

Plot, character and setting

SECTION

4

Truth or rumour?

Objective: To reflect on how working in role helps to explore complex issues.

What you need: Copies of *Why the Whales Came*, photocopiable page 17, writing materials.

What to do

- Discuss what people on the island were saying about the Birdman. (He is mad, he puts spells on people, he is a spy.) Ask: *Why do you think they were saying those things? In what ways is he isolated or different?* (He lives alone, wears strange clothes, talks to himself.)
- Hand out copies of photocopiable page 17 to pairs of children. Explain that they need to counter each rumour with the truth, citing evidence from the novel to back up each fact.
- Arrange the children into two groups. Each group should form a long line, facing each other. One child plays the role of the Birdman and walks slowly between the lines as the children

shout out rumours, insults or accusations against him. At the end of the exercise, ask the 'Birdman' to describe how the crowd made him/her feel.

- Repeat the exercise, but this time one line should shout out the accusations, the other should counter each one and defend the Birdman. For example, if one child shouts out 'he signals to German submarines', one in the opposite line could counter with 'he is just trying to stop ships getting into trouble'.
- Discuss how rumours can escalate unless they are countered by the truth.

Differentiation

For older/more confident learners: Challenge the children to write a short character profile for the Birdman based only on true facts.

For younger/less confident learners: Encourage the children to write speech bubbles expressing different views about the Birdman.

Beside the sea

Objective: To infer writers' perspectives from what is written and from what is implied.

What you need: Copies of *Why the Whales Came*.

Cross-curricular links: Geography

What to do

- Together with the class, read the passage in Chapter 6 from 'It was while we were working side by side in the boatshed...' to 'I've taken the King's Shilling' (pages 85–87). Ask the children to pick out all the references, direct or implied, to boats or the sea. (Gracie and Daniel working in the boatshed, the Navy ships, Gracie and her mother fishing.)
- Tell the children that the author once said of the Scilly islanders 'the sea rules their lives'. What do they think he meant by this? Explain

that even today, sea conditions/tide times rule the islanders' lives. Check that they understand the terms *high water mark*, *high/low tides*. Why should these be so important to islanders? (They use the sea for fishing and transport, and the tides can determine where/when boats can land.)

- Discuss which events in the plot are driven by the sea. (Father joining the Navy, the timber, the whales, the shipwreck.)

Differentiation

For older/more confident learners: Suggest that the children draw a flowchart showing how the sea drives events in the plot.

For younger/less confident learners: Ask the children to write a bulleted list of events in the plot which are linked to the sea.

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