



By Patrick Deeley

MUCKEEN AND THE UFO

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Muckeen is a happy little pig. He skips and dances in the Big Field. Then a big silver spaceship beams him up into the sky. Muckeen gets a terrible fright when he finds himself surrounded by a group of aliens and far away from the Big Field. But the aliens don't want to harm Muckeen, they want his help. Despite having everything that they could ever need, these aliens are not happy. They worry all the time. But with Muckeen's help they are soon skipping, dancing and having a party. In fact, they are having so much fun Muckeen is tempted to stay. A charming story with a message about the important things in life.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Language of movement: dancing, skipping, twirling, dancing in circles, whizzing by.
- ◆ Language of pigs: fat, pink, snout, roots, mash, boar, sow, piglet, banbh, intelligent.
- ◆ Language of space/aliens: comets, planets, galaxy, atmosphere, Milky Way, outer space, UFOs, space-ships, rockets, robots, antennae.
- ◆ Language of collective groups: a group of aliens (p26). Compile a list, eg, flock, litter, gaggle, clutch, pack, pride, school etc.
- ◆ Language of similes: 'Alien speech sounded like frogs hopping in and out of cold porridge' (p32). Ask children to make that sound and suggest other similes to describe alien speech. Also think of similes to describe Muckeen squealing with fright (p28) and the sound of the UFO sucking Muckeen up into it (p10).
- ◆ Descriptive language: 'It was a lovely day for skipping and dancing' (p6). Using colourful images, describe different types of weather.
- ◆ Descriptive language: teacher draws outlandish alien and uses vivid images to describe, children draw and compare results.
- ◆ Discussion: examine illustrations and tell alternative story, or children predict outcome of story based only on cover illustration.
- ◆ Discussion: what is Muckeen thinking when he sees the aliens? What are they thinking when they see Muckeen? Discuss fear of unknown.
- ◆ Creative: What's behind Muckeen? (p25). Children identify sounds, eg, tapping, pages rustling, footsteps, pencil being sharpened.
- ◆ Creative: the aliens and Muckeen 'all had a great party' (p53). Create a menu, plan games and music. Write invitations to the alien party.
- ◆ Drama: Muckeen relates his adventures to Mrs Farmer. Will she believe him? Muckeen must convince her he is telling the truth.
- ◆ Read other O'Brien books about pigs and talk about the characters in each: *Muckeen the Pig* by Fergus Lyons, *The Pig in the Pond* by Martin Waddell and *Little Piggies* by Paul Morgan and Sally Morgan.
- ◆ Language of hats: brainstorm and compile a list of all the different types of hats children can think of, eg, woolly caps, peaked caps, top hats, bonnets, witch hats, crown, tiara, garda cap, butcher's hat, firefighter's helmet, cowboy's hat or Stetson, cycling helmet, swimming cap, riding hat, baseball cap, turban, fez, beret, sombrero, Australian hat with corks hanging from it. Can you find illustrations of these or other hats in old newspapers, books or magazines? Collect and display on wall.

SPHE

- ◆ Myself – Feelings and Emotions: Muckeen was so happy he was 'dancing around in circles with his eyes closed' (p8). 'Muckeen began to squeal with fright' (p28). What makes us happy? Can dancing/skipping make us happy? Explore various ways feelings can be expressed and discuss the most appropriate and acceptable.
- ◆ Myself – Feelings and Emotions: The aliens 'were super-intelligent and had nearly everything that they could ever need but they were still not happy' (p42). Discuss the concept of happiness.
- ◆ Myself and others – Relating to others: The aliens began talking to Muckeen but 'he could not understand a single word' (p32). How can we communicate if we don't have a common language? Discuss verbal and non-verbal behaviour and communication. Ask children in pairs or in small groups to show how they would communicate without using words. Children could mime or physically depict some feelings and emotions, eg, I'm thirsty/cold/hot/sad/afraid/surprised/worried/bored/angry.
- ◆ Myself and the wider world: living in the local community. How many languages are represented in your school or community? In how many languages can the class say simple phrases such as Hello/Goodbye/Please/Thank you/Welcome? [Libraries often have leaflets in many of the most languages used in the locality.]

VISUAL ARTS

- ◆ Paint and Colour: use colour expressively to depict what Muckeen may have seen when he looked out the window of the UFO: dark night sky, bright stars, comets, meteors etc.
- ◆ Paint and Colour: create your own alien creature. See *Starting Art Book 1*, pp 14, 15 (978-0-86278-607-6) for suggestions on how to vary patterns and colours using wet paints and folded paper. When the paint is dry, add eyes, mouth, teeth, and antennae as desired.
- ◆ Drawing: make drawings based on imagined aliens. Precede this activity with lots of discussion about possible appearance of an alien. Use a variety of media – charcoal, pencil, pastels, and crayons.
- ◆ Construction: design an imaginative rocket or UFO using waste material. Allow plenty of time for children to select chosen materials, in groups or individually. An empty toilet roll/kitchen paper holder could provide the starting point for a rocket. Two paper plates glued together might make a suitable UFO shape. Use straws, tinfoil, string, glitter, coloured cellophane paper etc to add detail.

- ◆ Clay: turn a ball of clay into an imaginary alien creature by rolling, squeezing and pinching the clay. Finish with surface texture or incised decoration. See *Art and Craft Adventures 1* (978-0-86278-683-0) pp 20, 21, for ideas and practical suggestions.

MATHS

- ◆ Measure: 'They were all getting further away by the second' (p22). How many children in first/ in second class can tell the time? Simple measures of time, eg, time school starts/ends; how long do you have for lunch-time, PE etc
- ◆ Position: 'Muckeen was in the field behind the farmhouse' (p6). Give children a blank sheet of paper and ask them to sketch a farmhouse in the centre of the page. Using a pig-shape made from modelling or other clay ask children to position Muckeen in different places, eg, in front of/behind/beside/over/next to/near the farmhouse.
- ◆ 2D and 3D shapes: Create a rocket or robot using a rectangle for the main part of the rocket or the robot's body, a triangle for the nose, circles for eyes or windows etc.
- ◆ Data: 'Sloppy stuff was Muckeen's favourite dinner' (p8). Discuss what 'sloppy stuff' might be made of. Do a survey on children's favourite dinner and compile data on simple graph.

SESE – SCIENCE

- ◆ Living Things: examine pigs, their characteristics and behaviour. What do children already know about pigs? Do they think them clean or dirty, intelligent or otherwise? Discuss the pig as a source of food for some humans. do the children know that it is a forbidden food in some major religions?

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Natural Environments: planet Earth in space. Discuss what the children already know about the solar system – Earth, the sun, moon and other planets. Children can visually depict the nine planets using chalk pastels on black sugar paper, with bright oranges and red to depict a fiery ball of gas for sun.

P.E.

- ◆ Warm-up: Pig in the Middle
- ◆ Movement Activities: Skipping, twirling, dancing around in circles.
- ◆ Drama: Dramatise Muckeen teaching the aliens how to skip around – stiffly at first, then skipping freely around and finally Muckeen showing the aliens how to dance.

MUSIC

- ◆ Listening and responding to music: *The Planets* by Holst.