Michael Morpurgo’s *Kensuke’s Kingdom*: A look at the book through drama

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**KS2**

**Introduction**

*Kensuke’s Kingdom* is at once an adventure story, a story of resilience and survival, a story about friendship and, ultimately, about loss. It contains much to challenge and inspire the minds of KS2 students, and this scheme of work offers an exploration of the key themes, events and characters in the book, utilising a range of drama-based exercises and group discussion.

The scheme is written in chronological order, so it can accompany a classroom reading of the book. However, it could also work well with groups who have already finished the story, or who are further along with the book than each lesson suggests.

It broadly covers all aspects of the drama objectives within the KS2 National Curriculum, and the scheme will help students to develop their spoken language and listening skills.

**Learning objectives**

By the end of this scheme the students will:

- Have used a range of dramatic techniques to explore the themes and characters within Michael Morpurgo’s *Kensuke’s Kingdom*
- Have experience of improvising and devising drama
- Have experience of working in small groups to produce tableaux and short scenes
- Have experience of creating and sustaining characters through use of body language, facial expression and voice
- Have experience of responding to others in role
- Have developed their speaking and listening skills through a range of exercises both in small groups and as a whole class
- Have experience of feeding back to each other and of participating in group discussion.

**Lesson 1: Life before the Island**

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- Have experience of improvising in pairs
- Have experience of sharing their work and speaking in front of the class
- Have explored the use of body language and facial expression to portray different characters
- Have experience of working together in small groups
- Have experience of responding thoughtfully to the work of others.

It is important that students are familiar with *Kensuke’s Kingdom* to the end of Chapter 3 for this lesson.

**Warm-up: ‘I’m going on a boat, and I am packing …’ (10 mins)**

A fun movement and memory game to start the lesson.

Ask students to stand in a circle, and to imagine that they are setting off on a boat journey like Michael. What might they need to take with them? What would they need, and what luxuries might they take?

One student starts and says, ‘I’m going on a boat and I am packing …’ followed by the item he or she is going to take. At the same time, they mime using the item. Everyone else in the circle copies the mime.

The next student around the circle repeats the sentence, repeating the item and the mime of the previous student, and then adding in one of their own. The rest of the students all perform the mimes at the same time.

Continue around the circle. The game becomes fun as the list gets longer and...
someone can’t remember what was on it. They will be quickly reminded by their classmates miming around them!

**Improvised dialogues: The phone call (10 mins)**

‘I was there when the phone call came a week or so later. I knew it was my father. My mother said very little, so I couldn’t understand what was going on, not until she sat me down afterwards and told me.

“He sounds different, Michael. I mean, like his old self, like his very old self, like he used to be when I first knew him…””

Ask students to get into pairs, and remind them about the phone call Michael’s father makes to his mother to tell her to get packed and come to Fareham.

Ask each pair to improvise that phone call now. What does Michael’s father say to try to persuade/convince his mum? What is it about his tone that gives her confidence?

**‘Spotlight’ the dialogues (5 mins)**

This is a great technique to use when you have limited time and want to see a cross-section of the work.

Ask students to continue to improvise their dialogues, but when you stand next to a specific pair, everyone else should be silent and only that pair continue to speak. As soon as you move away, everyone continues from where they left off, until you stand by another pair, and so on.

**Improvised tableaux: This is my family (15 mins)**

Divide the class into groups of four. Ask them to cast themselves as Mum, Dad, Michael and Stella.

Call out a number of scenarios that the family might find themselves in before or during their boat trip. Examples might be ‘This is my family at sea on a rough day’, or ‘This is my family sailing while my Mum is sick’.

After you call each one out, the groups have ten seconds to arrange themselves into a tableau showing the scenario. Highlight any really good ones before calling out another for students to explore.

**Rehearsed tableaux: The Incident (10 mins)**

Read students the section from Chapter 3 that begins ‘I tried calling Stella first’, and runs through to the end of the chapter.

In their groups, ask students to create a series of up to five tableaux to tell the story of this incident.

Students can vary who plays the characters in each tableau, and also use their bodies to create the scenery/objects.

