

Teachers' Notes for *Far Rockaway*

by Charlie Fletcher

Keep a reading log so you can record thoughts and ideas and viewpoints as they develop and change during the course of the story. This can include:

- Predictions
- Plot development – summarising each chapter
- Character studies – deduction and making inferences and refining opinions as the story progresses
- Author techniques – style analysis: form, language, imagery, foreshadowing, motifs, themes, viewpoint, tone.
- Vocabulary – clarifying unfamiliar words and extending personal vocabulary.

When considering discussion points, try out your ideas with a response partner before entering into whole class discussion.

First Impressions

Look at the title and book jacket.

Discussion points

(Prediction and inference)

- What do you think this book will be about
- Does your view change on reading the blurb?
- What genre of book do you think this might be?
- Who so you think the target audience for this book is?
- Do the quotes on the cover give you any further insight?

Make a note of your opinions.

Read the extract of the Lawrence Ferlinghetti poem, *A Far Rockaway of the Heart*.

(Deduction and inference)

- What do you think this extract might mean?
- Why do you think the author decided to place it at this point in the book?

Quick research

(Information report)

- Find out, write down and share three important pieces of information about Lawrence Ferlinghetti.
- Find out and write a paragraph of information about *Far Rockaway*.

Reading

(Making connections)

Read Victor Manno's words to his granddaughter. Think of a place that is special to you and briefly describe two alternative ways of travelling there.



Reflect and Discuss

(Prediction)

Far Rockaway is divided into four sections.

- Why do you think the first section is entitled Bad Step? What do you predict might happen in this section? Give reasons to support your opinion.

Read the extract from the poem, *Little Gidding*, by T.S Eliot

(Prediction and making connections)

- How would you interpret these lines?
- Think of one or more instances from your own experience where the beginning is the end or the end is a beginning.

Quick research

(Literal comprehension; determining importance and summarising)

- Find out, write down and share three important pieces of information about T.S. Eliot.



Part 1

BAD STEP

Chapter 1

Merry Christmas

Discussion

(Inference and personal recount)

- Why do you think Cat was sulking?
- In pairs, describe a time when you have been in a mood. Explain why and how it affected other people.
- Write an account of this. Consider detail and how to convey your inner feelings

Drama

- In groups of six or more, by reading the text closely, act out the scene with the following characters:
 - Parents
 - Grandfather
 - Cat
 - Lorry driver
 - Shoppers
 - Santa

Groups can tell a story by using three freeze frame images to create a beginning, middle and end.

Remember that different poses will be needed for Cat according to what she is doing on the phone – telephoning or googling.

When touched by the teacher, speak the thoughts going through your character's head at that point. Record on camera and evaluate.

Writing task

(Visualisation and information report)

Create an accident report.

- Traffic accident reports are intended to be accurate and objective accounts of all the specific details of a traffic accident. They are used for insurance purposes, police investigations and as crucial evidence in court proceedings. When you are involved in an accident, the important thing is to collect all the necessary information before leaving the scene of the accident.
- The report will contain information about the persons and vehicles involved, a narrative about events leading up to the accident and a diagram of the accident.
- Write down the details of the accident while they are fresh in your mind. It is best to jot down details of the accident before you leave the scene. In addition to a narrative of the event, the form will ask you to draw a



diagram of the event. The necessary details include the date, time and location, road conditions, the direction you were travelling, the speed the vehicles were travelling and other factors that contributed to the accident. The report should be as objective as possible.

- Describe the accident. Use your notes about the accident to write an objective and concise description of the accident. The description should be a paragraph long. Draw a diagram of the accident that outlines how and where the accident occurred.
- Proofread the report. Make sure that you have supplied all the necessary information. Pay close attention to your narrative and diagram of the event to make sure that you have not made any blunders.
- Turn the traffic accident report in on time.

Author technique

- Re-read the first chapter and write about the different techniques the author uses to involve the reader.
- Consider the following: description; sentence length and balance; paragraph length; vocabulary choice; detail; foreshadowing; juxtaposition of different ideas; shock tactics; implicit comparison and value judgements.
- What do you think the author means in the last two lines of the chapter?
- Why do you think the author chose the title, 'Merry Christmas?'
- What have you discovered about the main characters so far? With whom do you identify most closely? Write brief character sketches, referring to the text to inform your opinions.

Discussion/writing task

(Evaluation, inference and prediction)

- Discuss the pros and cons of mobile technology with a partner and then extend the discussion with the class.
- Try to balance opinions and think about the subject from every angle.
- Plan your discussion, starting with an introductory paragraph.
- Remember to use the present tense, formal language and causal connectives, culminating in a balanced conclusion.
- Consider whether you have modified some of your own viewpoints through exploring the subject.

Chapter 2

First Aid

Discussion

- Pick out the details relating to the different senses of sight, physical sensation and hearing which the author uses to convey the scene of the accident so vividly.



- What effect do you think the final line of the chapter and the use of ellipsis has?

Research/writing task

(Instructions)

- Find out how to administer first aid when someone has received a head injury. Write a clear set of instructions.

Chapter 3 The Bad Step

Reading Skills

Read up to the end of the first paragraph on page 12.

- Why is the first line effective?
- *(Echo of the final line in previous chapter, but has changed from the first person plural to third person plural, from cat's voice to the authorial voice.)*
- What techniques does the author use to structure this passage to reflect the apportioning of blame?
- *(Fine balance of cause and effect reflected in choice of vocabulary: 'weighing;' 'thin line between life and death...; the incisive image of the 'line – thin and final as a razor;' the consideration that one small decision can have life and death consequences. The incorporation of the question words: how, where and when show the basic facts and the thought processes that people go through when faced with a calamity, but the more relevant 'why' is unfathomable and links in with what Victor sees as the meaning and purpose of life).*

Discussion and writing task

(Persuasive writing)

- Discuss the pros and cons of mobile technology. Even if you feel strongly aligned to one side, try to think from the opposing point of view, too. Take notes on the different points people make.
- Decide whether you are going to argue for or against the use of mobile technology.
- Plan your argument using persuasive language features. Discuss your ideas with a response partner to ensure there is a logical progression and that you have covered relevant points.
- Write and proof-read your work.

