



Celebrating 20 years of the Branford Boase Award

These talking point ideas have been designed to celebrate texts that have been previous winners of the Branford Boase Award. The award was set up to reward the most promising new writers and their editors, as well as to reward excellence in writing and in publishing. The Award is made annually to the most promising book for seven-year-olds and upwards by a first time novelist.

The ideas in the sequence of sessions will support teachers in reading aloud selected texts that have been awarded the prize and talking about these texts with their children, allowing children to respond to and understand the text in greater depth.

Title: Floodland

Author: Marcus Sedgwick

Publisher: Orion

Winner of the Branford Boase: 2001

Set in an all too believable near future when many parts of England are submerged in water and people drift into gangs, divided due to the scarcity of resources, especially food. Zoe has been left behind on an island which used to be the city of Norwich and discovers a boat which she wants to use to try and find her parents. She has to cope with human cruelties and frailties but the story ends on a note of hope.

Session 1: 'before' Chapters 1 and 2, Pages 3-12

Focus: Predicting, questioning and thinking aloud.

Without sharing the front cover of the novel or the title, share with the children the initial wood engraving which depicts the wooden poles in the foreground submerged in the water and the city in the distance. Allow time for them to respond to what they can see. Ask the children to reflect on what is depicted in the illustration. *Why do they think the novel opens with this image? Where might it be? What does this suggest to us about the story that will unfold? What impression is made on them by this image? From whose viewpoint may this image be taken?*

After the children have had time to explore the illustration, read aloud the title of this section of the novel, 'before' which accompanies the picture. Ask the children to reflect on the word that they have just heard. *Was this what they expected to accompany this picture? What do they feel or think when they hear this? Looking at the illustration and text together, what do they think the impact of this is?* Link this back to their considerations of the image and any connections that they have made to other stories, images or real events.

Read aloud chapters one and two. Ask the children to discuss their responses to the text. The class can begin to explore their responses to it with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls 'the four basic questions'. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion: *Tell me...was there anything you liked about this text? Was there anything that you particularly disliked...? Was there anything that puzzled you? Were there any patterns...any connections that you noticed...?* As the book continues to be read, the children will benefit from regular opportunities to return to these questions and share their personal responses to the key events and character developments as they occur.



Consider the following with the children; *are the children familiar with Norwich and can they make any connections with what is happening in the text with their experience of this city? Does it make sense, given what they know, that Zoe would need a boat to escape Norwich? What does this suggest to them? Considering the novel so far, do they think it is set in the distant future or the near future? What clues tell them that? Why is this context significant? What do they think about the idea that Norwich could be covered in water in the not too distant future? What do they predict will happen next? Do they think Zoe will find her parents on the island?*

Ask the children to consider if they have ever read a book that has been set in a world which is familiar to them but that imagines a future where terrible things have happened and people have to fight for survival. If the children are unfamiliar with the term, introduce the terms dystopian fiction and dystopia. Explore this concept and genre with the children and ask them to consider if they have read any books like this before or seen any TV programmes or films that explore the same ideas.

The children may be familiar with the book and film adaptations of *The Lorax* or *City of Ember*, or the following books: *The Last Wild* trilogy by Piers Torday, the *Mortal Engines* series by Philip Reeve, *The Boy in the Tower* by Polly Ho-Yen, or the film *WALL-E*. Consider with the children if they enjoyed these books or films, what the impact of the genre was on them, why they think authors and filmmakers may decide to write in this way and what impact they think the authors and filmmakers want to have on their readers and audience members.

Finally, reflect upon the character Zoe and what they think they know about her at this point in the story. *How do you think she has lost her parents? What could have happened? Why does she no longer trust people? Who could Natasha be and why did it hurt to leave her? What can they infer about her father and how he prepared her for situation she has found herself in?*

Give the children time to share their ideas in small groups before asking the children to feedback to a whole class discussion. Ask the pupils to offer words or phrases they would use to describe Zoe's feelings and personality, as well as what the children know about her outward appearance or facts and other information about her. Support the class to make explicit links between the external and internal. For example, *how does something Zoe does tell us about her personality, or how does her personality make that action seem most likely?*

Session 2: 'then' Chapters 1-3, Pages 15-39

Focus: Visualising, clarifying and questioning.

