



## 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 talking about these texts with their children, allowing children to respond to and understand the text in greater depth.*

**Title: Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot**

**Author: Horatio Clare**

**Illustrator: Jane Matthews**

**Publisher: Firefly**

**Winner of the Branford Boase: 2016**

From the moment of his birth Aubrey is destined to be different — a ‘rambunctious wolf’ whose early years are marked by scrapes and incidents, the idyllic life he shares with his loving parents belies the difficulties in store, as his father succumbs to depression, and Aubrey must bring his imagination to bear to find a solution to the monster that threatens his father and his family. The story is told with humour and sensitivity, without shying away from the darker side of parental depression.

### **Advisory Note for Teachers:**

**This book is recommended for children in Year 6 or 7**

*Teachers should be aware that the story addresses the theme of parental depression, including description of an attempted suicide. Although it is addressed in a sensitive way, a decision needs to be made as to whether this is a suitable book to read aloud and discuss as a whole class. If children in the class are experiencing mental health issues in their family, it may be more appropriate to read this in a more supportive context.*

*All children reading this book will need support in understanding mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. It is advised that you become familiar with the range of teaching resources available that provide guidance in discussing mental health with children. Whilst it is the father that suffers from depression in the story, children will need time to explore their own emotions and how they manage them before considering how parental depression affects a child like Aubrey:*

- Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families: <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/resources-for-schools/talking-mental-health-animation-teacher-toolkit/>
- PSHE Association: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/guidance-teaching-about-mental-health-and>
- BookTrust: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/booklists/p/parent-depression/>



### Session 1: Chapters 1–3, Pages 1–38

#### Focus: Predicting, questioning, thinking aloud, summarising, clarifying.

Share the front cover of the novel including the title. Allow time for the children to respond to what they can see and read. Ask the children to reflect on what is depicted in the illustration, and what the title might mean. *Why do they think the cover uses this image? Where might it be? What do the elements of the illustration suggest to us about the story that will unfold? What impression is made on them by this image? Who or what do they think Aubrey might be? Who or what do they think is the Terrible Yoot?*

Share the images of the beetle, the leaping squirrel, the overarching trees and the dung beetle that precede the first chapter and read aloud the author biography. *What do you think is the significance of these illustrations? How do these images sit with what you thought about the book from looking at the cover? How does what you have learned about the author prepare you for the book you are about to read, what expectations do you have?*

Read aloud Chapter 1, ‘Rambunctious Boy’ (pp.1–20). As a general principle for whole-class enjoyment of the text, it might be helpful to use a visualiser or scan any illustrations for ease of sharing; it may also ease fluency to save footnotes for discussion at a convenient stopping point. Ask the children to discuss their responses to the text. The class can begin to explore their responses 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 you continue to read the book, 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.

Ask the children to summarise what they have found out about Aubrey and his family from the opening chapter, and to predict how they think the story might develop. *What do you think you know about Aubrey, his personality and his wider family, from what you have read? What kind of book do you think this is likely to be? Why? What clues do you think you have as to how the story will develop?*

Create a Role on the Wall for Aubrey to add to as the reading continues, including inferences drawn about his character and questions about him. In due course you could also use hotseating to gain insights into his actions and motivations. Give the children time to share their ideas in small groups before asking the children to feed back to a whole class discussion. Ask the pupils to offer words or phrases they would use to describe Aubrey’s feelings and personality, as well as what the children know about his outward appearance or facts and other information about him. Support the class in revisiting evidence from the text to make explicit links between the external and internal. For example: *How does something Aubrey does tell us about his personality, or how does his personality make that action seem most likely?*

Support the children in discussing the author’s vocabulary choices; when pupils first encounter a word, you may choose to gloss it or encourage children to infer meaning from the context before returning to address specific words and their meanings and connotations. As you share the text, collect together a list of the unfamiliar vocabulary that has been identified by the class and work together to explore definitions, synonyms, connotations and so on. *Why do you think the author chooses to use rare words to describe his*



characters? What is the effect of describing Aubrey as ‘rambunctious’? Discuss the footnotes the author has provided, in this case on philosophy: *How do you read the footnotes the author has included? Have you read other books that use footnotes? Why do you think authors include them? How do you think these help you to understand the story and add to the text?*

As you read you may wish to draw attention to the way the author often uses the final sentence of one chapter to link to the action of the next, and tune children in to this feature of his writing so they can respond to it independently as you read on.

