

# The Borrowers: A look at the book through drama

Helen Day

KS2

# KS2

## Introduction

*The Borrowers* by Mary Norton is a classic book that has delighted children for generations. The idea of little people who live under the floorboards is as exciting and enticing today as it was when the book was published. Although 'of its time' in some ways, its themes - freedom, learning about the world, prejudice - are still relevant and inspiring to look at in the classroom today.

This scheme has been written with upper KS2 in mind, and should be undertaken after a classroom reading of the book has been completed. Each lesson starts with a warm-up, and then moves through a series of exercises and activities that use drama as a tool to explore the narrative, characters and themes of the book. The scheme broadly covers the KS2 National Curriculum drama objectives, and will also be useful for covering the speaking, listening and group discussion and interaction objectives within KS2 English.

### Learning objectives

By the end of this scheme the students will:

- ▶ Have used a range of dramatic techniques to explore the characters, themes and storyline of *The Borrowers*
- ▶ Have experience of working in pairs and small groups to investigate the characters and ideas within the text
- ▶ Have experience of working in small groups to produce tableaux and short scenes
- ▶ Have experience of improvising, devising and of scripting drama
- ▶ Have experience thinking, moving and speaking in character
- ▶ Have experience of feeding back to each other and of participating in group discussions.

## Lesson 1: The characters in *The Borrowers*

### Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have explored working in character through the 'Be a Borrower' exercise, using both movement and mime
- ▶ Have considered the Borrowers as a family unit and worked collaboratively in small groups to create freeze frames
- ▶ Have participated in classroom discussion, as well as discussion in smaller groups
- ▶ Have broadly considered all the characters in the book, and have focussed on at least one for further consideration
- ▶ Have experience of using the hot seating technique to explore the inner thoughts of a character.

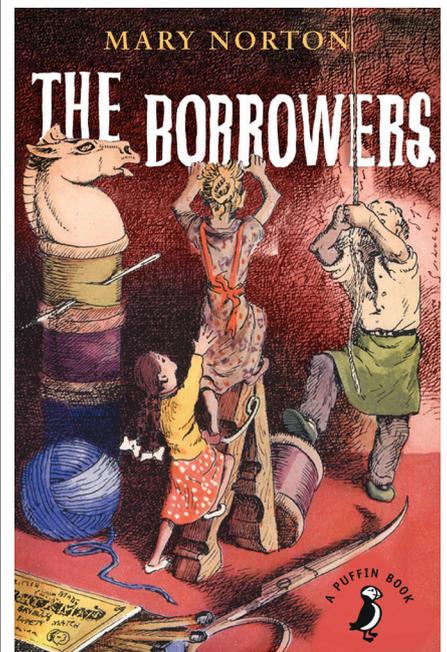
### Warm-up: Be a Borrower (10 mins)

This is an imaginative movement exercise to get the class up on their feet and ready to look at *The Borrowers* through drama.

Ask students to find a space in the room, and to work alone. Ask them to close their eyes for a short time, and to imagine that they are a Borrower, about to embark on a secret night-time mission to borrow something for their home. Ask them to decide upon the item they are looking to get, and where it is located.

Next, ask everyone to open their eyes and to begin acting as though they are sneaking into the main house to go borrowing. Talk them through things they might see and do. Do they have to creep down a long passage to get to the house? Do they stop and hide if they think they hear someone coming? How do they move differently when they have to move over different surfaces, e.g. through deep carpet? Do they have to climb up to get to the object they have chosen?

**Helen Day** is a performer and teacher of performance, and has delivered workshops for numerous theatre companies and arts education organisations. She is co-founder of H2oh! Education, who run a range of curriculum-linked performing arts workshops in primary and secondary schools across the South East of England, and she ran weekly workshops for the Beacon Arts Youth Theatre in Brighton for over twelve years. She is currently touring the United States with Cirque du Soleil.



### Resources

- ▶ A large roll of paper, and suitable pens for writing on this paper.

Finally, ask everyone to arrive at their object, and to consider how they are going to lift/move it. Ask everyone to mime getting hold of the object and carrying it home.

### Quick-fire frozen images: This is the Family (10 mins)

You are now going to look specifically at the Borrowers we meet in the book. Take a moment to reflect on Pod, Homily and Arrietty, and to remember their roles and relationships within the family unit.

