

BARBSMASHIVE (SPELLS TROUBLE)

AN INTRODUCTION

The main character in 'Barbsmashive' is an adventurous young boy of eleven, called Marc. He attends the local primary school which he will soon be leaving, as the end of the school year approaches. Marc is something of a loner and inhabits his own imaginative world. He is able to conjure up virtual worlds into which he happily escapes his humdrum life. Marc lives with his mother and her boyfriend, as well as an older sister who has little time for a troublesome younger brother.

Barbsmashive is an imaginary creature which Marc finds on one of his days out exploring the hills and under a bridge near his home. Barbsmashive leads Marc into new and exciting exploits, not without their own dangers and pitfalls. He speaks in a peculiar language, which is difficult to interpret, but is puzzling and funny at the same time.

Children will identify easily with this likeable mischievous boy, who is constantly stretching his boundaries and setting challenges for the adults he encounters. It opens up a vision of life in the valleys of South Wales in the latter years of the 1990s. It offers pupils an insight into the daily life of a child struggling to find his own way in an alien adult environment.

This novel offers exciting opportunities for teachers to develop work on a wide variety of themes from robots, machines, cool stuff, aliens, thrills and spills, bringing down the borders as well as to the more traditional themes of the local environment and transition. It also raises many contemporary issues, such as bullying, family relationships and truancy.

Teaching Idea 1

The language of *Barbsmashive*

Authors often invent their own language or alter it in a way which suits their characters. Mike Jenkins has done exactly this to give *Barbsmashive* a 'hard man' image.

Barbsmashive speaks in a peculiar language based on sound. Mike Jenkins makes use of onomatopoeia to create a new original language. The creature uses sounds from the language he hears in the world around him. These are borrowed from the dialect spoken by Marc and the other children; guttural sounds are heavily used and the overall impression is that the creature is using language which might well be rude.

Read some of the phrases *Barbsmashive* uses. What you think he is saying?

Shuck ick. Page 6

Ey, clock it yuffobb. Page 17

Doan slake thkiss, or-rye? Page 17

Cotch it, y' laft dird! Page 18

Spit large. Scrate think! Eye wanneh. Page 19

Sorry bog, thasmee orrye. Page 21

Activity

What kind of emotion do you think the language conveys and how does it do this?

Invent your own language or code to talk to your friend.

You may wish to write words backwards or substitute certain sounds.

Tell your friend in your new language how you are feeling today.

Teaching Idea 2

Describing Barbsmashive.

Barbsmashive is the mysterious creature found by Marc. It is described on page 18 and 19.

What does it look like?

How do you think it was made?

Who do you think made it?

Where does it live?

How does it communicate?

What do you think Barbsmashive can do?

Activity

With your talking partner discuss the questions above and suggest possible answers.

Compose questions of our own about the creature.

Create a character web showing the attributes of Barbsmashive.

Write a character study of Barbsmashive.

Teaching Idea 3

Design a creature of your own

Read the description of Barbsmashive on pages 18 and 19.

Barbsmashive is based mainly on the emotion of anger. Its body components show that it contains objects and materials which could be dangerous. Each of its body parts could also be easily found in the local environment. Its arms are thin knives, its legs, cigarettes and its head, a broken pane of glass. The body itself is a miniature roll of barbed wire. When it speaks it is in a language which is shrill and angry.

Activity 1

Design your own creature based on an emotion: happiness; sorrow; fear.

Draw a model of your creature, selecting objects that will help to form its character, labelling each part.

Choose another emotion: happiness: sorrow: fear:

Write a short description of your character, giving it a name also.

Activity 2

Compose a poem about your creature.

Teaching Idea 4

The local environment

Barbsmashive is set in the valleys of south Wales. Deprivation is evident in the description of the housing estate, the surrounding countryside and the town.

‘He peered around at the mattress, the old fire with blackened lager cans and the piles of rubbish further along. Where had it come from?’

‘The black gate was hanging off its hinges . . . A ripped back bag was on the lawn. Most of its rubbish splurged out. Disgusting!’

‘Marc wondered what he was staring at. Was it the rows of houses with broken windows? Was it the shops with their barbed-wire rooftops? Or perhaps it was the stubs of cigarettes on the path?’

At the same time the environment offers a prospect of hope.

‘Above him, on a hill’s summit were the ruins of an old castle. He wondered if something lurked there and did it have an arrow head?’

Activity 1

With a partner list the negative and the positive aspects of the environment.

Activity 2

Research an area which you are familiar with, possibly where you live.

Describe the type of housing which is available and the local facilities.

Produce a pamphlet describing the area and highlighting the positive aspects.

Teaching Idea 5

Chapter 1

Similes

Similes are used to enhance descriptions by using comparisons and are introduced with the words 'like' or 'as'.

It was a voice like bits of glass scraped together. **Page 6**

He heard the cracking voice like a child who'd swallowed tacks. **Page 6**

His eyes became wide as hub caps. **Page 6**

Jayne gave him a hard glare as though he was a spider in her shower. **Page 12**

She had a main finger like a gun barrel when she was riled. **Page 23**

Rye leapt up as if his legs were springs and launched himself out of the room. **Page 16**

The creature retreated into the can like a hermit crab. **Page 20**

Activity

Write a short description of Marc. Use **similes** to describe

- His eyes
- His body
- Ideas in his head
- The things he does
- Exploits on his bike

Teaching Idea 6

Chapter 2

Sentence structure

Short sentences and extended sentences

The author Mike Jenkins uses short sentences to build up tension in the story. On finding tyre marks near the last spot where he had seen Barbsmashive he continues:

‘He followed them towards the tree. He turned and looked around. The lager can lay crumpled by the road. It was empty. The body had vanished! Sherlock Thomas panicked.’