Character analysis

(Deduction, literal and inferential comprehension)

- What do you think Sam meant by; '*observing that 'why' buttered no parsnips.*'



- Victor uses a different idiom, telling Sam that *'he should get his head out of the numbers and smell the roses every now and then...'* What does he mean by this?
- What do we discover about Sam's and Victor's characters and the nature of their relationship?

Discussion

(Making connections)

- Either:
 - On page 13, Cat intervenes in the conversation between her father and Victor, *'trying to dilute the ribbing before it got an edge and someone took an eye out.'*
- Describe a situation where you have tried to avert an unpleasant outcome.
- Or:
 - On page 15, the author focuses on Cat's teenage response to the strength of her grandfather's personality: *'she felt both embarrassed by being with Victor, and ashamed of that embarrassment.'*
 - Describe an occasion where you have felt both embarrassed and ashamed of that embarrassment, explaining why this was the case.

Drama

Readers' Theatre

- In groups of four: Cat, Victor, Joe and Narrator - rehearse and prepare a reading of the following section: page 16 from *'Far Rockaway...'* to page 18 *'and everything had felt exciting and special, yet safe.'*
- Think about and make performance notes on:
 - who will read each section
 - what the dialogue should sound like
 - what the punctuation is telling you about how to read the extract
- Concentrate on fluency, timing, expression, intonation and phrasing, so that you clearly convey the characters' qualities.

Writing activity

Poetry

- Either:
 - Write a poem about time. You might want to think about the TS Eliot quote at the beginning of this section and what Victor says about the clock at Far Rockaway.





- Or:
 - Write a poem about a place and what its name suggests to you. You could use a map book, atlas, subway maps or train line maps to get ideas about the place name – it doesn't have to be somewhere you know.

Quick research

- Victor is a professor of literature at New York University. Make a book list in your reading log, noting all the books that are referred to in the text and find out the names of the authors and when they were written.

Writing activity

(Description)

- Re-read Cat's description of her relationship with her brother Joe on page 18. Note the stylistic device of repeating : '*Her Joe ...*' and finishing with '*That was her Joe,*' before she goes on to show how he has changed.



- Discuss what you have found out about Cat's brother and how he has changed. Why do you think this has happened?
- Either:
 - Write about someone you are or have been close to and what makes them so special.
- Or:
 - Write about how somebody has changed.

Chapter 4 Ambulance

Discussion

- How does the author convey the sense of urgency in this chapter? Refer to the text to support your views.
- *(Details of parents' reactions and imagery used; the flash forward to the future effects this episode has on Sam; details of movements, sound effects, background detail, and medical procedures; Cat's physical sensations; Natty's positive, chirpy paramedic talk trying to ensure Cat remains conscious).*

Chapter 5 Betrayals

Discussion

(Deduction and inference)

- Analyse and discuss the conversation up to page 27 up to: 'Not this afternoon.'

Readers' Theatre

- In groups of five: Cat, Victor, Sam, Annie and Narrator - rehearse and prepare a reading of the text.
- Think about and make performance notes on:
 - who will read each section
 - what the dialogue should sound like
 - what the punctuation is telling you about how to read the extract
- Concentrate on fluency, timing, expression, intonation and phrasing, so that you clearly convey the characters' qualities.

Discussion

(Literal comprehension, deduction and inference)

- How many betrayals are there?
- *(Joe going to Far Rockaway; Sam and Annie not telling Victor or Cat; Joe sending pictures which destroyed the imaginative idea of Far Rockaway; Joe giving up classical music; Joe not showing up for lunch; Cat*



*choosing not to go to Far Rockaway that afternoon; Cat lying to Victor about reading *The Three Musketeers*; Joe not answering his phone).*

- What have you learned about parent/child relationships from this chapter? Do you find yourself empathising more with the child or the adult? Why do you think this is?

Authorial technique

- Page 26:
 - *'Sam's eyes slid off her and when he answered he spoke to Victor.'*
 - Read this in context and discuss what the author is indicating to the reader. Which words have the most impact?
- Page 27:
 - *'She'd looked down at the red and white checks on the tablecloth and tasted the raw onion on her breath; it too tasted like betrayal.'*
 - What do you find effective in this description?
- The author often makes statements which make the reader ask questions. One example is on page 27:
 - *'It was her own little act of treachery.'* How many pages do you have to read before finding out exactly what the act of treachery is? (5 pages) Why do you think the author does this?
- How do you think the author feels about stories? Find evidence to support your answer in the text.
- Victor says: *'Got to love Long John Silver... Even though you can't trust him. The world would be a duller place ...'*
 - Do you know of any other characters of whom this is true?
- Cat has not read about the character called Milady. Predict what you think this character may be like and why you think this?
- Cause and effect: discuss and list all of the separate elements which contributed to the accident occurring (*Joe not turning up for lunch; Cat refusing to go to Far Rockaway; Joe not answering his phone; Cat wearing headphones and using her mobile*)
- Pages 34-35. Pick out examples of irony.
- Joe chooses not to answer the phone when Cat rings. Discuss why avoiding issues can cause difficulties and give examples to support your opinion.

Quick research

- Continue your list of the books mentioned by Victor and find out who wrote them and when.
- Find out about the Big Dipper and explain in your own words, and with the aid of diagrams, how to find the North Star.
- Find out about the story of Zeus and the Great Bear. There are several versions. Retell the story in your own words.