Next, divide the class into groups of three. Within each group, students should decide on who will take on each role during this exercise.

You are now going to call out activities and situations for the family to be doing. After you have called, the groups have ten seconds to arrange themselves into a suitable tableau showing the family in the scene. These can be imagined or based more directly on things that happen in the book, e.g. 'This is the family eating dinner'; 'This is the family when Arrietty first goes borrowing with Pod'; etc. When groups are frozen, point out those that have shown the relationships and activity particularly well before moving on and trying another scenario.

### Classroom discussion: The 'other' characters in *The Borrowers* (10 mins)

Now that everyone is warmed up and imaginatively placed in the world of *The Borrowers*, ask students to reflect on the other important characters in the book. Which other characters play a part in the story and how big an influence do they have on the narrative?

Write the list of characters on the IWB.

### Role on the Wall (20 mins)

Divide the class into groups of four or five, and give each group a long strip of paper from the roll, and some pens.

Ask each group to choose a character to consider further. This should be a character from the list in the Resources, or Pod, Homily or Arrietty. Try to ensure that between the class as many characters as possible are covered.

To set up the Role on the Wall exercise, one student from each group should lie on the piece of paper, and another should draw an outline around their body. This outline represents the character they are considering. Ask them to write the name of the character above the body outline.

Around the outside of the body outline, students should write any facts that they know about the character. An example for Arrietty might be 'Daughter of Pod and Homily'.

They should then write any thoughts, feelings, or other information about the character within the outline, in the first person. An example for Arrietty might be 'I want to know more about the world'.

Allow time at the end of the exercise for each group to present their character to the rest of the class. If the rest of the students have additional suggestions for each character these can be added at this stage.

### Hot seating (20 mins)

Use the Role on the Wall exercise to springboard into hot seating.

Ask each group to nominate someone from their team to take to the 'hot seat' and answer questions *in role* as the character they have been considering.

Allocate a chair to be the 'hot seat' and ask the first student to come and sit in it. Ask them to introduce themselves in character.

The rest of the class now have the opportunity to ask questions of that character, in order to dig a little deeper into who they are and what makes them tick.

Once each group has had a go at presenting a character, ask the class to reflect on the exercise. Was there anything anyone said that surprised them? Do they think anyone in the exercise really brought a character to life well?

### Plenary (5 mins)

Round up the lesson by reflecting as a group on the work that has just been done. Who are the most important characters in *The Borrowers*, and indeed about whom do we know the most – and the least?

Encourage students to use their body language and facial expressions as much as they can during this exercise. How can they show how the family feels about each other and whatever they are doing in the scenario without using words?

A list of characters is provided in the resources that accompany this scheme of work.

If you can, display the role on the wall work around the classroom. These character investigations will provide inspiration for work throughout the rest of this scheme.

Try to encourage students not to focus on asking the hot seat character about facts. This is an opportunity to explore the inner thoughts of the character imaginatively.

## Lesson 2: Arrietty's World

### Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have experience of listening to and responding to extracts of text
- ▶ Have explored the use of persuasive language and tone through the 'Decision Alley' exercise
- ▶ Have explored the character of Arrietty through imagination and movement
- ▶ Have participated in group discussion
- ▶ Have worked together in small groups to create a piece of drama work for sharing
- ▶ Have experience of performing in front of their peers.

### Warm-up: Borrow the Keys (10 mins)

A fun concentration game to get everyone back in the world of borrowing and Borrowers!

Students should sit in a circle. Place a chair in the middle of the circle with a set of keys beneath it.

Ask one student to sit on the chair, and blindfold them. Next, select one student from the surrounding circle to attempt to make their way quietly to the centre of the circle and to try to 'borrow' the keys without the student on the chair hearing. The student on the chair must listen carefully, and if they think they hear the 'borrower' coming, they must point in the direction that they think the sound comes from. If they are correct, the borrower goes back to his place and another student has a try. If the 'borrower' is successful in getting the keys back to their place in the circle, they then take the place of the student in the chair wearing the blindfold.