Read aloud chapter one, 'then'. Consider with the children the new characters that have been introduced; *are the class surprised that they are mostly children and not adults? Why might this be the case? Can the children understand the language used by the characters in the novel? What do they think they mean by 'cats', 'pigs' and 'eels' or what could 'scrag' mean? Why do they think the characters are using language like this? Why doesn't Zoe understand them? Why do they think Dooby wants Zoe's help? How do they think Zoe feels to have found herself here on this island? What kind of place do they imagine Zoe has arrived at? What do they think she will do next?*



Return to the description of the building and the people living within it on pages 20-21. Re-read this section aloud and ask the children to imagine the cathedral in their mind's eye as you are reading aloud. Ask the children to close their eyes and picture the scene unfolding as if it were a scene in a film. Read the short passage aloud two or three times and then ask them to describe to a partner what they pictured.

Following this, ask the children to share what they imagined and to identify key vocabulary or phrases which support their understanding or interpretation. For example, *'Huddled in small groups round smoking fires were the scraps of people'* or *'She stared at the building which had once been magnificent. The floor was thick with dirt and heaps of rubbish'*. Ask the children why these words or phrases in particular stood out to them; *what made them so vivid or memorable? What mood or sense of place is created by the author through the descriptions? How do these descriptions make them feel? What would you be thinking if you were Zoe? Does the cathedral symbolise anything to you? How does it make you feel to imagine this building in this state? Do you feel hopeful or worried about what could happen next?*

Read aloud chapter two and three, up until 'she had a stitch'. Engage the children in book talk regarding what they have heard, considering: *was there anything you liked about this part of the book? Was there anything that you particularly disliked...? Was there anything that puzzled you? Were there any further patterns...any connections that you noticed...?*

It is at this point that Zoe speaks to the character William for the first time. Spend time reflecting on who the children think William could be and what his significance in the story could be. Pause and reflect on the conversation the two characters have and what William speaks to Zoe about. The children may connect the story of Brother Elmer to the story of Icarus, in which a man tries to escape an island using hand-made wings but falls from the sky to his death as he flies too close to the sun. Consider why William might be sharing this story with Zoe, *what warning may he be trying to give her?*

Read aloud to end of chapter three in which it is revealed that Dooby has taken Zoe's boat. Ask the class to predict what they think will happen next and how else she might escape the island if she wants or needs to, based on their understanding of her character so far, *what actions seem most likely?*

Session 3: 'then' Chapters 4-7, Pages 40-62

Focus: Clarifying, summarising and making inter-textual connections.

Read aloud until the end of chapter five. Stop at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up.

Reflect on William's explanation of how the water came to flood the land on pages 48-49. Ask the children to summarise the points he has made, *can the children relate this to current concerns and evidence around climate change that they know about?* Consider why the characters in the book think his stories are 'madness' and do not believe what he is saying is an accurate description of what happened. William also makes reference to stories and rhymes that the children may be familiar with in this chapter, including the story of Noah's Ark and then the rhyme Dr Foster. You may want to encourage the children to explore these references and to consider their significance. *Why do they think William is referencing these fictional stories alongside the description of what happened to England as a result of climate change?*



Read on until the end of chapter seven. In this chapter William references a lyric from the song 'Stairway to Heaven' by Led Zeppelin, 'There's a feeling that I get when I look to the west'. You may want to explore the lyrics of the song and share the song with the class. (Lyrics can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2gCXfnb>) Additionally, look up the date this song was released which may give the children further context and will suggest that the novel is set not too far in the future. William also directly quotes William Blake in this chapter, referencing the name of Zoe's boat Lyca, which features in William Blake's poetry. You may want to explore these poems with the children; 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'The Little Girl Found'. These poems are in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* – there are several editions of this – recommended is the edition in the Penguin Clothbound Poetry series, designed by Coralie Bickford-Smith. Allow plenty of time for the group to read and discuss the poems and ask the children to consider why this poetry may be referenced in the novel, *in what way can they connect the poetry to Zoe's predicament? Do they consider her 'a little girl lost'? Do they think her parents are looking for her, in the same way as the parents in the poem?*

Session 4: 'then' Chapters 8-13, Pages 63-99

Focus: Empathising, questioning and close reading.