Writing activity

(Personal recount and description)

- Either:
 - Re-read the description of the books on pages 28-9, where they are likened to '*jewel boxes*' that '*came to life and poured out their stories like old treasure.*'
 - Write about a book or books that are precious to you. Remember that little, carefully selected details make the writing more vivid.
- Or:
 - Re-read the description of the swordstick, '*a thing of wonder,*' on pages 30-31.
 - Write about an object that you find fascinating, remembering that accurate detail will make it easier for the reader to visualise it.
- Or:
 - Think about the complications lies can cause and relate this to your own experience.
 - Recount when you or someone else told a lie that had unforeseen consequences.

Chapter 6

ER

Discussion

Authorial technique

- The author chooses to revisit the accident at different points in the story. Why do you think he does this?
- Look at the sentence starters on pages 36-38. What do you notice about word choice and rhythm? (*The use of 'He' and negatives – 'He never...'; 'He didn't'*)
- Re-read the first two paragraphs and pick out any words and phrases that you think are particularly effective, stating why.
- Read the last sentence of the chapter. How does it make you feel and what do you think will happen? The author uses an oxymoron: '*the association of two terms that seem to contradict each other.*' Why is this effective? (*'gentle' and 'tsunami'*).

Drama

- Revisit your original freeze frame interpretation of the accident. With the extra details available from Victor's perception of what happened, revise and re-record the freeze frames and characters' thoughts in the light of what you have discovered about the character since the first chapter.
- Revisit
- Re-read the lines from TS Eliot's *Little Gidding* which the author chose for the section, Bad Step.
- What do you think the lines mean in the context of the story now? Have you amended your initial interpretation?



Part 2

INWOOD

Reflect and discuss

- Read the Walt Whitman quote from *Song of Myself* which preceded the second section.
- *'Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes.'*
- What do you think it might mean? Record your ideas in your reading log.

Chapter 7

A deep green world

Discussion

Author technique

- How does the author convey Cat's emerging consciousness on the first page of the chapter, page 43?
- What do you notice about the paragraphing and repetition on page 44? Why do you think the author has organised the text in this way?
- What do you think has happened to Cat when she realises that: *'she knew she'd been in these wood before, smelled this smell, seen this green and heard this silence; and she also knew for certain that it was a forest in which she had never, ever set foot.'*
- Comment on how the author describes the whitetail buck on page 45 and the techniques he uses to suggest sound, stillness and movement.
- Which incident does Cat's reaction to her grandfather's danger mirror from earlier in the book?
- Page 52. Re-read the short paragraph starting: *'Cat's instinct was to struggle...gagging her.'* How does the author convey an impression of Cat's captor? How do you visualise him at this point in the text?
- Re-read the description of Magua, on page 53-54: *'The Huron.... He was her nightmare made flesh.'* In your own words, summarise the qualities the author portrays in Magua. Why do you think the author emphasises the fact that he's in a red coat?

Writing task

(Personal recount and description)

- Page 47-48, from *'She ran blind ...she sprinted for it.'* Pick out all the verbs. What do you notice? Use a thesaurus to collect synonyms for the verbs and create your own short description of a pursuit, in a setting of your choice, substituting other powerful verbs to convey the feelings of the hunter or the hunted.

Quick research

- Find out about the trees named on page 45 and 47.



Chapter 8

Intubate

Reflect and discuss

- Read the paragraph on page 58 starting: *'The doctor...hers.'*
- Can you identify with the doctor's attitude? Do you think you would act in the same way?
- How does the author help you to visualise the scene in this chapter?
- What do you predict will happen to Cat?

Chapter 9

Ghost Warrior

Reflect and discuss

- What is the implication of Cat's captor's words:
- *'Be still ... there is only now until now is over. Then there is then.'*
- Why do you think the book is so important? What do you think it contains?
- What else have you discovered about the main characters in this chapter? Add to your character notes in your reading log.
- Which story are you reminded of when the Hurons are unable to pull the sword from the tree?
- Why do you think that the chapter ends at this point saying that Cat felt *'lonelier and more abandoned than she had ever felt in her whole life?'*

Author technique

- Read the paragraph at the top of page 66, beginning: *'The hand ...'*
- It describes one action. How does the author help you to visualise it?
- Find other examples of descriptive writing in this chapter which are visually evocative.
- Find all the similes on page 69. Which do you think is the most effective and why?

Chapter 10

A name returned

Discussion

- What does Cat's grandfather think about being decisive? Do you agree with his viewpoint?
- Explain what you think the Indian is saying on page 75-6?
- Do you think names are important? Is the naming of people, places, plants and animals necessary?
- What is the significance of Chingachgook submerging himself in the water?



- Discuss the effect of Chingachgook's words in the closing words of the chapter.
- Author technique
- Find the extended metaphor on page 79 when the Indian is talking about death.
- Can you and your response partner think of a similar extended metaphor that would work when conveying the depth of bereavement?
- Locate another example where the fire imagery, associated with the Indian, which occurs before the end of the chapter. (Page 81).

Chapter 11

Upside

Reflect and discuss

- Why do you think the compass on the swordstick doesn't show the right direction according to the sun?
- Why has Chingachgook joined forces with Cat?
- Do you think they will succeed in outwitting Magua? If so, how do you think they might do this?
- How does Chingachgook convey his attitude regarding the Huron?
- Explain in your own words, the meaning of:
 - vertiginous - page 89
 - irrevocably – page 89
 - cinched – page 91
- The name of the next chapter is: Flail section. Predict what might happen (*without skimming ahead!*).

Chapter 12

Flail section

Reflect and discuss

(Making connections, deductions and inferences)

- After re-reading how Sam is reacting to the accident, describe the physical and mental sensations you experience when really worried.
- Do you think the nurse is a convincing character? How does he feel about his job? Give reasons to support your opinion.

Chapter 12

Eagle feather

Author technique

- Why do you think the author focuses so graphically on the physical effects the journey is having on Cat? How does he convey this convincingly?