### Classroom reading and discussion (10 mins)

Read aloud the section from Chapter 6 that begins 'Homily turned away', and ends 'For blue sky and grass and suchlike'.

Invite students to comment on why Homily wants Arrietty to go borrowing, and why Pod has reservations.

### Decision Alley: Should we let her go? (10 mins)

This exercise allows students to explore the different sides of an argument.

Divide the class into two groups, and ask each group to stand in a line facing each other. Take one student out to be the decision maker, and tell one line that they will be arguing *for* Arrietty to go borrowing, and the other that they will be arguing *against*.

The decision maker will now walk slowly between the two lines, and as she does so, the students in each line whisper their arguments for and against as she passes. She can take her time, in order to clearly hear all the arguments (although the students in each line should stick to just a few sentences each).

When the decision-maker finishes her walk, she should comment on the arguments she heard. Based on these, would she be inclined to let Arrietty go borrowing or not?

### Classroom discussion (5 mins)

Based on what the class have just heard and considered, do students now feel that Arrietty should be allowed to go borrowing? Invite some comments and discussion and then take a vote, for interest.

### Responding to the text (10 mins)

Ask students to each find their own space in the room.

Explain that you are going to read aloud the section of the book in which Arrietty first goes into the garden. Students will try to imagine that they themselves are Arrietty, or indeed a boy borrower having the same experience. They should respond to the words they hear in movement, miming what Arrietty does and trying to imagine how it might feel to be her in this big, new world she is discovering.

Read aloud the section from Chapter 8 that begins 'A greenish beetle, shining in sunlight', and ends 'Something had glittered. Arrietty stared.'

### Group discussion (5 mins)

Invite comments from students as to how it felt to undertake this exercise. Were they able to imagine seeing all of these things for the very first time? How did it feel to be so small in the garden, next to the beetle and blades of grass, etc? Have any of the students experienced seeing an entirely new environment for the first time like this?

### Resources needed:

- ▶ A set of keys and a blindfold.

To add a level of complexity to this exercise, allow the two opposing sides to have a group discussion before they start, so they can plan out how to best deliver their point of view. Also remind students that they do not really have to agree with what they are saying; this exercise is about using persuasive language, making sure as many points are covered as possible, and it is about using a tone of voice that will appeal to the decision maker.

If it feels more manageable, split the class into groups for this exercise. Allow one group at a time to respond to a shorter section of this text, whilst the others watch.

**Scene creation (15 mins)**

Ask students to get into groups – four or five students per group should work well.

Ask each group to create a short scene that gives an alternative narrative for what happens to Arrietty in the garden. Rather than meeting the Boy, might she meet someone else? What might happen if she met an animal? What other things could have happened to her in the garden?

Each group should work together to decide on one alternative event, and to create a short scene that they can show to the rest of the class.

**Showing the scenes (10 mins)**

To watch the scenes students have prepared, use the ‘spotlight’ technique. This allows you to see a little of each group’s work in a short space of time, and is also useful for giving confidence to shy students as it takes the pressure off the individual ‘shows’.

Each group should find a space, and when you clap your hands they should all start performing their scenes. When you call out ‘freeze’ everyone stops in place. You then move from group to group; when you are standing next to a group they continue with their performance from where they last left off, and when you move away they freeze once again.

It can be fun to stop and start some of the groups several times, turning this game into both a performance and concentration exercise.

Remind students that they do not all have to have a part in the scene. Some students might choose to be narrators, or indeed to use their bodies to create ‘set’ such as blades of grass, leaves, etc. The aim is to tell the story as effectively as possible, in a concise and creative way.

**Lesson 3: The World of the Boy****Learning objectives**

By the end of this lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have used facial expression and body language in the portrayal of character through the ‘Expressive Statues’ exercise
- ▶ Have worked in pairs to use the text as a starting point for imagined duologues
- ▶ Have experience of scripting text
- ▶ Have developed vocabulary skills through the consideration of a range of feelings and emotions
- ▶ Have experience of building on the ideas of others in the ‘Essence Machine’ exercise.

**Warm-up: Expressive Statues (10 mins)**

This is a fun game to focus students on the Boy as a character, and to get everyone moving and thinking in the world of *The Borrowers*.