**Sharing the work: Showing the tableaux (15 mins)**

Invite each group to show their tableaux in front of the rest of the class. After each group has performed, invite constructive criticism from those watching. How well did the group convey the storyline? How well did they use body language and facial expression to show what was happening in each tableau?

**Plenary (5 mins)**

Bring the lesson to a close by asking students to reflect on this section of the book. Have any of them been on an adventure that was in any way similar to the trip on which Michael and his family have embarked? How would they feel if their parents suggested the same thing to them? Does it sound fun, or scary?
Lesson 2: Arrival on the island, and meeting Kensuke

Learning objectives
By the end of the lesson the students will:
▶ Have developed their imaginative skills in the warm-up exercise
▶ Have experience of working collaboratively as a class to create the soundscape
▶ Have experience of sharing and developing ideas outside the boundaries of the text
▶ Have experience of devising and performing scenes, and responding to the work of others.
▶ Have participated in group discussion.

It is important that students are familiar with Kensuke’s Kingdom to the end of Chapter 6 for this lesson.

Warm-up: Waking up on the beach (10 mins)
This is an exercise that invites students imaginatively to explore this situation individually.
Ask students to find a space and lie down on their own. They should close their eyes, and take a few moments to focus. Tell them that when they open their eyes they are going to imagine being completely alone. They are on a beach, on an unknown island. For this exercise, they do not even have a dog with them. They are going to try to imagine a world in which everything around them – sights and sounds – is new and unfamiliar.

When they open their eyes, guide them through the things they are seeing and hearing. You can take inspiration from the section in Chapter 4 in which Michael describes waking up on the island; however you can also stray from that if you wish. The point of the exercise is for students to engage with the idea of being stranded and alone, and how that might feel.

Group discussion (5 mins)
Discuss as a class what students experienced during the exercise. Could they feel what it might be like to be in Michael’s situation? How much difference would it have made to Michael that he had Stella with him?

Soundscape: The Island at night (10 mins)
‘The howling had started up again far away in the forest, a last mellifluous evensong, a chanting that went on and on until darkness covered the island. Insects (that is what I presumed they were anyway) whirred and whined from the forest. There was a hollow tapping, like a frantic woodpecker. There was scraping, scratching, and a grunting grating noise that sounded like frogs. The whole orchestra of the jungle was tuning up.

‘The jungle droned and cackled and croaked, and all night long the mosquitoes were at me too. They whined in my ears and drove me mad.’

The sounds of the island at night clearly disturb Michael. Can students work as a group to recreate the sounds they imagine he might hear with their own voices?

Briefly discuss the sounds described in the extract above. What other sounds might Michael also hear?

Choose a student to commence the soundscape creation. He or she should start making a sound, using the voice, which can be sustained or repeated. Invite another student to join in with a sound that complements the first, and continue inviting students to join until everyone is part of the soundscape.

Once the soundscape is complete, some fun can be had ‘conducting’ the sounds, making the whole thing become louder or quieter, or bringing up particular sections of the ‘soundscape orchestra’ while fading others away.

Imaginative work and group discussion: Who might Kensuke Be? (10 mins)
Read aloud the following extract from Chapter 5:

‘I sat there trying to gather my thoughts. So far as I could tell – though I couldn’t be sure of it – there were only two of us on this island, the old man and me. In which case, it stood to reason that only he could have left me the fish and the bananas and the water. Surely that had been an act of kindness, a sign of friendship, of welcome? And yet, now, this same man had banished me to one end of the island as if I were a leper, and had made it quite clear that he never wanted us to meet again. And all because I had lit a fire? None of it made any sense at all, unless he was out of his head and completely mad.’
Invite the class to discuss their ideas for who Kensuke might be. Even if they have read further in the book, and understand the outcome and story that unfolds, ask them to consider other possible outcomes. Could Kensuke have turned out to be a dangerous person? Could he have turned out to be desperately in need of Michael's help? What thoughts and ideas would run through students' heads if they were in Michael's situation?

**Scene creation (15 mins)**
Divide the class into small groups. Groups of four or five should work well.

In their groups, ask students to discuss their ideas as to what sort of character Kensuke could have turned out to be, continuing from the discussion above. Which ideas do they find the most exciting or unusual?