- *(e.g. It parallels her medical experiences in the real world. Contrast between Chingachgook's flowing movement and Cat's 'pistoning' legs; build up of detail: sweating, false horizons, the thudding of her heart, the breath sucking and blowing, 'the drum-machine jackhammering').*
- Read the paragraph on page 100: 'Hiking uphill.... above them.' Describe what you can see in your mind's eye.
- Reflect and discuss
- *(Inference and prediction)*
- Who do you think Cat is reminded of by Chingachgook's face and chuckle?
- What do you think Chingachgook means when he says to Cat that she is a 'real human being'?
- Do you think the eagle feather will have any significance?

Writing activity

(Personal recount)

- Either:
 - Write about an occasion when you have felt a strong connection with the landscape
- Or:
 - Write about a physical challenge which has given you a great sense of achievement.

Chapter 14

Downside

Discussion

(Inference and prediction)

- What sort of world are Cat and Chingachgook inhabiting? Do you think it is real?
- What do you think the final sentence of this chapter indicates?

Writing activity

(Personal recount; poem)

- Write about an occasion when you, or somebody else, has 'said the thing that was not.'
- Write a short prayer to the Great Spirit.

Quick research

- Find out how to make a fire with sticks.
- Find out three facts about Native American culture.

Visualisation

- Draw and label a diagram of the layout of the land, showing how to navigate the river, according to Chingachgook's description on page 113.



Chapter 15

In the donut

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, deduction, inference and analysis)

- Acute powers of observation are essential if writing is going to be convincing. Discuss which details in this chapter show Charlie Fletcher's skills of observation.
- Analyse Sam's train of thought when he wants to blame Joe for the accident. Do you feel someone is to blame and, if so, who?
- What do you think the final line in the chapter means: *'and he too now felt the strong wind in his hair.'*

Writing activity

- Annie's approach to dealing with the situation is her *'magical thinking'* that the only way to appease the gods is to make a personal sacrifice. Write about any superstitions you have to ward off bad luck: *'If I do then.....'*

Chapter 16

Lying in wait

Reflect and discuss

(Creating, analysing, evaluating and predicting)

- Revisit your diagram of the river and add further details to show Chingachgook's plan. Do you think it will work? Predict what might happen.
- When is it right to fight? Discuss with reference to real events, both personal and historical.
- Do you agree with Chingachgook that the *'wings of a truly righteous anger'* can make less skilled fighters victorious?
- Re-read the paragraph on page 130, beginning: *'Time jerked...'*
- Discuss a time when this time-warping effect has happened to you. If you haven't experienced it, think of circumstances when this might happen.
- What does Victor mean when he says on page 133: *'All I have to do is get to Far Rockaway.'*
- What do you think is in Victor's book that makes it so important?
- What do you think will happen to Cat?

Author technique

- Charlie Fletcher sometimes has very short, one sentence paragraphs, as on page 127: *'Her guts felt like water again.'*
- Page 132: the use of new lines which are not strictly paragraphs.



- Why do you think he does this at these particular points in the story? Find other examples of this technique and discuss their impact.
- Page 131 '*...her brain let her feel the bone-crack cold of the river with a shock that stopped her breathing.*'
- Page 135 '*...water so cold that within three breaths her head was splitting in a colossal brain-freeze that made her want to sob with pain.*'
- Page 136 '*Her brain was in a kind of self-inflicted hibernation because of the insult the freezing water had inflicted on it.*'
- Why does these particular descriptions work so effectively?
- (*Links to the main story and Cat's injuries, treatment and response, her removal from the world; suggestion of severe physical pain that can be caused by extreme temperature; single syllable words, with hard alliteration – bone-crack cold*).

Vocabulary

- Find the meaning of the following words and compose different sentences in which you use them.
 - *shucked* page 122
 - *tamping* page 122

Chapter 17

Nutcracker suite

Discussion

- Why does the author use this title?
- How does the author maintain the tension in this short chapter?
- (*Sense of speed and movement in verbs used; professionalism of the doctor; parents' panic reflected by their focus and use of few words; ellipsis of final sentence – cliffhanger relating to both story strands.*)

Chapter 18

Feeding the wolf

Discussion

- What does the title of the chapter imply?
- What makes Magua so menacing?
- Pages 147-148: Why do you think the author chooses to close this section of the book at this point?
- (*Mirrors events in the real world – effects of anaesthetic and intrusive surgery; closes this strand of the story, ready to move on*).

Author technique

- Why is the opening simile particularly effective?
- Why do you think the author uses scientific terms, 'geometry' and 'hydrology' at Cat's point of crisis? Page 141.



- Read aloud the sentence on page 144, which begins: 'As she went over the edge... of the falls.'
- Pick out the words which are alliterative or have internal vowel sounds which are repeated (*assonance*).
- How does the author maintain the relentless pace of the action?
- (*e.g. short 'paragraphs;' repeated use of the participle on page 146; powerful verbs and adjectives; focus on detail*)

Writing activity

- Update your character profiles in the light of what you have discovered in this chapter.



Part 3

JAMAICA

Reflect and discuss

- Read the John Masefield quote from *The Ballad of Long John Silver* which precedes the third section.
- To what period in history do you think these lines refer? What do you think they mean? Record your ideas in your reading log.
- What do you think this section will be about and why do you think it is called Jamaica?

Quick research

- Find 3 facts about John Masefield.

Chapter 19

Castaway

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, deduction, inference and prediction)

- Read the opening page and pick out all the elements of description which relate to the senses.
- What do you think might be happening in 'real time?'
- What is the significance of Victor's notebook?
- What might happen in the next chapter?

Author technique

- Find the unusual simile on page 152. Why does this work well in the context?
- (*'...like a broken deckchair...;' visually vivid, suggesting damage to body; fits the setting on the beach*).
- You are normally told not to use too many 'ands' in your writing, so why do you think the author chooses to do it on page 153?
- What does the author do to drive home the degree of physical discomfort Cat is feeling in the extract on page 154 from: *'But though she could feel... too big for her mouth.'*
- (*'salt-scoured suggests the abrasive nature and the sting of the sea water; comparison of different types of discomfort; use of an oxymoron – something 'dried out' but 'swollen'*).

