Timeless classics, hand-picked by Michael Morpurgo

Now with whole-class teaching guidance
TreeTops Greatest Stories brings you 35 classic stories hand-picked by Michael Morpurgo, and beautifully retold by well-known authors and illustrators, to open up your children’s cultural worlds. These rich and challenging texts develop the deeper comprehension skills children need to reach the higher expectations of the 2014 National Curriculum.

We are now introducing two new Teaching Handbooks, matched to all UK curricula, to give you the support you need to develop your children’s understanding of literary heritage texts.

These new Teaching Handbooks are written by English teaching specialist, James Clements, with his expert guidance on improving the comprehension, vocabulary and grammatical skills children need to succeed.

TreeTops Greatest Stories Resources
For ordering information, please turn to the back page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOOK BAND</th>
<th>OXFORD LEVEL</th>
<th>STORIES</th>
<th>TEACHING HANDBOOKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BROWN</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409394.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td><img src="..." alt="New Teaching Handbook" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409395.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409396.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409397.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREY</td>
<td>12</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409398.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409399.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARK BLUE</td>
<td>14</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409400.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409401.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARK RED</td>
<td>16</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409402.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409403.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARK RED+</td>
<td>18</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409404.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409405.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td><img src=".../files/409406.png" alt="Images" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Free teaching support available at www.oxfordowl.co.uk
Soon, lots of other May bugs came to inspect the tiny stranger.

‘She’s weird,’ said one bug. ‘She’s only got two legs!’

‘She hasn’t got any feelers!’ said another. ‘And she looks like a human! How horrid!’

When he heard this, the May bug who had snatched Thumbelina changed his mind about keeping her. He flew her down to the forest floor and left her there.

All summer long, Thumbelina lived in the forest. She began to think of it as a great adventure. Thumbelina ate nectar from the flowers and drank dew from the leaves. She even sang along with the graceful swallows who flew overhead.

She gave Kai a smile, but Gerda noticed that the smile didn’t reach her eyes.

‘And here’s the Birthday Girl!’ said the storyteller. ‘Do you like the Snow Queen too?’

She offered a handshake, but the moment they touched hands, Gerda felt a sort of shock: a very unpleasant feeling of a connection of some kind. The storyteller snatched her hand back and her eyes became wary; she had felt it too.

‘I suppose the Snow Queen is not to everyone’s taste!’ said the storyteller quickly to Gerda. ‘But now then, young man, what did you think of that book, eh?’

‘It’s a lovely book, but there are some pages missing!’ said Kai. He showed her. ‘Look, this story can’t possibly end here. We were wondering whether you know the end of A Mirror and its Pieces?’

‘That one, eh?’ said the storyteller softly. ‘Why is she giving Kai that intent look?’ thought Gerda, uneasily.

‘Not many people know that story beyond what you saw written down,’ the storyteller said slowly after a moment. ‘But I think I could …’

Just then a large party of excited customers came in, ready for the next storytelling show. The storyteller seemed suddenly to change her mind.

‘It’s not a story for happy crowds, that one!’ she said briskly. ‘Why don’t you stay for this show, and then we’ll have a private telling later?’

‘There are some other things I want to see,’ said Gerda, firmly, feeling that somehow it was really important to get away.

Kai looked uncertainly from Gerda to the storyteller and back. ‘Here’s your book back,’ he said.
Gawain and the Green Knight
retold by Philip Reeve

Synopsis and Background
On New Year’s Day, King Arthur and his knights are waiting to begin their feast when a huge green knight, riding a green horse, arrives at Camelot. The Green Knight suggests a challenge: someone can strike him once with his axe on condition that he can return the blow. Arthur’s nephew, Gawain, takes up the challenge and readily beholds the Green Knight, but the court are shocked to see the Green Knight calmly pick up his severed head, perfectly alive. He tells Gawain that he will return the blow in one year’s time at the Green Chapel.

After almost a year of waiting, Gawain sets off to keep his side of the bargain. After many adventures and hardships, Gawain arrives at the splendid castle of Sir Bertilak and his beautiful wife. Sir Bertilak explains that the Green Chapel is less than two miles away and proposes that Gawain rest at the castle. Sir Bertilak and his wife are hospitable and generous – almost too generous – but the reasons for their behaviour are revealed when Gawain goes to the Green Chapel to keep his appointment with the Green Knight and receive his blow of the axe.

The Green Knight reveals himself to be Sir Bertilak, transformed by magic. He explains that the entire adventure was a plan to test King Arthur’s knights. Gawain is ashamed to have been tricked but the Green Knight forgives him, as he acted to save his life, which is not dishonourable. Gawain returns to Camelot feeling joyful to be alive.

Themes and Ideas

Ambiguity of characters
• In rich stories, as in real life, characters aren’t simply good or bad. While Gawain behaves bravely and honourably for much of the story, he is also human in his flaws. This provides excellent opportunities for discussion.

Honour and chivalry
• In this story, Gawain often has to decide between what is honourable and what might keep him alive. The choices he makes reflect how he strives to meet the code of conduct for knights, and how he sometimes falls short of this ideal. This provides an opportunity for discussion about how our decisions can influence the future.

Bravery
• Through following Gawain’s adventures and the choices he makes, children will have the opportunity to consider what it is to be brave and how sometimes even the bravest of characters find themselves afraid for their life.