Read Chapter 2, ‘The Spell’ (pp.21–30) in which Jim’s mental state deteriorates, and share the illustrations. How does the author manage to convey the change that has overcome over Jim? Which do you think are the most effective words and phrases that are used? Why do you think he compares Jim’s feelings to a ‘heavy hat’, a ‘hairy worm’ and a ‘panicked bird’? What effect do these images have on you? Why? How do you think it makes his family feel?

Read the title for Chapter 3, ‘How Do You Break a Spell?’ then give the children time to explore the illustration on page 35. What is Aubrey doing? Why? Now read the chapter, pausing after Aubrey attempts to diagnose his father to discuss the children’s thoughts. How does it make Aubrey feel to know he can’t necessarily ‘cure’ his father? Read on until the end, discussing his mum’s response and how he feels now.

At this point, the children may want to find out a little more about the impact of depression to which you can support them through the guidance provided by associations like the *PSHE Association* or *Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families*. This will need to be treated with sensitivity to children’s own circumstances.

## Session 2: Chapters 4–6, Pages 39–69

### Focus: Visualising, clarifying and thinking aloud.

Read aloud Chapter 4, ‘The Secret’ (pp.39–44), in which Aubrey’s Night Venturing in Rushing Wood is introduced. Revisit the description of Rushing Wood on pp.40–43 and ask the children to imagine the scene in their mind’s eye as you are reading aloud. Ask the children to close their eyes and picture the scene unfolding as if it were a scene in a film. Following this, ask the children to share what they imagined and to identify vocabulary or phrases which support their understanding or interpretation. For example, *‘glades of silver beams glowed between the tree trunks’* or *‘wolves glide under giant fir trees and bears teach their cubs to toboggan by the light of the stars’*. Ask the children why these words or phrases in particular stood out to them: *What made these images so vivid or memorable? What mood or sense of place is created by the author through the descriptions? How do these descriptions make you feel? What do you think you would be thinking if you were Aubrey? Do the woods symbolise anything to you? How does it make you feel to imagine visiting them and seeing the life that is in them? Why do you think Aubrey might be visiting this place in his imagination? How do you think this place relates to the real world in which Jim feels so sad? Which place do you think Aubrey might prefer? Why?*

Read aloud Chapter 5, ‘The Owl’ (pp.45–57), which begins with an interior monologue as Aubrey wrestles with finding a solution to Jim’s mental state, and — turning to the Ancient Greeks and thinking of Pallas Athene as a source of wisdom — is visited by a talking owl, Augustus, who invites him to go Night Venturing.



At appropriate points share also the illustrations and footnotes. Encourage the children to think aloud about the events of the chapter: *How do you think Aubrey is feeling as he goes to bed? What do you think might be going through his mind? Why? What links can you make between his imagination and reality? Why is the owl significant?*

Read aloud Chapter 6, 'Unkillable Monster, Impossible Quest' (pp.58–69), in which Aubrey and Augustus visit the Great Wood to see the Tawny owl Athene Noctua, and seek advice on helping Jim. Engage the children in book talk regarding what they have heard, considering: *Was there anything you liked about this part of the book? Was there anything that you particularly disliked? Was there anything that puzzled you? Were there any further patterns... any connections that you noticed?* Ask the class to predict what they think will happen next, now that Aubrey has enlisted the help of the creatures to support his efforts at fighting off the Terrible Yoot and keeping Jim well: *How do you think Aubrey and the creatures will be able to help Jim recover from his sadness? What do you predict specific creatures might be able to do to address his mental state?*

### Session 3: Chapters 7–9, Pages 70–120

**Focus: Clarifying, summarising, re-reading, skimming and scanning.**

Read aloud Chapter 7, 'Surprising Events at Woodside Terrace' (pp.70–86), in which Aubrey encounters Hoppy the squirrel and Jim experiences Night Fears. Stop at appropriate points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like and/or dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that your reading brings up.

Ask the children to summarise the conversation between Hoppy and Aubrey, and the squirrel's plan for Jim, including the tone of the advice: *Do you think the squirrel offers Aubrey good advice? Do you think Aubrey trusts him? Does he take him seriously? Why? Why not? How do you feel about the practical jokes Hoppy suggests playing on Jim?* Look closely at the illustration of Jim on p.81, capturing his Night Fears, then read on to the incident of Marcel the fly lulling him to sleep: *What do you think the illustration adds to the text? Which details stand out for you? Why?*

The author shows some of the action through Mr Ferraby's eyes. *How does Mr Ferraby's reaction make you feel? Why?* Read Chapter 8 'Eighty Squirrels, One Heron' (pp.87–104), in which Mr Ferraby witnesses Hoppy and his fellow squirrels invade Jim and Suzanne's house, and the heron Ardea bringing Aubrey fish he has caught.