Quick research

- Add to your list of plants.



Chapter 20

Something in the water

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, deduction and inference)

- What surprises are there in the opening chapter of this section?
- What do you understand by the term: *'fight or flight?'*
- How is the character of Long John Silver introduced to the reader?
- *(Silhouetted against a dramatic sunset; powerful similes; 'Doom;' a quick glimpse; 'Scarecrow of death;' clumsy, full of trickery and intelligence).*
- What do you think the author means when he writes: '...her own little movie smashcut to black?'
- What is going to happen next?

Author technique

- Pick out the musical imagery in this extract: Page 166, from *'Sadly what she saw... venomous rhythm to it.'*
- Foreshadowing is when an author hints that something ominous will develop. Find an example of this on page 167. Why do you think the author does this?
- Re-read the paragraph on page 164: *'Once more, as she body-swerved... on from it.'*
- Collect all the verbs and adverbs. What do you notice?
- *(Emphasising speed, movement and danger, with some unusual choices).*

Vocabulary

- Find the meaning of the following words and compose different sentences in which you use them.
 - *maelstrom* page 163
 - *rictus* page 163
 - *jinked* page 163
 - *cadence* page 166

Chapter 21

Cranial bolt

Reflect and discuss

- How does the author convey to the reader what is happening to Cat?
- *(Asking the trainee surgeon; use of black humour; brutally clinical words and explanations).*
- Is there anything surprising in this chapter?



Chapter 22

Honest John

Reflect and discuss

(literal comprehension, deduction, inference and prediction)

- Re-read the paragraph on page 178: *“That’ll smart some...as we was.”*
- Translate this into everyday English.
- Read the last paragraph on page 179. Why is the word ‘sparked’ more effective than sparkled? What do we learn about the pirate?
- Do you think the title is a true reflection of John Silver’s character?
- What do you think is meant by *‘Fiddler’s Green?’*
- Cat acts instinctively when under attack and has no intention of killing; it is a reflex action. Do you think this is true in many confrontations or do you think that, more often, actions are calculated and deliberate?

Author technique

- The parrot has: ‘unfriendly eye like a tiny bead of tar.’
- Why is this an apt simile?
- Find all the weather imagery relating to John Silver. What do you think this indicates?
- *(Thundercloud; thunderhead; stormcloud; dazzle of sunlight: two sides to his character – unpredictable).*
- How does the author build up to a climax when the new attacker appears from the trees?
- *(Vivid, gruesome detailed description; use of capitals; build up of negative increasingly horrific statements building up to the ultimate horror of him not minding his injuries).*

Vocabulary

- Find the meaning of the following words and compose different sentences in which you use them.
 - *scooched* page 178
 - *spar* page 180
 - *mad-dogged* page 180
 - *puncheon* page 181
 - *thunderhead* page 182

Chapter 23

A nasty discovery

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, deduction, inference)

- Find examples of John Silver’s sense of humour.
- What is your initial reaction to John Silver?
- Why do you think the blade on the swordstick is deteriorating?



Author technique

- Charlie Fletcher develops distinctive voices for the characters. Pick out examples of John Silver's speech and discuss the characteristic features.
- How does the author build up suspense for the reader on page 195-196, when Cat realises what was wrong?

Vocabulary

- Idioms:
 - *'that's egging the pudding...'* What does John Silver mean by this?
 - Collect other examples of idioms.
- Find the meaning of the following words and compose different sentences in which you use them.
 - *unchancy* page 194

Writing activity

- Proverbs:
 - *'Time and tide wait for no man.'*
 - Collect other examples of proverbs. Use them as titles for short stories or poems.

Chapter 24

Post-op

Reflect and discuss

(Deduction, inference and analysis)

- Why do you think Annie says that Joe should have come to lunch? Do you think she will say this to him directly when he comes to the hospital?
- What does Victor's conversation, which the nurse relays to Sam, indicate?
- How convincing is Charlie Fletcher's portrayal of teenage behaviour?

Author technique

- Analyse the way in which the author conveys Victor's vulnerability.

Chapter 25

A broken night

Reflect and discuss

- What other aspects of John Silver's character does the reader discover? Add to your character profiles in your reading log. How do you think the author wants the reader to feel towards him?
- (*E.g.: very observant; knowledgeable; verbally acute; calculating; perceptive; duplicitous*).
- Cat thinks about different types of danger on page 204. Discuss different types of death. Are some more acceptable than others and, if so, why?



- Page 210: Cat knows Silver is lying. What other indicators are there when somebody is lying?
- Predict what will happen in the next chapter.

Author technique

- Page 203
- ‘...she saw blood feathering out of a pale belly...’
- ‘Cat just shivered. The furiously silent carnage...shark bite.’
- Page 204: ‘The killing frenzy... hidden teeth.’
- How does the author convey the menace of the situation?
- (Very visual verb – ‘feathering’ which is gently menacing; short opening sentence of paragraph; use of oxymoron – ‘furiously silent’; strong nouns, adjectives and verbs; personification).
- Page 205: find the extended metaphor describing John Silver.
- (‘A spark flashed ... damped it down with a smile.’)

Quick research

- Find out where Hispaniola and Port-au-Prince are.
- Find out about diet on board ship in the mid-18th century.

Vocabulary

- Find the meaning of the following words and compose different sentences in which you use them:
 - strakes – page 211
 - guile – page 211
 - cogitate – page 214

Drama

Readers’ Theatre

- In groups of three: select part of the dialogue.
- Think about and make performance notes on:
 - who will read each section
 - what the dialogue should sound like
 - what the punctuation is telling you about how to read the extract
- Concentrate on fluency, timing, expression, intonation and phrasing, so that you clearly convey the characters’ qualities.

Writing activity

(Imaginative description/narrative)

- Re-read Silver’s description of coming ashore in Port-au-Prince.
- Write an account of walking down a back alley in Port-au-Prince, remembering to use some of Charlie Fletcher’s techniques in building up tension and increasing suspense, together with the physical description of fear.



