



Celebrating 20 years of the Branford Boase Award

These talking point ideas have been designed to celebrate texts that have been previous winners of the Branford Boase Award. The award was set up to reward the most promising new writers and their editors, as well as to reward excellence in writing and in publishing. The Award is made annually to the most promising book for seven-year-olds and upwards by a first time novelist.

The ideas in the sequence of sessions will support teachers in reading aloud selected texts that have been awarded the prize and talk about these texts with their children, allowing children to respond to and understand the text in greater depth.

Title: A Boy and a Bear in a Boat

Author: Dave Shelton

Publisher: David Fickling Books

Winner of the Branford Boase in 2013

Prior to reading:

Before beginning to read this book, you might like to create a display close to the area in which you read that provides a blue ocean backdrop to any notes made of the children's responses and that could be used to track the sequence of events and the characters' emotional responses to them as they unfold.

Session 1: Chapters 1-7 / Pages 1-55

Focus: Predicting, Empathising, Questioning and Re-reading

Before revealing the front cover or title, show the children the silhouetted illustration of the boy and the bear in a boat that appears on the title page and is repeated above each chapter heading. Elicit the children's initial responses to the image. Do the children have any questions about it? *Who do they think these characters are? What is their relationship? What are they doing in a boat together? Where are they going?*

*What type of story do they think this will be and why do they think that? What kind of stories would have a bear rowing a boat? Encourage them to make intertextual connections by drawing on their existing literary knowledge. You could then create a display of familiar books that feature bears or other animals that are humanised by authors, such as a great many traditional tales like *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, or picturebooks like *Peace at Last* by Jill Murphy and *Bears Don't Read* by Emma Chichester Clark.*

Read aloud the first chapter 'Stepping Aboard' and ask them to discuss their responses to both text and illustrations. The class can begin to explore their responses to it with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls 'the four basic questions'. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion: *Tell me...was there anything you liked about this text? Was there anything that you particularly disliked...? Was there anything that puzzled you? Were there any patterns...any connections that you noticed...?* As the book continues to be read, the children will benefit from regular opportunities to return to these questions and share their personal responses to the key events and character developments as they occur.



Focus on the boy and how the children think he feels upon boarding the bear's boat through to falling asleep. *How would they feel?* What is it like to be in a boat? Ask the children to draw on personal experiences and give them opportunity to revisit the chapter, highlighting words to describe the movement, sound and feel of being on the boat on the sea. Are any moments particularly memorable to them that illustrate the boy's shifting emotions; particular words or phrases or something they notice in how he is illustrated? Revisit these moments, clarifying ideas and reflecting on the impact of language choices, such as 'tremble', 'wobble', 'unfixed' and 'unnerving'. *How do you think the bear makes him feel? Why has Dave Shelton chosen to describe the bear as 'lunging towards the boy, reaching out to grab at him' while he merely rows the boat? How does the bear make the boy feel? How do you think he feels about the bear's responses to his questions?* You can continue to track the boy's emotional journey throughout the reading experience by creating an enlarged graph of emotion on the working wall which comprises the sequence of events displayed along the bottom, perhaps using Shelton's illustrations, and a scale of emotion along the vertical axis, ranging from 'terrified' to 'relaxed'. *Is there anything you would like to ask the boy or the bear? Where is 'the other side?'* Children could keep a record of questions that are thrown up in this intriguing tale in their own or a class reading journal and be encouraged to discuss ideas throughout.

Read aloud the title of Chapter 2 'Unforeseeable Anomalies' (pages 8-15). Write the title on a flip chart and note the children's suggestions as to what they think this means. After you have read the chapter and having heard the word 'anomalies' used in context, invite the children to offer more informed suggestions. *What are they learning about the bear and the boy's feeling towards him? From whose viewpoint are we being told the story? How does this affect our response to the bear?* The bear has increasingly vague responses to the boy's queries and some interesting turns of phrase, such as 'tickity boo' on page 14. Whenever these are expressed, explore with the children what they might mean and how they affect the mood.