Ask them to settle on an idea, and to create a short scene that shows this different version of Kensuke. It can be a scene in which he interacts with Michael, or indeed it can be a scene in which we see him alone or with other (imagined) characters. Students can decide the roles that they wish to have within the scene, which can include acting to portray characters, setting the scene using their bodies, narrating, or even adding sounds with their voices.

**Showing the scenes (15 mins)**
Invite the groups to perform their scenes in front of the rest of the class. Allow a short time for feedback after the performance of each scene. What do other students think of the idea? Could Kensuke have turned out like that?

**Plenary (5 mins)**
Draw the lesson to a close by reflecting on Michael's experience on the island so far. What must it be like to be alone in an unknown place with someone you don't know, and whom you do not understand?

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**Lesson 3: Getting to know Kensuke**

**Learning objectives**
By the end of this lesson the students will:
- Have explored and discussed non-verbal communication
- Have participated in group discussion
- Have worked as a whole class to devise and develop tableaux
- Have explored the text and the character of Kensuke through the Role on the Wall exercise.

It is important that students are familiar with Kensuke’s Kingdom to the end of Chapter 9 for this lesson.

**Warm-up game: What am I miming? (10 mins)**
This is a fun, themed game to start the lesson.

Invite students to form a circle. One by one, each student should have a go at miming an action or activity. Everyone else has to try to guess what they are doing.

You can make this game more challenging by adding specific intentions. So, for example, instead of simply miming 'digging', the challenge could be to mime, 'I want you to dig with me'.

**Classroom discussion (10 mins)**
Using the warm-up game as a springboard for conversation, discuss ways of communicating with someone who does not speak the same language as you. Can students remember how Michael and Kensuke do this in the book? Have any of them had experience of trying to get to know someone in this way?

**Listening: The Story of Kensuke (10 mins)**
Read the class an extract from Chapter 8. Read from the fourth paragraph, which starts “Now I tell you everything, Micasan” through to the end of Kensuke's story (“Under the sand now, part of island now”).

After students have listened to the extract, take a couple of minutes for them to reflect on and discuss what they have just heard.

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Two pitfalls of scene creation with this age group are 1) groups being unable to settle on an idea, or using all the time allowed for both that and rehearsal to do so; and 2) groups creating scenes that last a very long time.

To encourage groups to select an idea, remind them a couple of minutes into their creation time that they should now have decided on an idea. A minute or so later, remind them again. This should make sure they stay on track. You can even suggest that if they are really struggling they simply agree to go with whichever idea they are discussing at that precise moment. The key is to have an idea and explore it, rather than to discuss and discuss in the hope that the very best idea of the day will emerge. With this kind of timeframe I usually suggest that groups try to create a scene that lasts only one minute. Invariably, the scenes will last longer, but the attempt to create such a short piece usually avoids them stretching to being too long, and keeps them to a few minutes only.

**Resources needed**
- A large roll of paper, and suitable marker pens for writing on this paper.
Tableaux exercise: Kensuke’s story (15 mins)
Challenge students to build the tableaux to tell Kensuke’s story, as a whole class.

This does not mean that every student needs to be in every tableau. In fact, sometimes sitting out and noticing when the tableau seems ‘complete’ is as valuable as joining in. However do encourage everyone to get up and have a go over the course of the exercise.

With students forming an audience, ask them to choose a starting tableau for telling Kensuke’s story. Decide on one quickly, and invite students one by one to come up into the acting space and form part of the tableau. Students can keep coming up and adding to the picture until the class feel the image is complete. After that, clear the image and start again with the next tableau from the story.

Role on the Wall: Kensuke (20 mins)
Divide the class into groups of four or five.

Using the large roll of paper, instruct one student from each group to lie on it, and ask another to carefully draw around them. The outline can be quite loose. Each group should now have a life-sized outline of a person on their piece of paper. This outline represents Kensuke.

Ask the groups to discuss what they know about Kensuke (it doesn’t matter if they have read further in the book and know additional information). Within the outline, they should write the facts that they know about him.

However, outside the outline they should write Kensuke’s thoughts and feelings, as they interpret them. These can be based on knowledge from the book, and how they imaginatively see him as well.