Chapter 26

A pocket picked by moonlight

Reflect and discuss

- Why do you think the author says: *'For a long time Cat was just that most valuable and fugitive thing: simply happy.'*
- Page 221: *'Victor had always said... in the first place.'* Discuss Victor's viewpoint and what makes something 'corny.'
- Page 223: *'She wasn't waiting for something. She was doing something.'*
 - Is it better to wait or do? What does this tell you about people's personalities? Would you say that you are a waiter or a doer?

Drama

- Conscience Alley or Thought Tunnel
- Should Cat pick John Silver's pocket? The teacher splits the class into 2 groups – the pros and the cons. Each person explores their 'view' in detail. The class forms two lines facing each other and one person is chosen as the protagonist, Cat. She walks between the lines as each person speaks their advice. When she reaches the end of the alley she makes her decision and explains why.

Vocabulary:

- Find out the meaning of:
 - *overclocked* – page 224
 - *caromed* – page 225
 - *swab* – page 226

Author technique

- Page 219: *'After everything that had happened ... wind-scalloped silver.'*
- Why do you think the author writes about Cat's exhilaration in taking control of the boat at this point?
- *(Parallels with real world – her condition is stabilising; time of calm before the next crisis).*
- Find another paragraph that develops this idea further?
- (It might have been...direction she chose.' Page 220
- Pick out the different elements in the description and comment on them.
- *(Tactile – 'stiff breeze,' 'gently heaving;' aural – 'hiss and slap;' visual and also aural because of the sibilant alliteration - 'wind-scalloped silver.')*
- Find an example of foreshadowing on page 223. (*'The one thing she hadn't done...')*
- Page 224: pick out effective similes and metaphors and discuss why they work.
- *(...firing like a trip hammer...overclocked her system;' ...like trying to play that kid's game...;' 'like a rooster on a dunghill;' ...like a concert pianist warming up.')*



- Page 224: find the text where the author is addressing the reader. Why does he do this?
- How does the author build up the tension when Silver wakes up?
- *(Focus on sound first; Cat's physical reactions to fear; Silver's control and sarcasm; the way he dresses his threats up ; description of Silver's eyes; use of rhetorical question; series of short, one sentence paragraphs).*

Writing activity

(personal recount/description)

- Write about something that makes you feel happy or contented and explain why you think this is.

Chapter 27

Joe

Reflect and discuss

(Deduction, inference, forming opinions)

- Should we judge by appearances? Draw on your own experiences to support your viewpoint.
- Talking partners: think of two different 'types' and discuss the ways in which they show their allegiance to a particular group.
- How do you think Joe feels about Victor's opinion of Joe's image?
- Do you think this episode on the subway is believable? Support your answer by referring to the text.

Chapter 28

False colours

Reflect and discuss

- What else do we discover about Silver's character?
- *(He thinks quickly before acting; he's a good reader of people - dispassionate; he enjoys communicating because he has a facility with words, particularly of a nautical nature; he controls others; he has a robust sense of humour balanced by menace; practical and tactical; observant).*
- Do you think Cat is right to be suspicious of Silver – give reasons.
- Page 236:
 - 'Trust is a hard thing, and that's another truth. Got to be earned and you're right to keep a-hold of it until you know you're giving it to the right person'
 - Discuss.
- Page 236: read what Cat thinks about Victor's sayings. Do you have any family sayings which didn't mean much when you were little but which you now understand?



- Discuss how believable you find Silver's words to Cat, when he tells her he'd prefer friends to enemies.
- '*Books is power*' page 240. Who else said these words and what do you think they mean?
- Author technique
- Find examples of foreshadowing in the last two pages of the chapter.

Chapter 29

Flint

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, predicting, deduction, inference, making connections, analysis)

- In your own words, give a resume of what we know of Flint. Refer to the text.
- Find all the euphemisms for death on page 248. Can you find others.
- Page 249: if you analyse the similes Silver uses with regard to Billy Bones, what do they reveal about his real opinion?
- Stop at the end of page 250 and predict further complications, taking into account Israel Hands' attitude to Cat.
- Page 251-2: discuss the nature of bullying and the way people exert power.
- Page 255: discuss the way in which Hands threatens Cat.
- What do you think about Silver's revelation to Flint and Cat's reaction?

Drama

- Mime the scene where Cat first climbs on board to face all the crew, and Flint cuts through the crowd.
- Readers' theatre: characters of Silver, Cat, Flint, Hands and crew, plus a narrator: pages 247-252: '*Well, John....*' ... *at the foot of the quarterdeck stairs.*'

Vocabulary

- Look up the meaning of:
 - *barked* - page 245
 - *scurvy* - page 250

Writing activity

- Recall an occasion when you, or somebody else, has said sorry but have not meant it.

Chapter 30

The empty threat

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, deduction, summarising, evaluating)



- What was the title referring to?
- Sum up and evaluate Silver's reaction to the turn of events.
- Page 262: '*There's truth in most tales...*' What is your opinion?
- '*Masthead him.*' What does this mean?

Drama

Readers' Theatre

- Pages 262-263: Narrator, Flint, Silver, Hands, Cat.
- Think about and make performance notes on:
 - who will read each section
 - what the dialogue should sound like
 - what the punctuation is telling you about how to read the extract
- Concentrate on fluency, timing, expression, intonation and phrasing, so that you clearly convey the characters' qualities.

Chapter 31

Joe and Victor

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, deduction, inference, analysis, evaluation).

- What are your feelings about us being made of stars? And being reborn as something else?
- Discuss the importance of art in all forms: it won't last for ever but is it '*the nearest thing to living for ever?*'
- When Victor says that Cat is on the wrong tack, what do you think he sees as the right tack?
- What do you think Victor wants Joe to tell his father?

Chapter 32

Shackled to the sky

Reflect and discuss

(Inference; forming opinions; prediction)

- Explain whether you think Cat's attitude to Silver is justified?
- What do you think Silver intends?
- What role do you think the Indian will play?