Read aloud Chapters 3 to 5 (pages 16-37), engaging the children in book talk. In order to capture the children's growing ideas around the characteristics of both the boy and the bear, and their relationship, it would be useful to create a Role on the Wall for each of them which would also highlight similarities and differences between characters as well as to explore their relationship as the story unfolds. To create a Role on the Wall, draw an outline to represent the character on a large sheet of paper; on the outside, record what is known about him drawing on evidence from the text and illustrations and on the inside inferences that can be made from this about personality, thoughts and feelings. *Look at various images of the boy and the bear seen so far. What do they tell us about their personalities and outlook? If you saw these without having heard the story so far, which would you prefer to be with? Is this different from how you feel now you know something of their behaviour or personality? Do they remind you of anyone you know? Why?* Encourage the children to reflect on significant dialogue between the boy and the bear – or internalised thoughts – that tell us something about them. *How does the chapter 'Harriet' change or confirm what we thought about the bear beforehand? Why?* These Role on the Wall posters can be returned to repeatedly as the children gain new insights into each character.

Read aloud chapter 6, 'The Comic', ensuring the children have access to a version of the comic strip enlarged through a visualiser or a copy for themselves. Pause to allow the children to try and make meaning from it as the boy struggles to do. What kind of strategies could the children use to translate the



text in the speech bubbles; what are the clues available to them and the boy? Discuss the type and style of language that typifies the comic book genre. Provide examples.

Make the comic available for the children to revisit for themselves later so that they might continue to read it more closely, share ideas and make sense of it. You might provide art materials so that they might use it to predict the missing parts of the story they imagine happening. After reading aloud chapter 7, elicit the children's personal responses to what they have heard about the 'On-Board Entertainment'. Revisit Chapter 4 and reflect on the stark difference between the bear and boy in terms of their respective boredom thresholds. *Who do you relate to most, the boy or the bear? Why is the boy so frustrated? Would you be too or can you relate to the bear at all? Why are the bear's routines important to him? What is being revealed about each character's way of thinking and how each is managing being on board a boat in the middle of a seemingly endless journey? How does this relate to what we know about people in real life?*

Session 2: Chapters 8-14 / Pages 56-120

Focus: Predicting, Empathising, Scanning, Summarising

Show the children the 3 illustration panels on page 56 without revealing any of the text. Invite the children's responses and predictions. *What do they notice about the way the characters are portrayed in each image? How does the body language betray inner emotional state? How would the children describe the boy's state in particular? What do they think about the bear? What does his portrayal say about him?* Scribe the children's responses around a copy of the illustration panel. Discuss how much time the children think has passed between each scene and what may be causing the boy's decline in well-being. Reveal the chapter title 'Trust' and ask the children to offer further suggestions. *What might this mean at this point in the story?* Read aloud the chapter and consider why the chapter is entitled 'Trust'. Whose trust is it referring to and what is it that has inspired the boy's increasing lack of faith? Refer back to the bear's responses that you have gathered from their first meeting. Relate this to personal experiences in which the children may have felt anxious about doing something or going somewhere that is unfamiliar. Talk about how the unknown can be overwhelming or worrying and that being informed can be reassuring. What would the children like to say to the bear to ensure the boy does not lose his trust in him? *How could he reassure the boy?* Discuss its startling brevity. *What impact does it have? Why has the author done this? What is he trying to achieve? How does it relate to the meaning taken from the illustrations?*

Read on to the next chapter 'The Maps' pausing at the moment before the map is revealed on page 67. *What do the children think about the dynamic between the two characters now? How has the bear's behaviour changed? How do you know?* Encourage the children to revisit the text and scan it for words and phrases that describe the threatening nature of the bear's behaviour; his menacing silence, staring, defiant and angry, growling. *How does it make you feel?* Look at the image of the boy fearfully looking up at the angry bear. Invite pairs of children to adopt these positions and consider what the stream of consciousness would be in each character's head. Read on in which the featureless map is revealed to the boy and he realises his predicament. Gather the children's responses to the map, the bear's change in mood, his lack of concern and the boy's deeply emotional response. *How would you feel if you were him? Why? What might this mean for the rest of the story?* Help the children summarise their ideas on each Role on the Wall, articulating what they know or imagine each character must be feeling in these moments.



Read the rest of the chapter and consider what message the boy should write in the bottle. *What would you write? What does the boy hope for?* This is the first time the boy has mentioned a parent – his father. *What do we think about that? What does that tell us about the boy's situation?* Return to the children's initial ideas about what the boy is doing on the boat with the bear in the first place; where he wants to go and why; and how likely it is that he will get there.

