The Trials of Ruby P. Baxter

Author: Joanna Nadin
Illustrator: Gemma Correll
Teaching Notes author: Liz Miles

Synopsis

This story is the diary of Ruby, a girl who describes everything that she finds 'exceedingly trying'. When her best friend Elsie sings in a group with Ruby's enemy, Lacey Prendergast, Ruby has to find a talent she can perform alone at the Gang Show. She wins the Show by performing magic tricks badly and making everyone laugh.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

(Questioning, Predicting) Look at the front cover and read the title. Ask the children what they think the story will be about.

(Qlarifying, Questioning) Ask the children to read pages 3–5. Discuss the features of a diary and encourage discussion about any other stories they have read in diary form.

Strategy check

Check the children notice the use of brackets and commas for parenthesis and how the information inside them are often humorous asides.

Check that the children apply their knowledge of prefixes, suffixes and root words, such as verb prefixes (e.g. ‘replaced’, page 11; ‘overrated’, page 57; ‘disqualified’, page 89).

During reading

(Clarifying) On page 30 discuss the meaning and etymology of ‘pessimistic’ (‘pessimus’ – worst) and compare it with ‘optimistic’ (‘optimus’ – best).

As the children read independently, ensure they look out for root words to help them work out word meanings.

Independent reading

Objective: Draw inferences such as inferring characters’ feelings.

(Questioning, Clarifying, Imagining, Summarising)

After reading page 4, discuss the meaning of ‘patented’, and ask the children how they would feel if they had a dad like Ruby’s.

After reading page 8, ask the children to summarise what makes Ruby’s life difficult. Who do they think Topaz is and why might she be ‘trying’ too?

After reading page 10, ask the children how Ruby feels about each character she mentions and why she feels this way.

Ask the children to read some sentences aloud, such as the first paragraph on page 11. What images do the words create? How would they describe Ruby (e.g. she talks a lot; she is funny)?
Continue reading, asking what they think of Ruby. Encourage them to point to evidence in the text to explain their views.

Assessment:

- Do the children build a clear view of Ruby’s character in their mind based on the text?

Returning and responding to the text

Objective: Identify how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning.

(Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising)

- Reread page 13 and ask what links the paragraphs together. Discuss the first sentence of the second paragraph, and how it both provides a link and makes us want to read on.
- On page 14, point out the connecting phrase in the next paragraph and discuss how the change of subject adds humour.
- Look at pages 15, 16 and 20, and discuss how lists are a concise way of giving examples and do not need repetitive connecting words, such as ‘also’ and ‘too’, and adverbials of time, such as ‘next’.
- Discuss why Ruby uses formal abbreviations, such as ‘i.e.’ and ‘e.g.’ on pages 24–25 to describe the history lesson (suggests facts, as in a history essay; makes it concise).
- Ask the children how parentheses are used to add extra thoughts into a sentence (e.g. on page 29, brackets – and also commas within the brackets – are used).
- Ask the children to find the funniest entry in the journal and explain what words they find funny, and why.
- Invite the children to share their thoughts on the part they thought was the funniest, and why.

Assessment: Check that the children:

- can identify how the choice of vocabulary adds to the humour and builds the character
- refer to the techniques used to keep the text concise and that are appropriate for the diary form.

Speaking and listening

Objective: Provide reasoned justifications for their views.

- Ask the children to work in pairs to list the pros and cons of a fictional diary form. What does it allow for (e.g. innermost thoughts) and what does it limit (e.g. information on what other characters think)?
- Invite the pairs to share their lists and then open up to a class discussion on how a diary form and a first-person narrative form differ.

Assessment:

- Do the children justify their views throughout the discussions?

Writing activities

Objective: Using a wide range of devices to build cohesion within and across paragraphs.

- Discuss and review the ways in which paragraphs are connected in Ruby’s diary, and how subjects are the focus of each paragraph.
- Ask the children to write a two or three paragraph diary entry as the character of Ruby or Topaz.
• Invite the children to swap their finished work and comment on how well the paragraphs are linked.

Assessment:
• Do the children use and link paragraphs effectively?

Cross-curricular links

History
• Read and discuss historic diaries and journals, focusing on what they tell the reader about the writer's character.
The Trials of Ruby P. Baxter (Oxford Level 16)
curriculum coverage chart

**Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:**
- Can use inference and deduction skills to discuss messages, moods, feelings and attitudes using the clues from the text. (D) [ORCS Standard 6, 8]
- Can discuss how an author builds a character through dialogue, action, description. (D) [ORCS Standard 6, 11]

**Comprehension strategies**
- Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the Teaching Notes to enable pupils to understand what they read, in books they can read independently. In these Teaching Notes the following strategies are taught: Predicting, Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising, Imagining

### ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: Years 5 and 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoken language</th>
<th>Pupils should be taught to articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions (SpokLang.4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehension</strong></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by drawing inferences such as inferring characters’ feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence (Y5/6 ReadComp.2iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by identifying how language, structure, and presentation contribute to meaning (Y5/6 ReadComp.2vi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to draft and write by using a wide range of devices to build cohesion within and across paragraphs (Y5/6 WritComp.2iv)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes – Second level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening and talking</th>
<th>When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can share information, experiences and opinions (LIT 2-09a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own (ENG 2-17a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discuss structure, characterisation and/or setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• discuss the writer’s style and other features appropriate to genre (ENG 2-19a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>In both short and extended texts, I can […] divide my work into paragraphs in a way that makes sense to my reader (LIT 2-22a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oracy</th>
<th>Learners explain information and ideas, exploring and using ways to be convincing, e.g. use of vocabulary, gesture […] visual aids (Y5_OracSpea.1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>Learners infer meaning which is not explicitly stated, e.g. what happens next?, why did he/she do that? (Y5_ReadComp.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners identify features of texts, e.g. introduction to topic, sequence, illustrations, degree of formality (Y5_ReadStrat.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Learners use paragraphs, which have a main idea and related details (Y5_WritStru.3 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NORTHERN IRELAND Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talking and listening</th>
<th>Pupils can explain information, ideas and opinions clearly (L4_com_talk.3i)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>Pupils understand explicit meanings and recognise some implicit meanings (L4_com_read.4ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils explain opinions about what they read (L4_com_read.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils understand explicit meanings and recognise some implicit meanings (L4_com_read.4ii)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Pupils structure writing, including using paragraphs (L4_com_writ.2ii)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>