Activity 1 Group activity

Look through Chapters 1 and 2. Find other examples of short sentences and explain why the author has chosen to use them.

Activity 2

Imagine you are Marc and you are trying to escape from the two older boys who approach you suddenly Write how you feel. Use short snappy sentences. Continue from the opening sentences.

‘I heard voices. I spun round . . .’

Extended sentences

In the following sentences the words in bold are used to connect two ideas. The author uses these extended sentences to convey emotion and to develop the action. Read the following sentences:

‘He felt so miserable **as** he dashed down the hill and through the school gates.’

‘He then crept into the classroom **while** the others were in prayers.’

‘Marc could tell he was angry, **because** he breathed in gulps like blowing himself up.’

‘Marc was busy swallowing tears **before** they could come.’

‘**When** he reached his house it occurred to Marc it would be locked.’

‘Barb managed to raise himself, **so** his window-head pointed towards their front-door.’

‘**If** he smashed it then it would resemble a large mirror of Barb’s face.’

Activity 1

Identify the connectives in each sentence.

Discuss each one with your talking partner and jot down the different ideas which each sentence contains.

Activity 2

Marc’s Escapade

Write at least 5 sentences about Marc’s escapade in school using a connective in each one.

- Write down events which happened.
- List possible connectives you could use.
- Compose sentences

Teaching Idea 7

Chapter 3

Newspaper Account

Marc goes along to the offices of the local newspaper, thinking that his discovery of Barbsmashive would make a great story.

'PEN BOY DISCOVERS ALIEN'

The reporters are not keen on following up this story. They think that their readers will not believe them. Can you help the reporters to think of how they could present this story so that it seems credible?

Activity 1

Write an article on the discovery of Barbsmashive for your local paper.

- Plan the events that you will include in the story. (Discovery of creature; description of creature; importance of find; your opinion of this.)
- Write article.
- Devise your own headline.

Activity 2

Write an article on a discovery that you have made for your local paper.

Teaching Idea 8

Chapter 4

Emotions

Explore Marc's emotions throughout chapter 4. Consider how important each one is.

Read the following sentences.

'Opening the tin, he chuckled at barb. The creature had thrust one of his knife-arms into the can's small opening and was stuck.'

'Marc beamed at them, smiling wide as their valley. His plan A was working so well.'

'In his bedroom, Marc was completely miserable and bored.'

'He went to bed but couldn't sleep. He kept hoping that Barbsmashive would rescue him.'

'Marc was fixed to the kitchen chair in shock-panic. She shouted for him and he meekly replied.'

'The sunlight made dust dance in his room. The dream had made him confident. He went through the two plans in his head.'

Activity 1

With your talking partner discuss which emotion applies to each statement.

Sequence the statements as they occur in chapter 4.

Teaching Idea 9

Chapter 5

Speaking and Listening

Bullying is one of the themes which is touched upon throughout the novel. In Chapter 1 we are introduced to Ratty, who is described as a 'nutter'. He is aggressive, uses rude language and is threatening. He obviously enjoys the power that he exerts over the younger children on the estate and he is always on the look-out for the opportunity to bully them. He seizes his chance when he encounters Marc in the park with his friend Gemma.

‘Ratty never missed an opportunity and the little girl’s ginger hair was another magnet.’

Fortunately on this occasion help is at hand and Ratty is quickly dispatched by Carl, though not before Barbsmashive is damaged beyond repair.

Activity 1

Hot seating

- Marc encounters more than his fair share of bullying. As well as Ratty he is also mugged by two older boys and his friend's remote is stolen from him.
- Choose one pupil in each group to take the role of Marc and 'hot seat' him/her. The other pupils compose questions (similar to the questions below) which they can put to him.

How did you feel when you saw Ratty approaching?

Were you determined to stand up to him?

Why do you think Ratty always picked on you?

Did he target other children?

Was Gemma's ginger hair a reason to bully her?

Activity 2

Now choose another pupil to take the part of Ratty and hot seat him/her.

Pose appropriate questions.

Why do you target younger children?

How old were you when you first began to bully others?

Which groups of children do you like to bully?

Do you like being in control?

What would help you to stop behaving in this way?

Activity 3

Organize a debate on a theme related to the story.

Choose two teams of three speakers.

Discuss the issues involved.

Themes which would be suitable might include:

- Children should only play outside when they are supervised by a responsible adult.
- Name calling is not a form of bullying. All children have to put up with this sometime.

Activity 2

Write a story describing an adventure experienced on a day trip.

Include a character who uses a different persona.

- Plan the story
- Ensure an interesting opening.
- Give details about the setting.
- Introduce the characters.
- Develop the plot.
- Show how the plot is resolved in the ending and how the character's use of a persona helped.

APPENDIX

The Language of Barbsmashive

Possible translations for examples quoted in Teaching Idea 1

‘Shuck ick!’ - Shut it! (p.6)

‘Ey, clock it yuffob’ – ‘Hey, stop that. Leave off!’ (p. 17)

‘Doan slake thkiss, or-rye?’ – ‘Don’t mock me, alright?’ (p.17)

‘Cotch it,y’laft dird!’ – ‘Give over, you daft turd!’ (p. 18)

‘Spit large! Scrate think! Eye wanneh.’ – ‘It’s a bit big. A great thing. I want it.’ (p. 19)

‘Sorry bog, thasmee orrye.’ – ‘Sorry, but. That’s me alright.’ (p.21)