Before Reading

Background knowledge
• Recap any knowledge that the children have about King Arthur or knights in general, to support them to understand the stories in the book. It is also useful to tell children about chivalric codes; the strict set of rules which knights chose to live by. Understanding this is helpful when trying to understand Gawain’s actions.

Vocabulary

(retold by Philip Reeve)

- What does it tell you about King Arthur’s hopes?
- Why does Gawain step forward to meet the Green Knight’s challenge? What does this tell you about Gawain?
- Will the Green Knight behead Gawain?
- Will Gawain keep his promise?

Chapter 2

1. Questions for comprehension
• What gift does King Arthur give to Gawain before he leaves?
  - Why might the armour be a useful gift?
  - What does it tell you about King Arthur’s hopes?
3. Evaluating the author’s use of language
- Ask the children to find phrase ‘grown a coat of cold white fur in the night’ (page 30). What does this mean? Why has the author chosen to use figurative language, rather than directly saying it was frost?
- Ask the children to skim the chapter, collecting other examples of figurative language, such as ‘winter came to meet him, flinging handfuls of hail’ (page 29). Challenge the children to come up with their own example of figurative language – a simile, a metaphor, personification etc. – for something they can see on the illustration on page 37.

Chapter 4

1. Questions for comprehension
- How did Gawain feel when he was given the chance to turn back from the Green Chapel? (page 79)
- Can you explain the Green Knight’s test? Why did he swing his axe three times? What did each swing represent?
- Why did the Green Knight let Gawain live?

2. Evaluating the author’s use of language
- Ask the children to reread the text where Gawain is approaching the Green Chapel (pages 81–83). How does the author build a sense of tension with the language he uses? Children might comment on the use being sharpened (including the sound /chat, chat, chat/); the long multi-clause sentence on page 82 that builds to the short sentence that reveals the source of the sound, Gawain talking to himself, mentioning ghosts and spirits.

3. Grammar, punctuation and vocabulary
- Ask the group to consider the spelling of the word ‘knight’. Tell the children that the pronunciation of the word has changed over time, but the spelling hasn’t. Once the ‘k’ would have been pronounced. These letters that are not pronounced are sometimes called silent letters. Can the children think of any other words where the initial ‘k’ is no longer pronounced? (knock, knife, know)
- Ask the children to use the ‘Silent Letters Photocopy Master’ to find out about some other words with tricky spellings.

After Reading

1. Questions for comprehension
- Is Gawain a chivalrous character? Consider his dealings with the lady, lying about the girdle and taking the challenge in the first place. Did the fact that Gawain kept the girdle secret change your opinion of him?
- Do you think people nowadays and when the story was first written would find Gawain easy to identify with? Explain why, or why not.

2. Explaining themes and ideas
- Ask the group if they can identify any recurring themes in the book (honour and chivalry, bravery, nature). If necessary, prompt the children with these questions:
  - Chivalry: Are there times when Gawain must choose between chivalry and staying alive? What does he choose to do?
  - Are there times when Gawain could behave unchivalrously, but chooses not to?
  - Bravery: How is bravery important in the story? Does the fact that Gawain isn’t always brave make him more believable?
  - Nature: How does the author use nature in the story? (to describe the Green Knight; in the hunting scenes; in the Green Chapel)
  - Why might this be important in a story about human nature?

3. Appreciating vocabulary choice
- Working in pairs, ask children to compare the unfamiliar words they collected as they read, and define them together. Challenge the children to choose one of their words and to try and use it in their next piece of writing.

Responding to the Text

Written response
- Ask the children to write a chivalric code for King Arthur and his knights. Remind them that they can draw on scenes from the story, research and their imagination to help them write their code. The children could then share ideas and create a class code of conduct.

Additional follow-up tasks
- With a partner, improvise the conversation between Sir Bertilak and his wife when they first met. (spoken language)
- Challenge the group to consider the spelling of the word ‘knight’. Tell the children that the pronunciation of the word has changed over time, but the spelling hasn’t. Once the ‘k’ would have been pronounced. These letters that are not pronounced are sometimes called silent letters. Can the children think of any other words where the initial ‘k’ is no longer pronounced? (knock, knife, know)
- Ask the children to use the ‘Silent Letters Photocopy Master’ to find out about some other words with tricky spellings.

Spoken language including debate

Key comprehension strategies

Assessment points flagged throughout

Every unit highlights grammatical features and relevant spelling opportunities

Meaningful ideas for written work are provided to deepen children’s understanding

Vocabulary focus
1. Find and copy the phrase from Chapter 3 which tells Sir Gawain that the girdle can protect him from the Green Knight's axe.

2. How do you think King Arthur will feel when Sir Gawain returns to Camelot and tells his story? Explain your answer.

Responding to the Text: Answers

Credit should be given for any answers that demonstrate children's understanding of the text or where they express an opinion as requested, justifying their answer. Good answers to the Responding to the Text Photocopy Master might include:

- Question 1: 'The magic woven in it will deflect all blades' (p.68) to the Photocopy Master might include:

- Question 2: Any plausible answer that is backed up with reasons from the text or where they express an opinion as requested, justifying their answer. Good answers to the Responding to the Text Photocopy Master might include:

Activities are also provided for key skills coverage including grammar, comprehension and vocabulary

Assessment support for National test style PCMs

National test style comprehension questions

For a wealth of free resources, including:

- Videos of Michael Morpurgo reading extracts of the stories
- Best practice videos from James Clements
- Teaching notes
- Editable planning and assessment documents

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISBN</th>
<th>Packs</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>MONEY SAVING PACKS</strong></td>
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