Read on to Chapter 13 'Inclement Weather', taking time to discuss children's predictions or understanding of what this title might suggest before discussing what the chapter reveals. You might create a Scale of Intensity on the working wall, re-reading and scanning to find the author's language choices (inclement, storm, squall, lashing rain, biting wind, eerie) and asking the children to order them. *What does this chapter reveal about the boy's attitude towards the bear? What does it tell us about the bear's experience as a sailor? Would we trust him? Why? Why not?*

Read on until the end of Chapter 14 'The Very Last Sandwich' (115-120) in which hunger drives them to contemplate the repulsive sandwich before realising it has made its escape.

Pause at this stage to reflect on and summarise the events and themes in the story so far.

Session 3: (Chapters 15-18 / Pages 121-191)

Focus: Predicting and Empathising

Read aloud the chapter 'Fishing' allowing the children time to engage in book talk, in particular discussing the ways in which the pair collaborate and what each of them contributes to the task of catching a fish. Do we know how the bear feels about the boy being on the boat? How? Revisit and re-read page 128 which gives rare insight into the bear's viewpoint and discuss the children's thinking.

Read the next chapter 'Trading Up' up to "You'll scare the fish away." on page 158. Reflect on the boy's newfound patience and the lessons he is learning. Pause each time the bear trades a fish to gauge the children's reactions. *What do the children think about the bear's behaviour? What do they anticipate will happen? What will be the consequence of his actions? Does this remind them of other stories they know?* Read on until the end of the chapter, allowing the children to enjoy the cliffhanger before reading on to reveal the fate of the bear and 'The Thing From The Deep'.

Read the chapter 'Floating Down' up to page 188 'That wasn't meant to happen at all.' Elicit the children's responses to the bear's aggressive reaction, revisiting the illustration on page 187. *Is this what the children expected? Why? Why not? Do the children lean toward either character's viewpoint during their argument or are they undecided?* Engage the children in discussion and debate, modelling how they justify views and create balanced argument. Return to the Role on the Wall posters adding the new insights gained into each character following these turn of events.

Session 4: (Chapters 19-23 / Pages 192-273)

Focus: Predicting, Empathising, Close Reading and Thinking Aloud

Read on through 'The Mermaid' chapter, pausing at page 203 for the children to make predictions as to what they think the boat has bumped into causing the boy to be knocked unconscious. Scribe the children's ideas around a copy of the illustrations. Turn the page to reveal the ship and give children ample time to



discuss this image. *What does it remind them of? What might happen in the story now? Who else might it involve?* Read on as the pair explore the deserted ship until page 229 'The boy looked over the rail.' Pause to respond to the illustrations and to reflect on the atmosphere inside the ship created by the author. *Where are we placed as reader? How do the children feel about being on board this ship? Why?* Consider what has happened to make the bear sob as he looks over the side (p.229). Read on to the rest of the chapter and on to the next one 'Oops' in which the well-meaning boy makes a series of mistakes that cause them to lose the bear's beloved Harriet and the ship. Consider the bear's response to these unfortunate events. *How does it make the children feel when he loses the Harriet? What might they say to him to make him feel better? How does his demeanour change when they are faced with a sinking ship and the threat of drowning? Why has the author described the bear as 'sturdy as an island'?* Compare this to the children's descriptions of him on his Role on the Wall and consider how they could relate this literally and figuratively. Ask the children to re-read and scan for other words and phrases that the author has chosen to describe the bear and his influence on the boy's safety and sense of well-being.

Read on until the end of chapter 18 'A Temporary Promotion', engaging the children in book talk at this point. *If they were to track the bear's emotional journey in recent episodes, what would it look like? How do the children feel about his total lack of hope now? What would they say to him? What does it mean for the boy? How does this affect him? How does he deal with the bear's desolation? What does this say about him and his relationship with the bear?*

Session 5: (Chapters 24-27 / Pages 274-292)

Focus: Summarising, Empathising and Thinking Aloud

Read on until the end of the book. Provide ample time for the children to engage in book talk. *What are the children's initial responses to the way the story ends? Are they satisfied with the ending? Why? Why not? Why is it not resolved? What might happen next? Does it remind them of other stories they know? What kind of story is this? Do the children have any questions? Does anything continue to puzzle them? To which character do they relate to most? Why? If you had to say what this story is about, what would you say? What could we learn from this story about ourselves and about the way people think and behave?*

Reflect on the fact that the book won the Branford Boase award, *why do you think this book is considered worthy of an award? What makes an award winning story in your opinion? What other books have you read that have won awards? Were they similar or different? What makes this a good book for children aged 7+? What defines a high quality text for you as a reader? What things do you look for when you are considering new reading material?*

These resources were created by The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE).

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