Start by referring to the Role on the Wall paper you have for the Boy from Lesson 1. Remind students what we know (or think we know) about him. Ask students to close their eyes for a moment and to imagine what he looks like.

Next, ask students to open their eyes and to begin moving around the room as if they are the Boy walking calmly.

You will now call out a series of sentences beginning ‘This is the Boy ...’, and then saying what he is doing. These could be events taken directly from the book, such as seeing Arrietty for the first time, borrowing from the doll’s house, etc., or they could be made up actions or events. After each sentence students must freeze into an ‘expressive statue’ of the Boy doing whatever you have just said. When you clap your hands they unfreeze and walk calmly as the Boy again, before you call out the next sentence and they form expressive statues again.

Remind students that their expressive statues should use every part of their body, paying particular attention to the face.

**Improvised duologues (10 mins)**

*“The Boy sat thoughtfully on his haunches, chewing a blade of grass. “Borrowing,” he said after a while. “Is that what you call it?”*

*“What else would you call it?” asked Arrietty.*

*“I’d call it stealing.”*

By the end of the book, the Boy has essentially become a ‘borrower’ himself, as he collects items and brings them to Pod, Homily and Arrietty. However when he first meets Arrietty, he sees her and her family’s activities through human eyes.

Ask students to get into pairs, and to improvise a duologue between the Boy and a friend. The Boy is telling his friend about meeting Arrietty and about the Borrowers. How does he explain Borrowers to a fellow human, and what questions does that fellow human ask? Does she/he believe him?

Of course, in the book we do not hear of the Boy having any friends and he seems very isolated at the house. You are asking students to step out of the exact world of the book and to make an additional imaginative leap here.

**Scripting the duologues (15 mins)**

Students should continue working in the same pairs, and should now try to commit some of their words to script.

A script template is included in the Resources provided with this scheme of work, and may be of use.

**Performing the duologues (10 mins)**

Select a few of the pairs to perform sections of their duologues in front of the rest of the class.

Invite comments from the audience – do they feel the Boy would present the Borrowers to his friend in this way? How many different ways are there in which he might choose to tell someone about them?

**Listening and classroom discussion (15 mins)**

Read aloud the section from Chapter 18, which begins at the start of the chapter, and which ends “Pod,” he whispered. “Homily!”

Ask students to consider the range of feelings and emotions that the Boy goes through during this passage. What mental journey does the Boy go on as he goes from being in bed trembling to finally calling for the Borrowers at the hole in the floor? How many words can be found to describe how he feels?

You may like to read the extract again, slowly, inviting students to chip in each time they think the Boy’s emotions change or develop.

**Essence Machine: The Boy in the dead of night (15 mins)**

This exercise is a fun way to round up this lesson and to further explore the above extract from the text.

Explain to students that they are going to form a ‘machine’, using their bodies and voices, that somehow brings to life the Boy’s experience at this point in the story.

One student starts, and must offer a repeated sound and action that they think fits with the text/the Boy’s experience. For example, a strong suggestion would be to mime repeated quiet footsteps and to say ‘creeping’ over and over. Subsequent participants should try to find actions and sounds/words that complement this rhythmically, and which add to the whole picture.

The aim in ‘Essence Machine’ is not to form a tableau, but a living, breathing ‘machine’. Encourage students to choose movements that fit with each other in the same way as the moving parts of a machine.

If the game gets too frantic simply stop the machine, and choose a new person to start a new machine with a new sound and action, again building from there.

## Lesson 4: Overcoming prejudice

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have experience of working physically, quickly and collaboratively, in the ‘Ten-second Object’ game
- ▶ Have explored the notion of prejudice through classroom discussion
- ▶ Have further explored the notion of prejudice through drama scene creation in small groups
- ▶ Have experience of performing in front of their peers
- ▶ Have experience of thinking and speaking in character.

**Warm-up: Ten-second Objects (10 mins)**

Divide the class into groups. Six or seven students per group is ideal for this exercise.

You are going to call out an item that might be borrowed by the Borrowers – either an item from the book or imagined, and groups then have ten seconds to work together to form themselves into a giant sculpture of that object. At the end of ten seconds, groups must freeze. Pick out a group that has done really well for everyone to look at before moving on to call out another object.