Vocabulary

- Find out the meaning of:
 - *skysails* – page 270
 - *moonrakers* – page 270
 - *topgallants* – page 271
 - *royals* – page 271
 - *lubber's-hole* – page 274



Author technique

- Pages 269-270: what makes the description of the sailors working on the sails so effective?
- *(Transformation; sense of sound and movement; reminder of the earlier foreshadowing – ‘gallows-like’; visually vivid – picture of detail within the whole seascape; strong verbs and adjectives; unexpected simile).*
- Pick out some of the nautical imagery that Silver uses when speaking to Cat and Hands.
- How does the author shock the reader on page 276?
- *(Cat relaxes after expected confrontation, when the Indian’s face ‘fills her vision’ –impact on reader is almost physical).*
- Comment on Israel’s threatening language.
- *(Savagely colourful with surprising and inappropriate references to the Christian religion).*
- What does the word ‘whipsawed’ (page 278) convey?
- *(the speed, the cold and the pain).*

Chapter 33

Fever

Reflect and discuss

(Prediction, inference)

- Do you think Cat will pull through?
- Where do you think Joe is?
- What do you think of Annie’s thoughts about Joe?

Chapter 34

The horrors

Reflect and discuss

(Making connections, deduction, inference, prediction)

- Page 283: the description of dread. Think about a time when you have had a deep dread and talk about the physical effects it had on you.
- Who do you think is helping Cat?
- Pages 285-7. Interpret Cat’s hallucinations.
- What does the chapter ending suggest has happened to Cat in real time?

Author technique

- Page 238. Shrapnel is a noun, but the author changes it into an adjective: ‘...great spinning chunks of shrapnelled time...’ Why is this a particularly effective image in this instance?
- *(Because of the metal plate in Cat’s head and effects of the fever).*
- Page 284. Analyse the paragraph: She held the mast for hours ... moonlight.’



- Ensure that you find out the meanings of any unfamiliar words.
- *(smirs = drizzle (Scottish); spindrift = spray blown off waves at Beaufort scale 8).*
- Page 287. Comment on the image: 'as inexorable as a piledriver.'
- Pages 287-8. How does Charlie Fletcher convey the drowning process?
- *(Continuation of image of piledriver; 'last huge lung-popping mouthful...'; 'facing the sea roof; the metaphors used to describe the diminishing size of the moon; cold black marble tomb metaphor; vocab choice – 'dark chunk...inkiness...bible-black...'; 'increasing emphasis – 'nothing, then less than nothing, just an absence...starless void).*

Chapter 35

Alan

Reflect and discuss

(Forming opinions; deduction, inference, making connections, analysing, summarising)

- Do you think by wishing something aloud, it might happen? Does what happen in the chapter support your opinion?
- Do you find Flint a convincing character? Use the text to support your answer.
- Page 297: Alan Breck appears to be a complex character. Do you feel that his depiction is true to life and can you make any connections with other characters in this book or in other books that you have read?
- Page 299-300. Alan Breck gives his definition 'gentlefolk.' Summarise his argument and add supporting features in a modern context.
- How do you think Silver will behave? Give reasons for your opinion.

Vocabulary

- Find out the meaning of the following words:
 - *recalibrated* – page 298
 - *eructations* - page 298
 - *fleeching* - page 300
 - *conundrum* - page 302

Author technique

- How does the author build up the suspense regarding the introduction of the new character?
- *(Cat's wishes come true; a voice is heard first; a description is built up gradually; Cat realises who it is without letting the reader know – arouses curiosity; use of one sentence paragraphs before the introduction).*



Chapter 36

Surprised below decks

Reflect and discuss

(Deduction, analysis, summarising, prediction)

- How does the language of the various characters differ? In pairs, read out speech from one of the characters and see if you can guess who it is.
- Which character would you put the most trust in to get them out of their predicament? Support your answer with reasons.
- Summarise the sequence of actions that led to the escape from the brig.
- Predict what the characters will have to do next.

Vocabulary

- Find the meaning of the following words:
 - *parole* - page 305
 - *scourge* - page 307
 - *spanged* - page 311
 - *precipitate* - page 312
 - *carronades* - page 312
 - *smooored* - page 312

Author technique

- Find the simile on p 306 where Pew is knocked out. Why is this effective?
- Page 310. Why do you think Charlie Fletcher uses humour in tense situations?

Chapter 37

The fight in the captain's quarters

Reflect and discuss

(Analysis, making connections)

- What elements make a good film? Do you think that this book would meet your criteria?
- Does this book remind you of any films that you have seen?
- Pick out the most striking elements in the description of Flint on page 321.
- What does Flint mean when he roars: '*WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE GOOSE IS GOOD FOR THE GANDER!!*'
- How do you feel towards Silver when he refuses to react to the threat of Flint and his response to Uncas's injury?
- What are you reminded of by Uncas's bravery? (*Victor's attempt to save Cat*).
- What has happened to Cat in the real world?



Vocabulary

- Find out the meaning of:
 - *jolly boat* - page 320
 - *davits* - page 320
 - *rictus* - page 321
 - *scuppers* - page 327
 - *thwarts*

Author technique

- How does the tempo change at the end of the chapter – pages 328-9
- *(Lulled into a false sense of security; growing realisation of impending danger; lack of oars; 'Too late' – foreshadowing; one word paragraphs which shock).*

Chapter 38

The bleed

Reflect and discuss

- How does the author make this scene horribly realistic?
- *(Effect of alarm; description of physical and emotional exhaustion; image of 'mental carnage;' curtness of language because it's an emergency; eating and normality continues for medics; professionalism of surgeon; sense of speed; appeal to higher being; helplessness of parents).*



Part 4

BROAD CHANNEL

Reflect and discuss

- Why do you think this section is called *Broad Channel*?
- Read the extract from *Crossing the Bar* by Tennyson. What does this suggest to you?