Read on through Chapter 9, 'Exercise is Good for You' (pp.105–120), in which the crow Corax conspires to ensure that Jim takes the exercise that he needs, and Aubrey has a philosophical discussion with the mole Velvet Humps. Ask the children to summarise the creatures' interventions so far and the impact they have had on Jim and his wellbeing, re-reading as necessary, skimming and scanning to identify key information: *How do you think the creatures have helped Jim so far? Do you think their approach is proving effective? Why?* Ask children to clarify the conversation with Velvet Humps, questioning the significance of the discussion: *What do you think is the meaning of the conversation between Aubrey and Velvet Humps? Do you think it has particular significance at this point in the story? Why? What do you predict will happen next?*

### Session 4: Chapters 10–12, Pages 121–162

**Focus: Empathising, close reading, thinking aloud and visualising.**



### Advisory Note for Teachers:

**The next two chapters describe Jim's failed suicide attempt in some detail.**

*All children reading this book will need support in understanding mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. It is advised that you become familiar with the range of teaching resources available that provide guidance in discussing mental health with children. Whilst it is the father that suffers from depression in the story, children will need time to explore their own emotions and how they manage them before considering how parental depression affects a child like Aubrey:*

- Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families: <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/resources-for-schools/talking-mental-health-animation-teacher-toolkit/>
- PSHE Association: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/guidance-teaching-about-mental-health-and>
- BookTrust: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/booklists/p/parent-depression/>

Read aloud Chapter 10, 'The Attack' (pp.121–136) in which the change from autumn to winter affects Jim so badly that he is driven to attempt suicide. Stop at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Include in your discussion the 'cruel and spiteful' voice of the Yoot, which was first heard on p.106 and read the Yoot's words closely to identify the features that have an impact on Jim: *How do you think the Yoot's comments make Jim feel? How do they make you feel? What do you think it is about the things the Yoot says and the way it says them that are so wounding and affect Jim's mood and self-esteem?*

The joy of Christmas preparations stand in stark contrast to Jim's despair and feelings of worthlessness: *Why do you think Jim feels so down when Aubrey and Suzanne are making such efforts to celebrate? Do you think the two states are related? In what way? Look at the illustrations of Jim and of Aubrey and Suzanne in the chapter to see how Jane Matthews has reinforced the messages the author is giving: How do the illustrations interact with the words the author has written? Which details do you find effective? Why?*

The sudden sense that Jim might be in danger and Aubrey and Suzanne's hunt to find him are dramatic; discuss with the children how the author builds and sustains the tension of this section. *What do you think it is that makes Suzanne and Aubrey both suddenly fear for Jim? What words or phrases do you notice that particularly capture Jim's feelings and those of his wife and son? Which words or phrases make the hunt for Jim so compelling to read? Children may want to revisit and re-read the text with a partner.*

Read Chapter 11, 'A Battle of Life and Death' (pp. 137–144) and Chapter 12, 'Face to Face with the Terrible Yoot' (pp.145–162), in which Suzanne nurses Jim back to consciousness and all three return home; and in which Aubrey confronts the Terrible Yoot. Revisit the description of the Desert of Misfortune on pp.147–148, and of the Terrible Yoot on p.150, and ask the children to imagine the scene and the Yoot in their mind's eye as you are reading aloud. Ask the children to share what they imagined and to identify key vocabulary or phrases which support their understanding or interpretation. Ask the children why these words or phrases in particular stood out to them: *What made these images so vivid or memorable? What mood or sense of place is created through the descriptions? How do these descriptions make you feel? What do you think you*



would be thinking if you were Aubrey? Does the desert or the Yoot symbolise anything to you? How does it make you feel to imagine visiting it and seeing it? Support the children in thinking aloud and clarifying their understanding of the Yoot, who is paradoxical — ‘Stop wriggling about — be something.’ ‘You can’t beat me and I can’t go away.’ ‘You like him? Why do you make him miserable?’ — and whose conversation with Aubrey bears close reading. Allow the children time to respond to the text in small groups, noting their ideas and comments. Reflect on the events and discussion in this chapter. *What do you think will happen next? Where do you think Aubrey will find guidance, the ‘new perspectives’ he needs? What do you think is the origin of the Yoot’s name, and the secret of its true nature?*