Read aloud until the opening of chapter nine stopping at 'into his secret world'. Stop at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Consider what Zoe has discovered and ask the children to imagine what could be in Munchkin's secret hiding place. *What would he want to keep secret and how might it help Zoe to escape? Should Zoe enter his secret hiding place? Why? Why not?*

Read on until the end of the chapter and explore what was revealed about Munchkin from his secret hiding place. *Do you feel empathy for him? Why? Why not? What significance could he have in the remaining part of the novel?* Consider the language used to describe Munchkin and how this evokes empathy both in the reader and in Zoe, such as 'he shrank at the sound of his own voice', or the way he talks quietly to his pet rat to reassure it. After the children have had time to discuss their responses to the chapter, pose the question to the children: *Should Zoe try to get off the island alone or risk going with Dooby?* Discuss their reasons and ask them to justify their responses based on their reading of the text so far.

Read aloud chapter ten, stopping at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Spend some time revisiting the ideas suggested by William in this chapter, and the novel as a whole, that stories are innately human and incredibly important. Share the following extract from the book from taken from page 81, with the children: 'And how do you think people have survived? How do people remember who they are and where they're from? And how do they know what it means to be human, what makes us more than animals? How do they pass these things on to their children? Stories, that's how.'

Ask the children to reflect on this quote and whether they agree with William's assertions or not. *Do they think that stories make us human? What stories have they had passed onto them by their parents, family members and teachers? Which stories would they like to pass on later in their lives? Why?* Consider his statement 'stories walk the truth into existing'. *How does this relate to the novel as a whole, what 'truth' could the novel be walking into existence?*

Read chapter eleven aloud and allow the children time to respond to the text in small groups, noting their ideas and comments. Reflect on the events in this chapter. *What do they think will happen next? How will Zoe survive the attack? Will she still get off the island? What could happen if she is trapped on the island?*



Session 5: Chapters 12-13 and 'after' chapters 1 and 2, Pages 87-122

Focus: Summarising, noting the text structure and empathising.

Read to the end of the novel, stop at different points, clarifying their understanding and allow for discussion around what the group like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Discuss children's responses to the ending of the book. *Did they expect Zoe to be reunited with her parents? Were they surprised by the ending? How did they think Zoe reacted to the news of her baby brother? Is that how they think they would have reacted?*

Ask the children to consider the events that have unfolded, how Zoe has reacted to them and to infer what this tells us about her character as well as their opinions of the other characters. *Which character interested the class the most? Are there any 'minor' characters that the class would have liked to have spent more time with? Did any of the characters remind them of people they know or remind them of characters in other books?*

Discuss how the children felt about the book compared to their original expectations: *When you first saw this book, even before you read it, what kind of book did you think it was going to be? What made you think this? Now you've read it, is it as you expected? Have you read other books like it? How is this one the same? How is it different?*

Consider the structure and style of the novel. *When you were reading the story, did you feel it was happening now or did you feel it was happening in the past and being remembered? Can you tell me anything in the writing that made you feel like that? Marcus Sedgwick made the decision to write the book in the present tense. What impact does this choice have on the reader? How would the book have been different if it used a different voice or tense? Take a small passage from the start of the book and read it in both the past and present tense; What is the impact? Which do they prefer? Why do you think the author made these choices?*

Reflect on the fact that the book won the Branford Boase award, *why do you think this book is considered worthy of an award? What makes an award winning story in your opinion? What other books have you read that have won awards? Were they similar or different? What makes this a good book for children aged 7+? What defines a high quality text for you as a reader? What things do you look for when you are considering new reading material?*

A full teaching sequence, providing detailed planning for how to develop whole class learning in reading and writing over a series of sessions using this text, is available via subscription to CLPE's Power of Reading website at: <https://clpe.org.uk/powerofreading>

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