us about them |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| A large cat called Margo von Catton | "I'm gonna push something off a shelf. Hope it smashes." | Margo is bad-tempered. She likes to be the centre of attention and doesn't care if she causes trouble. |
| | | |
| | | |
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| Animal character | What they say in this book | What this tells us about them |
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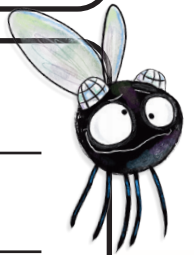
MY ANIMAL SIDEKICK

Draw your superhero animal sidekick!



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INTRODUCING...

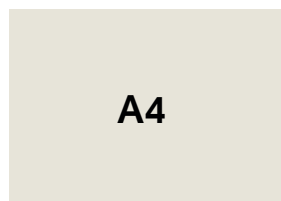




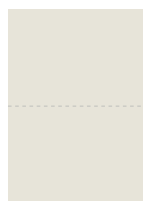
MOMENTS OF WONDER AND AWE



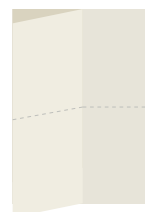
Follow the instructions below to make a booklet. Use it to record your superhero observations of moments of wonder and awe for the Resistance.



1.



2.



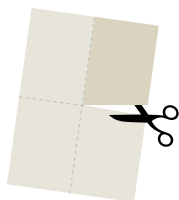
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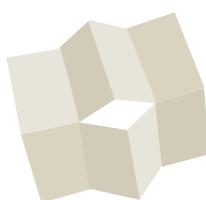
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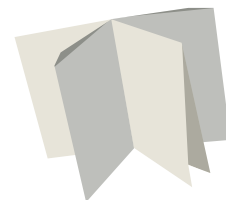
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7.



8.



9.

INSTRUCTIONS

Take an A4 piece of paper and lay it flat on the table in front of you.

All your folding needs to be done neatly, with all the edges carefully lined up.

You might need some help with Step 9!

1. Fold your paper in half hot-dog-style, then unfold it and lay it flat again.
2. Now fold it in half hamburger-style. This time leave it folded.
3. Fold one open edge back towards the middle and leave it like that.
4. Turn your paper over and fold the other open edge back the same way.
5. Unfold the last two folds you made (so it looks the way it did in step 2, but with some extra creases)
6. Using the line of the crease to guide you, carefully cut along the crease from the folded edge to the middle.
7. Unfold your paper completely so you can see the centre cut.
8. Fold it in half again hot-dog-style.
9. Push the outer edges together to fold your pages into a book shape.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

HAS

and has thereby proven their ability as a Mind-Skills Superhero
and been admitted to the Resistance.

Date:

Signed by:

