

ALFIE GREEN and a Sink Full of Frogs

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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

While walking his next-door neighbour home, Alfie discovers a discarded old sink. It is the perfect repository for a mini garden. Alfie's his father and brother Dermot help him remove the sink and install it beside the fuchsia bush.

That night Alfie dreams of the different types of plants he intends to grow in the sink. However in the morning he is met with a surprise. It has rained in the night, the sink has filled with water and is now colonised by a leap of frogs.

Exasperated, Alfie asks the Wise Old Plant for help and is surprised to learn how lucky he is, as the frogs will solve the bug infestation problem which is ruining his beloved plants.

Alfie heads to school, expecting to see a bug free garden when he returns. The reality is slightly different, however. An unguarded remark by a hosta plant to an impressionable young frog about the water in the sink having magic properties leads to a chain of expectation that has every frog for miles vying to plunge in the pool. The resulting pandemonium greets Alfie when he returns from school.

The only available action for Alfie sees The Wise Old Plant suggests that he finds a Dancing Fiddler whose music could coax the frogs away from the sink.

Alfie and Fitzer use all their powers of persuasion to convince old Podge from down the street that he and his fiddle are just the thing for the job. Suitably attired in a green velvet curtain, his old cap and some magic blue dust from the Wise Old Plant, Podge steps into the street and strikes up a tune.

The effect is immediate. The frogs abandon the sink, much to the relief of the neighbours. Podge directs them all to his own garden where every available bug and slug is devoured.

Podge is happy because now his vegetables can thrive in a bug free garden and Alfie quickly fills the sink with soil and an amazing variety of Alpine plants.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read pp.32-33. The bugs and slugs ate the plants and the frogs ate the bugs and slugs. This is called a Food Chain. What will be the effect on both the plants and the frogs when the bugs disappear? How many food chains are humans' parts of? Do you think food chains are the same in developing countries?
- Read pp.36-37. The old Hosta plant tells the young frog that the water in the sink has magic properties. He does this to soothe her and prevent her from crying, but it was a lie. Why do you think that adults sometimes lie to children? What kind of lies do adults tell children? Do you think it is right to lie? Which adults should you trust and which adults might tell you things that may not be completely true?
- Read pp.39-45. The balance of the garden has been upset and now there are some unwelcome consequences; a plague of frogs. The balance between all living things is called the ecology and when it is upset, strange things can happen. What effect do you think that humans have on this balance? Do you think we cause any unwelcome changes to the ecology?

ACTIVITIES

1. What a strange place

Read pp.15–19. We now know that plants are able to communicate with each other and share their views. Are there any plants in your classroom? Have you ever spoken to them or do you even know their names? If your plant were to speak to another plant, how would it describe your classroom and the treatment it gets? What do you think it would find interesting and amusing? Write a short description of the plant's impression of you. You can add an illustration if you like.

2. Garden Homework

Read p.23. Alfie has lots of flowers in his garden, including roses, fuchsia and hosta. Do some research of magazines etc. and gather loads of flower pictures. Use the pictures to make a collage of what you think Alfie's garden looks like and how the flowers are arranged in their beds.

3. I'm fed up with this

Read pp.31–33. The bugs, insects and slugs are very unhappy indeed. No one likes them. They are either being squished or eaten. They have decided to approach the Wise old Plant to ask him for help and they have asked you to help them present their case.

Write their side of the story. You could explain that ecology means that every creature needs space to live. Don't forget to write what advice you think the Wise Old Plant will give.

4. Sum Frogs

Read pp.44-45. The young frog has told some of his relatives about the 'magic' swimming pool and they have passed the information on, each frog telling more frogs, until there was a huge crowd.

If the young frog had only told two frogs and each of them had told two and then those two had told two, with every frog telling two more frogs, work out how many frogs were told about the pool after the message was passed on ten times. Use a branch diagram to show how you calculated the number. Can you see a pattern as the number increases?

5. The Dancing Fiddler

Old Podge Kelly is costumed and steps into the street with his fiddle under his chin. When the music starts, the frogs are mesmerised and begin to follow in a line, skipping and hopping.

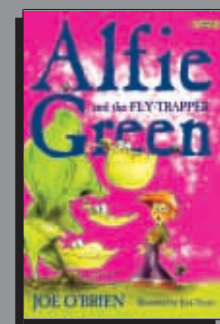
Pretend that everyone in your class is a frog following Podge Kelly and mimicking everything that he does. Pick someone to pretend to be Podge and take turns to see who could create the most unusual dance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, AUTHORNAME



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 by Joe O'Brien



Alfie Green and the Bee-Bottle Gang
Alfie Green and the Fly-Trapper