



# ALFIE GREEN and the Monkey-Puzzler

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## Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

### RATIONALE AND THEMES

These books present the magical world of Alfie Green. Together they create a wonderfully humorous world of exaggerated characters and animated flora. Woven through the magic is the essential thread of mischief that every child will identify with. Alfie is irrepressible, and with his friend Fitzer, they tackle a series of zany adventures with comic invention.

Although the books are aimed at the younger reader, the themes are universal and will create a rich and vibrant resource for class discussions and activities, particularly lending themselves to development through drama, visual arts and literacy. The main themes are:

- Dealing with bereavement
- Bullying
- Supporting others
- Developing coping strategies
- Emotional well-being
- Trust / Self esteem
- Following rules
- Feelings

### APPROACH

These books are written as a series of adventures for Alfie. Each is a discrete story. For the richness of the character to develop, however, a series approach should be considered. Activities and discussion points are suggested for each book and overall activities are suggested at the end for those who have read a number of books in the series.

The pace, plot and characterisation within the books are versatile enough for them to be used either as individual readers or to be read to the class as a group.

### SUMMARY

The music announced the arrival of the circus to Budsville. However this was no ordinary circus. This was a monkey circus, where all the performers were monkeys and for some strange reason it was free.

Alfie and Fitzer arrive for the performance early and find themselves seated behind Whacker. When the show begins the monkeys are simply amazing; juggling, clowning, tightrope walking and flying on the trapeze. Since the circus is free, Alfie and Fitzer are able to spend their pocket money on a feast of popcorn and fizzy drinks.

When the 'Big Prize' is announced, Principal Boggins' name is drawn out of the hat to challenge Edison, the most intelligent ape in the world. He has to ask him a question that he can't answer.

The principal's maths question is very difficult but Edison is able to answer it and the forfeit for Principal Boggins is to ride around the ring on a tiny tricycle, wearing a pair of frilly pink knickers. In the uproar of cheering and chanting that follows Alfie knocks Fitzer's fizzy drink all over Whacker and they both have to flee the Big Top chased by a very angry Whacker.

They just make it safely to Alfie's empty house and bang the door shut as Whacker comes pounding up to the gate. Eventually Whacker heads home to wash himself and as they sigh with relief, Alfie spots something very strange. There are monkeys climbing out of all the empty houses carrying bags. The strange man from the circus is collecting all the bags from them.

Alfie suddenly realises that the circus is just a cover for a gang of thieves. The sound of

tiny monkey feet coming from upstairs disturbs them and as Fitzer hides, Alfie heads for the potting shed and the Wise Old Plant.

The Wise Old Plant tells him to call the police and then to delay the circus from leaving until they arrive. He must challenge Edison to climb the Monkey Puzzle tree. Alfie is not too happy about this plan, but the tree reassures him that the sharp pointed leaves on the tree will make it impossible for the monkey to climb up. Sure enough, the simple plan defeats Edison.

With this the police arrive and the Monkey Puzzler tree whispers softly to Alfie that all the monkey thieves are hiding in the tree beside him. Blowing softly on the hair from the Wise Old Plant. Alfie conjures a sparkling blue banana that swirls in the air and proves too much of a temptation for the thieves, who fall out of the tree along with their bags of stolen goods.

The ring master is arrested and Jack Dumbkins from Dumbkins dazzling circus offers Alfie two tickets to his circus as a reward.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read pp.15–16. Everyone was asked to give their name and address to the circus. Do you know what personal information is? Do you think it is sensible to give this type of information to anyone who asks? If someone that you don't know asks for your name or address, what should you do?
- Read pp.36-38. Principal Boggins had to do a forfeit and dress up in frilly knickers. Everyone thought that it was hilarious. Do you think that Principal

Boggins thought it was funny? Why do you think he did it? Why didn't he say "No"? What do you call it when someone is forced to do something against their will? What should you do if someone tries to make you do something that you don't want to do?

- Read pp.57-58. Alfie called the police when he discovered that the monkeys were burglars. Then he tried to delay them by challenging Edison. Was this wise? What might have happened to him if the police had been delayed? If you see something happening that you think is wrong, what should you do and what should you not do?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Mmmmmmm!

Read p.12. The ringmaster called the circus Monty's Marvellous Monkey Circus. Do you notice anything about the sound of these words? When we use words that start with the same sound we call it alliteration. Write down five other examples of alliteration in the names of places or things. Try to use your own name to describe something that you like. For example: Peter's perfect picnic or Sarah's super seafood sandwich. Maybe you could think of one about your favourite football team or band.

### 2. The Big Top

Read p.20. Alfie and Fitzer thought that the Big Top was magical. It was so colourful and exciting. Use the description on p.20 to create your own colourful and exciting picture of what Alfie and Fitzer saw inside the Big Top.

### 3. Monkey Magic

Read pp.23-26. When the monkey band struck up their tune, all the monkeys trooped into the ring and the circus started. They were acrobats, juggling, balancing on a tightrope as well as clowning. Pretend to be one of the monkeys and mime their actions. You might be in the band or a juggler or a tightrope walker. You could work in groups and do your mime as a charade with the others trying to guess what you are doing.

### 4. The Forfeit

Read pp.34-36. Principal Boggins had to do a forfeit when he couldn't beat Edison. If you had to think up a silly forfeit for one of friends, what would it be? Write a description and a short explanation about why you have chosen this and draw a little illustration.

### 5. The Puzzle

Read p.65. Alfie has managed to outwit Edison with a puzzle he can't solve. Do you know any good riddles or puzzles? If you

Make a class collection of puzzles. You can then compile them in a scrapbook with loads of colourful illustrations. You might be able to put in puzzles from different countries. If you don't know any puzzles, ask at home for help or maybe your teacher can tell you some. When the scrapbook is finished, everyone can read it.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR, JOE O'BRIEN



Joe O'Brien is an award-winning gardener who lives in Ballyfermot in Dublin. He is well known and has a high media profile including regular guest appearances on his local radio station, WDAR 96 FM. He is also highly involved with children's group projects.

### Other books



Title by Author