Chapter 39

Buried in the mist

Reflect and discuss

(Making connections, forming opinions; inference)

- When given a choice in folk tales, what usually proves to be the better option – the easy or the hard path?
- Which island would you choose to visit?
- Does this predicament remind you of any other stories? (*Odysseus*)
- Why does the fare the woman mentions on page 341 sound ominous?
- What other elements in the story suggest that all is not well?
- *(The woman running ahead; the red dress; the man going into hiscroft; black sand; red wildflowers; the assumption regarding the names of the islands; the same name as the Isle of Evil Dead/Malos Muertos; Fiddler's Green; the fact that it's all too perfect).*

Vocabulary

- Find out the meaning of:
 - *skerry* - page 337
 - *skirled* - page 338

Chapter 40

Play her home

Reflect and discuss

(Analysis, making connections)

- Do you feel that complete honesty is always the best policy in the case of health issues?
- Which characters react in a way you wouldn't expect?
- Explain why you think Joe will or will not succeed in playing Cat home?



Chapter 41

Black house, dark island

Reflect and discuss

(Deduction, inference)

- Explain how the compass on the swordstick works.
- What are the different elements which add to Cat's sense of unease and mistrust?
- Who do you think the woman might be?

Drama

Readers' Theatre

- Pages 352 - 354: '*Ask her which island... '...ils sont a vous.'*'
- Narrator, Silver, Cat, Alan, the woman
- Think about and make performance notes on:
 - who will read each section
 - what the dialogue should sound like – remember the accents!
 - what the punctuation is telling you about how to read the extract

Chapter 42

The grip

Reflect and discuss

- Why do you think the title of this chapter is '*The Grip?*'
- How is the tension built up at the beginning of the chapter?
- What does Alan mean when he says on page 359: '*That was just a dram before meat?*'
- How did you expect the chapter to end and what do you think will happen next?

Author technique

- How does the author convey the predatory determination and menace of Pew on pages 357-8?

Quick research

- Which Shakespeare play has a line with a similar meaning: '*...something seeming so fair could be so foul?*'

Writing activity

(Imaginative recount or description)

- Write a story or description about something or somebody who seems fair, but is, in reality, foul. Title: Fair is Foul.



Chapter 43

Honest John's treachery

Reflect and discuss

- What do you think the title indicates?
- What do you think is the walking deads' understanding of the book's powers?
- Discuss Silver's sense of honour.
- What do you think the violin music suggests?
- What do you think they will find on the other island?

Chapter 44

The why

Reflect and discuss

- What is your reaction to Joe's revelation? Does it change the cause and effect chain leading to the accident, and if so, how?
- Discuss the pros and cons of living wills.
- How do you think the story will be resolved?

Writing activity

- Revise your character profile of Joe in the light of this new information.

Chapter 45

Fiddler's Green

Reflect and discuss

(Deduction, inference, forming opinions)

- Appearances can be deceptive: do you think this is a theme in the book? What other instances are there of this?
- *(Joe's personal appearance; his 'betrayal'; Silver's behaviour on many occasions; Chingachgook and Unca's behaviour on first meeting Cat; the woman in red; the islands).*
- What does 'crossing the bar' mean?
- Do you think that people sometimes have the choice of life or death when they are seriously ill?
- Why do you think Victor's appearance has changed?

Writing activity

- 'Turnabout is fair play' – use Alan's words (page 381) as a title to a story.



Chapter 46

The roaring girl

Reflect and discuss

(Literal comprehension, deduction, inference, forming opinions, summarising)

- Explain what has happened to the swordstick.
- What place is Fiddler's Green?
- What is the purpose of Victor's book?
- Explain in your own words why the villains wanted the book?
- Do you think this could be linked to memories and how stories can become distorted in the re-telling depending on personal perspective?
- In your own words, state what the purpose of stories is, as far as Victor is concerned.
- What happens if the dead step back onto the wet sand at Fiddler's Green?
- What do you think Magua represents in real life?
- When does Cat come to the realisation that Victor has to stay?
- What do you think is the big message from this story?

Vocabulary

- Find out the meaning of:
 - *she-hellion* – page 392

Chapter 47

Paradise Lost

Reflect and discuss

- What is the point, according to Victor?
- Which remark takes us back to the dilemma at the beginning of the book and how is it resolved?
- *(Revealing the identity of the woman and Victor's forgiving smile).*
- If you were Cat, what would you have done?
- How is the ending of this chapter different from some of the other chapters? (It all goes white).

Chapter 48

Nobody lives forever

Reflect and discuss

(Inference, forming opinions)

- What is your response to the author's attitude to death?

Author technique

- What literary technique does the author use when Sam takes his moving farewell of his father?



- How do the last humorous lines of the chapter help the reader?

Writing activity

- Write a poem where you consider your own feelings and attitude towards death.

Chapter 49

The clock at the end of the world

Reflect and discuss

(Recall, literal comprehension, deduction and inference)

- Why would Victor have appreciated the fact that they went to Far Rockaway on a Sunday subway?
- Why did Cat choose to go via Jamaica?
- What sort of place is Far Rockaway?
- How has Joe changed?
- Why do you think the four faces of the clock have different times?
- Discuss the whole poem, *Crossing the Bar*.

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home!

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For though from out our bourn of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

- What do you feel is accomplished by the final line in the book?
- *(It sums up the theme of stories, and living your own story; it suggests an afterlife; it ties Victor's words in with Cat's; it is both an ending and a beginning, taking us full circle).*
- Who is your favourite character in the book and why?
- What are the main themes that emerge in the book?



Writing activity

- Either, write a poem called:
 - Keep your face toward the sunshine
- Or:
 - Shadows will fall behind you

Diagram of a schooner

<http://redlea.net/compendium/shipyards/anatomy.html>



Teachers' notes by Eva John, Adviser for Basic Skills and Literacy
For further information, please contact ad@hachettechildrens.co.uk