### Session 5: Chapters 13–15, Pages 163–206

#### Focus: Summarising, noting the text structure and empathising.

Read aloud Chapter 13, ‘When the Time is Right’ (pp.163–174), sharing the illustrations as appropriate: the scene contrasts with the night before, with Jim and Suzanne happy at breakfast and Suzanne taking the day off and Aubrey planning to take Jim to meet a visitor from the far north after meeting again with Lepus the hare who guided them to Jim the night before. Stop at relevant points, clarifying their understanding and allow for discussion around what the group likes, dislikes, any patterns that they notice or any questions that arise. *Who do you think the visitor might be? Why does Lepus suggest that Aubrey needs to bring Jim along to the meeting? Do you know of any other stories where important events and changes take place at midnight? What do you think is the significance of Aubrey waking at that hour? What does it suggest to you about what might be about to happen? How do you think Suzanne might react when she sees Aubrey’s note?*

Read on through Chapter 14, ‘The Visitor from the Furthest North’ (pp.175–188). Share also the illustrations and discuss their contribution to the story. *What features of Horatio Clare’s evocation of the High Peak stand out for you? What is the impact of the page layout describing their route to the place where they meet the snowy owl Bubo? How do the illustrations support your engagement with the story? How does the discussion with Bubo clarify your understanding of what Jim has been experiencing; the Universal Terror of Existence? How do you think Jim might feel to be discussing this? How do you think Aubrey might feel?*

Read on to the end of the novel Chapter 15, ‘The Miracle’ (pp.189–206), in which Aubrey and Jim share a huge view, looking across the whole world, and learn to ‘look past the fear to the wonder’, then return on Christmas morning to meet a French TV producer and his family. Discuss children’s responses to the ending of the book. *Did you expect the miracle to take the form that it does? Were you surprised by the experience Aubrey and Jim share? How do you think the experience affects them? Why? Is this how you think you would have reacted? Discuss the significance of returning home on Christmas morning: What do you think is the significance of the timing of the miracle, so that Jim and Aubrey return on Christmas morning? Do you know of any other stories where characters experience a change of heart or powerful life-changing experience at Christmas? Why do you think this is a significant time to stage such epiphanies?*

Engage the children in book talk regarding what they have heard, considering: *Was there anything you liked about the end of the book? Was there anything that you particularly disliked? Was there anything that puzzled you? Were there any further patterns, any connections that you noticed?*



Ask the children to consider the events that have unfolded, how Aubrey has reacted to them and to infer what this tells us about his character as well as their opinions of the other characters. *Which character interested you the most? Are there any 'minor' characters that the class would have liked to have spent more time with? How might the story have been different if told through the eyes of another character, e.g., Jim, Suzanne, Mr Ferraby, Esmeralda, the Terrible Yoot, or one of the creatures? Did any of the characters remind you of people you know or of characters in other books?* This would also be a good opportunity to discuss the author's use of Mr Ferraby, through whom we see much of the action: *What is the effect on you as a reader of seeing the action through the eyes of Mr Ferraby, as well as through Aubrey's eyes? What do you think this dual perspective adds to the story? Why do you think the author gives this angle to certain parts of the story?*

Discuss how the children felt about the book compared to their original expectations: *When you first saw this book, even before you read it, what kind of book did you think it was going to be? What made you think this? Now you've read it, is it as you expected? Have you read other books like it? How is this one the same? How is it different?*

Consider the structure and style of the novel. The author's use of footnotes and sophisticated vocabulary — e.g., rambunctious, anthropomorphic — gives his writing a distinctive voice: *What do you think the author is aiming to do by using footnotes to reflect on the story, and the language he is using?* The author also directs the reader at certain points, either implicitly from one chapter to the next (*Why do you think the author uses cliff-hangers or clues at the end of each chapter as to what might be coming next? What effect does this laying of a breadcrumb trail have on you as a reader?*) or explicitly (e.g., on p.55 the author explicitly talks about the story as a story: *What is the effect on you as a reader of the author highlighting Aubrey's crisis of conscience?*)

Finally, children may also want to discuss the nature of the story, and how it is like or unlike other stories they have enjoyed: *When you were reading the story, did you feel it was believable although it had elements of fantasy? Was there anything in the writing that made you feel like that?* Horatio Clare talks about communicating with animals — as mentioned in the author biography in p.1 — and the power of nature to heal, and making the decision to blend elements of reality and fantasy. *What impact does this choice have on the reader? Why do you think the author made these choices?*

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?*

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