The Bog Baby by Jeanne Willis, illustrated by Gwen Millward (Puffin books)

This is a magical story with a serious message about what it means to really love something. When two small sisters decide to go fishing in the magic pond, they find something unexpected and much better than a frog or a newt: they find a bog baby. Small and blue with wings like a dragon, the girls love him with a passion and make a pact to make him their secret. But the bog baby is a wild thing, and when he becomes poorly, one of the girls breaks silence and tells their mum. And she teaches them the greatest lesson, if you really love something, you have to do the best for it and let it go....

Overall learning aims of this teaching sequence.

- To engage children with a story with which they will empathise;
- To explore, develop and sustain ideas through talk;
- To explore and interpret stories through creative activity including play, art, drama and drawing;
- To write for meaning and purpose in a variety of narrative and non-narrative forms.

This teaching sequence is designed for a Nursery or Reception class.

Overview of this teaching sequence.

This teaching sequence is approximately 2-3 weeks long if spread out over a series of sessions. The book supports teachers to teach about emotional response to narrative fiction. The narrative structure is carefully crafted to be thought-provoking and the characters and settings are well drawn, offering young readers a good model for their own role play, experimentation and to structure writing to record and enhance their play.

Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework 2012:

Prime Area: Communication and Language

Listening and attention:
Listen attentively in a range of situations;
Listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions;
Give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity.

Understanding:
Follow instructions involving several ideas or actions;
Answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events;

Speaking:
Express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners’ needs;
Use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future;
Develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events.

Specific Area: Literacy

Reading:
Read and understand simple sentences;
Use phonemic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately;
Read some common irregular words;
Demonstrate understanding when talking with others about what they have read.

Writing:
Use phonemic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds;
Write some irregular common words.
Write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others.
Spell some words correctly and make phonetically plausible attempts at others.

Cross Curricular Links:

Understanding the World:
This book is perfect for exploring how to care for the wild animals that live in our local area. You may want to:

- Use logs and sticks to make a habitat pile in the outside environment to attract mini beasts. See: [http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/gardening/deadwood.aspx](http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/gardening/deadwood.aspx)
- Make a bird cake or bird feeder to care for local wildlife. See: [http://www.rspb.org.uk/youth/makeanddo/index.aspx](http://www.rspb.org.uk/youth/makeanddo/index.aspx)

Expressive Arts and Design:

- Look at art inspired by natural landscapes such as art by Claude Monet.
- Children can make close observational drawings or paintings of natural objects such as flowers and leaves.
- Children can use leaves to make prints and rubbings.
Physical Development:
- Encourage the children to move like a bog baby—jumping up and down, floating on their backs, slapping their wings...Can they make their bodies ‘soft as jelly’, like he ‘had no bones’?
- Play In and Out the Dusty Bluebells, see: http://www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/Early-Years-Childcare/Documents/Traditional_playground_games.pdf

Mathematics:
- Counting bog babies – adding one more or one less. How many makes a pondful?
- Use the bog baby as a weight, find things that weigh heavier, lighter or the same.
- Make up a counting song about a bog baby to the tune of a well known song.

Ideas for Continuous Provision:

Mark making/ writing:
- As this story focuses on the wonder of the outdoors, create an outdoor writing trolley so that children can mark make freely in the outdoor environment. Include a variety of mark making materials, ready made books, clipboards, minibeast checklists etc.

Role Play:
- Create a vets where children can investigate how to look after common animals.
- Create a wildlife centre where children can find out about animals in their environment and make leaflets, information sheets, minibeast hunt ticklists etc. and collect items for nature exploring.

Small world play:
- Encourage children to use logs, sticks, stones, mud and leaves to make an outside habitat for wild animals.

Create nature explorer resource boxes.

This may include....
- Binoculars
- Bug pots
- Magnifying glasses
- Tanks lined with natural materials
- Nets
- Jars
- Clipboards, notebooks and writing materials to draw, list, mark make

Teaching Approaches:
- Reading aloud and rereading
- Responding to illustration
- Book talk
- Role Play and Drama
- Visualising

Writing Outcomes:
- Shared Journal
- Speech/Thought Bubbles
- Caption Writing
- Own and Class Books

Teaching Sessions

Before beginning this book
- Collect together a selection of natural materials such as shells, wood, twigs, leaves, gravel, pebbles and fishing nets, jars and buckets as well as images of bluebell woods.
- Plan a trip to a local park to search for bog babies or organize to go pond-dipping with a local environmental centre. The class can then research what else they can find that lives in the water. Children can make annotated drawings using clipboards and crayons and using information texts try to identify their animals on their return to school.
• Put together a collection of story and information books about pond life for children to browse and read together and display them along with magnifying glasses and other observational tools. Research together around the children’s interests and make time for children to share what they have found out.