Allow groups to feed back to each other at the end of this exercise, so that they can share ideas, and perhaps add to their work if other groups inspire them.

If you are able to, display the work on the classroom walls, to inspire further thought and insight into *Kensuke’s Kingdom*.

Plenary (5 mins)
Bring this lesson to a close with a short discussion about Kensuke. What makes him interesting as a character? Do students like him? Has their impression of him changed since his first appearance in the book?

Lesson 4: Goodbye to the Island, goodbye to Kensuke

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- Have experience of considering, developing and sustaining character through the hot seating exercise
- Have participated in group discussion
- Have participated in a devising and performance exercise, working in small groups to perform in front of the rest of the class
- Have reflected on the themes within the book.

*It is important that students are familiar with Kensuke’s Kingdom to the end of the book for this lesson.*

Warm-up: Grandmother’s Footsteps (10 mins)
Remind students about the section in Chapter 10 in which Kensuke, Michael, the orangutans and Stella all have to hide at the back of the cave from the ‘killer men’, being very still and silent.

To warm up their bodies and minds for drama, play a game of Grandmother’s Footsteps, in which participants also need to be very still and quiet.

Ask one student to stand at the far end of the space, as ‘Grandmother’. They turn their back on everyone else and this means the game can begin.

The other students then begin to creep forward, the aim being to get as near to grandmother as they can. Whenever he/she likes, Grandmother can turn around, and if anyone is spotted moving or making a sound before he/she turns back again, they are sent away to start again.

The winner is the person who gets close enough to Grandmother to tap him or her on the back.

This is a fun game, but one that also encourages students to focus.
Hot seating preparation: What happened to Michael? (10 mins)
While Michael is living on the island with Kensuke, his parents, grandmother and friend Eddie must have had many ideas, and indeed fears, as to what might have happened to him.

Divide the class into four groups, and allocate each group one of these characters to discuss. What do they imagine their allocated character might think has happened to Michael? How do they feel about it?

Hot seating (20 mins)
Bring the class back together, and explain that some of them will now be given the opportunity to portray the character they have been discussing, answering questions posed by the rest of the class as they take the 'hot seat' in role.

Line up four ‘hot seats’, and choose one student from each group to take a seat. The rest of the class are now able to ask them questions, in order to try to understand how they feel about Michael going missing, what they think might have happened to him, and what they are doing about it.

After each character has answered a couple of questions, swap students in to have a go at taking on the role.

Listening (5 mins)
Read aloud the section from Chapter 10 that begins 'I could see there was no point in pleading' and ends ‘“I promise,” I said.’

Group discussion: Friendship (10 mins)
Discuss as a group the significance of this paragraph. Michael and Kensuke have come a long way from their initial meeting, and have learned so much about each other. Kensuke trusts Michael enough to ask Michael to tell no one about him.

What does this say about their friendship at this point in the book?

Devising scenes (15 mins)
Divide the class into groups. Groups of four or five should work well.

Ask the groups to devise the scene in which Michael meets Michiya (Kensuke's son) in Japan.

There is an option here for everyone to take a role in the scene, as you will of course need a Michael and a Michiya, but there could also be other family members present on either side. Alternatively, the scene could just be between Michael and Michiya, and additional group members could help to direct the scene. The aim is to bring out the emotion of the scene. How does Michael feel meeting this person who is so closely linked to Kensuke but who never knew him, and how does Michiya feel meeting the only person who has a direct link to his father's life on the island?

Presenting the scenes (20 mins)
Allow each group to present their scene to the rest of the class.

Allow the audience to feed back after each presentation. How well did the group portray the emotion of the scene?

Plenary (10 mins)
Bring this lesson, and indeed this scheme of work, to a close by reflecting on the book as a whole. What do students think Kensuke's Kingdom is about, at its heart? Is it an adventure story, a shipwreck story, or a story about friendship? Which parts of the book appealed to students most?

Extension exercises
A few additional ideas for exploration include:

- Challenge students to devise the scene in which Michael's dad presents the boat to him and Mum.
- Classroom debate: Did Kensuke make a good choice when he decided to stay on the island? Should he have gone back to Japan?
- Writing in role: Write a letter, as Michael, replying to Michiya's letter.