**Classroom discussion: Prejudice (10 mins)**

Remind students about the Boy, and what we learned about him and his journey during the last session.

In learning to trust the Borrowers and working with them, in many ways the Boy overcomes prejudice.

Discuss this as a class. What is prejudice? Have any of the students encountered prejudice themselves? Can they see the threads of prejudice in *The Borrowers* as a metaphor for anything they are familiar with in the modern world?

**Scene creation (15 mins)**

Divide students into groups of four or five.

Using the classroom discussion you have just had as a springboard, ask students to work together to create a short scene around the idea of overcoming prejudice. This scene does not need to be based around *The Borrowers*; it can be set anywhere and at any time that students choose.

### Watching the scenes (20 mins)

Time has been allowed in this lesson to (hopefully) see all of the scenes that have been created. Invite each group to perform their scene, and allow constructive feedback from the audience afterwards. How well did the scene depict prejudice? Do the audience feel the scene was realistic?

### Expressive Statues with thought tapping (10 mins)

Remind students of the 'Expressive Statues' exercise that they did during Lesson 3.

Explain that you are now going to repeat the exercise, but considering a whole range of characters and how they feel and their situation at the end of the book. You might like to refer back to the character list from Lesson 1 if this is helpful.

This time around, only call out the character of which you wish students to become a statue. They should therefore move around the space using a neutral walk, and should freeze when you call out a character's name. The freeze should represent their vision of that character at the end of the book.

While students are still frozen, tap one or two of them on the head. If tapped, the student should speak a few sentences, in the first person as that character, expressing what she or he is thinking and feeling at that moment. Repeat with as many of the book's characters as possible in the time you have.

### Plenary (10 mins)

Bring this lesson, and indeed this scheme of work, to a close, by reviewing the expressive statues exercise and considering which characters have changed their opinions or overcome their prejudices over the course of the book. Which characters change their point of view as the story unfolds? Which characters experience the least change, and why?

### Extension exercises:

A few additional ideas for exploration include:

- ▶ Ask students to write a diary entry for the Boy, the day after he has seen Pod for the very first time.
- ▶ Challenge students to draw a portrait of Mrs Driver. What does she look like, and why? What expression might be on her face if she were to pose for a portrait?
- ▶ Consider the modern home; where might Borrowers live nowadays? Ask students to write a short story about a family of Borrowers who live in their house. Where do they hide and what do they borrow?
- ▶ Create a home for Borrowers! Ask students to bring in small items from home that they think a family of Borrowers might use, and see whether your class can build its own world for Borrowers to live in.
- ▶ Classroom discussion: In Chapter 6, Pod says 'I never heard of no girl going borrowing before'. This book was published in the 1950s. Do students think that if the book were written now Pod's character would have the same misgivings about taking Arrietty borrowing because she is a girl?

This is students' chance to be really creative; however, what often happens in these cases is that groups tend to talk and talk and cannot make any decisions and commit to a scene. Overcome this by tracking the time allowed for this exercise. Give clear markers as to when groups should have made a decision on an idea and should have started rehearsing, and a clear marker as to when there are only a few minutes left to finish.

# RESOURCES

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## Resource 1: Characters in *The Borrowers*

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*Featured:*

Pod, Homily and Arrietty Clock

The Boy

Mrs Driver

Crampfurl

Mrs May

Kate

Great Aunt Sophy

Rich William

Ernie Runacre

*Talked about:*

Egletina

Aunt Lupy

Uncle Hendreary

Rosa Pickhatchet

Mr Frith

Nellie Runacre

## Resource 2: Script template

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Where is your scene set? Who are the two characters?

What are the two characters doing at the start of the scene?

*Write stage directions within the brackets, and speech below.*

Boy : ( )

\_\_\_\_\_ : ( )

Boy: ( )

\_\_\_\_\_ : ( )

How does the scene end?

## Resource 3: Diary writing checklist

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- ▶ Have you included the date at the beginning?
- ▶ Have you written in the first person?
- ▶ Have you described the important events of the day?
- ▶ Have you written the events in chronological order?
- ▶ Have you included adjectives to describe feelings and emotions?
- ▶ Have you included time connectives?
- ▶ Have you written informally, and mainly in the past tense?