Introducing the book: Visualising

• Read the book without showing the picture on the front of the book up to the point where the children first find the bog baby. Pause to talk with children about what they think the bog baby might look like. Suggest they listen hard to the next two or three pages and paint a picture in their mind’s eye.
• Then carry on reading but without showing the illustration to the point where they take him home and hide him in the shed
• Ask children to share their ideas of how they think the bog baby might look. Suggest they create one of their own using playdough. Supply children with a variety of materials to work with such as scraps of blue net, feathers, twigs, tissue, glitter and wool.
• When they are finished ask them to introduce their bog babies to a friend. What is he like? What does he like to do or eat? Does he make a noise?
• Using digital cameras each child should take a photograph of their own Bog baby and write a caption to accompany it.

Shared writing

• Using shared writing write some class instructions to give to another group so that they can make bog babies of their own. Make some folded books for children to use independently.

Responding to illustration and booktalk

• Show the children the first picture of the girls in the shed inviting them to predict what they think is going to happen next and to justify their predictions. What do they think mum would say if she knew the truth? What do they think will happen to the bog baby? Scribe some of the children’s ideas on a flip chart to refer back to later.
• Go on to read aloud the story from beginning to end.
• Talk with the children about the things that they liked or the things that they didn’t like about the story, returning to favourite pictures to explore the detail together.

Responding to illustration and drama

• Revisit the picture where mum discovers the girls in the shed.
• Sit the children in a circle and ask groups in turn to go into the middle to make freeze-frames of the scene. If children are new to this you might want to take the role of mum first.
• What is each individual (including the cat) thinking?
• Ask individual children to choose a character to write a thought bubble for.
• Can the other children guess whose thoughts these are?

Debate and argument

• Talk with children about why they think the girls behaved as they did. Do they think they were right to let the bog baby go?
• What do they think would have happened if their mum hadn’t discovered them?

Book Talk

• Children can respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions;
• Children are able to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events.

• The story tells us that the girls loved the bog baby sooooo much.
• Talk with the children about the things that they love that much and using shared writing make a list.
• Invite children to draw pictures of each of these things and present them as a class poster.

Storytelling and ICT

• Children can use simple sentences and begin to use more complex sentences to link thoughts;
• Children can attempt to write short sentences in meaningful contexts.

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• Make a book about the bog baby’s day in school.
• With the children’s help place a Bog Baby in different places in the classroom and take photographs of him.
• Play the photographs through the interactive whiteboard and with the children’s help storytell the story from both the children’s point of view and from the bog baby’s point of view- (eg *And then they put the bog baby in the sand tray. The children said.....but the Bog baby thought......*)
• This story can then be made into a class book with children writing their own captions and thought bubbles. More experienced writers can go on to draw and write their own accounts of his visit using small home-made books.

### Re-enactment through play
- Where do the children think the bog baby would be happiest spending his day if he came to school, and what sorts of things would help him feel at home?
- With the children’s help create a large scale habitat for the bog baby in the water tray outside.

### Mind-mapping and information writing
- What would someone need to know if they were ever lucky enough to find a bog baby? Using shared writing make a mind-map together of all the things that the children already know about bog babies sorting them by categories such as what he is like, what he eats, where he lives.
- Children go on to write information booklets about bog babies and send them to the address at the back of the book.
- Provide a variety of blue materials including collage, paint, pastels or diluted blue ink for children to use to create the ‘magic pond’ where the bog baby lives.

### Pets research
- What other sorts of pets do people keep?
- Suggest children try and find out, putting the children into pairs to interview some of the adults about their own pets; both within the school community and at home.
- They could record what they find out as drawings, take photos or record the ‘interview’ using sound recorders or easy speak microphones. Make a display of the findings.

### Other ideas and Activities:

#### Phonological Awareness:

1) **Word collection** – use and application at Phases 2/3/4 of Letters and Sounds  
   **Phase 2 words:**  
   Bog, dell, mud, bucket, tub, sick  
   **Phase 3 words:**  
   Fish, wings, jar, shed, shell, wool, wood, moon,  
   **Phase 4 words:**  
   Pond, spring, frog, flower, sandpit, jump, sleep

2) **Rhythm and Rhyme:**  
   Sing songs and rhymes about natural creatures, e.g.:  
   Incey Wincy Spider  
   Ladybird, Ladybird  
   Wiggly Woo

Other Writing opportunities:

- Letters- to persuade others to leave bog baby where he is  
- maps of the story setting to help people to find a bog baby  
- booklets telling others how to look after a bog baby  
- a menu of Bog baby’s favourite things to eat