

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Running on Empty by S.E. Durrant (Nosy Crow)

1. Explore it

Read the extract from the book below, thinking about what is happening and the characters you meet:



The Best Trainers in the World

I'm running so fast my feet don't touch the ground. I don't notice at first. I think I must be wearing the best trainers in the world and then I realise I'm sort of flying. And someone shouts. "Look at that boy!" and the crowd roars and I can't even see where I'm running because I'm going so fast everything's a blur. All I know is at this moment I'm the happiest, fastest, most brilliant eleven-year-old boy in the world. And somewhere Grandad's watching.

And then I'm back in the real world because I wasn't really running so fast I was flying. I was sitting on my bed gazing into space. And now Mum's put the kettle on and the switch is broken so if you don't turn it off at the plug the steam comes all the way up the stairs. That's how small our house is. And I can't stand it. I'm not kidding. I can't stand the kettle bubbling away on its own like it's going to explode.

I run down to the kitchen and flick the switch. The back door's open. Mum's standing in the garden with Dad looking at the sunflowers. She sees me and smiles.

"AJ," she says. "Thank you."

She looks at Dad.

"That's kind, isn't it, Eddie?"

Dad nods.

"Yup," he says.

"Very kind," says Mum.

We've got the tallest sunflowers ever this year. They're drooping now and a squirrel keeps stealing the seeds but they still look amazing.

It's sort of disappointing to wake up from a daydream. Because I'm not on a track with a crowd of people cheering me on, I'm in a little house with creaky stairs and a leaking roof and I'm pouring water into Mum's chipped teapot. I couldn't even spin round in my room if I wanted to. I'd knock myself out. Maybe that's why I've got such a big imagination.

What do you think is happening in this extract? Who are the central characters? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences?

Re-read the extract to yourself and think about the character of AJ. What do you learn about him as a character? What do you learn about his family? What makes you think these things?

Now think about the setting. What do you find out about AJ's home? How does he feel about it? How do you know? How is the world of his daydreams different from his real life? What words describe how he feels in his dreams? What words might you choose to describe him as he is?

Re-read the extract and think about how this part of the story makes you feel. How do you feel about AJ and his situation? What is it about the way the extract is written that makes you feel this way? Think about how it is written. Do any parts really stick in your mind? Which words and phrases do you like best? What do you like about them? Do they look or sound interesting? What do you picture in your mind as you read?

2. Illustrate it

Re-read the passage, ask someone to read it to you, or maybe record it for yourself so you can play it over again. After you have read the extract a few times, think about what you can see in your imagination. What

stands out most for you? Then take a pen or pencil and a piece of paper. If you don't have one to hand, you can use the back of an old envelope, letter or cereal packet.

Draw what you see in your mind's eye; anything that captures the place, action or mood in this extract. Which part captured your interest the most? AJ sitting on his bed, daydreaming? The actual daydream itself? Mum and Dad looking at the sunflowers in the back garden or the broken kettle, '***bubbling away on its own like it's going to explode.***' If you have coloured pencils, crayons or felt tips, you can think about how to use these to help capture the mood of the moment you have chosen.

Remember, everyone has their own ideas and imagines things their own way. This is a good thing! Add any words and phrases that have helped you make your picture, which might come from the passage or from your own imagination.

3. Talk about it

- Think about the final sentence of the first paragraph of the extract, ***And somewhere Grandad's watching.*** What do you think this means? Why do you think this thought snaps him ***back in the real world?***
- Why do you think the author places such a focus on the broken kettle, and uses the figurative phrase, '***bubbling away on its own like it's going to explode.***' What else could this be compared to? Why do you think the author has done this in this way?
- How does the mood of the extract change as we move from the inside of the house to the outside? Why do you think this is?
- Think about the impact of the adjectives used in the last paragraph, ***a little house, creaky stairs, a leaky roof, Mum's chipped teapot.*** How do these give a greater insight into AJ's family's situation?
- Think again about the final sentence of the extract, ***Maybe that's why I've got such a big imagination.*** Why do you think AJ says this? Why might he lose himself in his daydreams? Why do you think he might dream of running?

4. Imagine it

Think about the different emotions that AJ goes through in the extract. What in his life do you think makes him feel free? Frustrated? Happy? Sad? What factors in his life might be contributing to his emotional reactions? How does he deal with his differing emotions? What are the positive aspects of his life that support him in staying resilient, despite the harder aspects? What should he focus on to stop him feeling too negative about his situation? How could you help yourself or others who might have feelings of stress, anger, sadness or worry to feel more at ease? Write your ideas down, either as a list or as a letter to AJ.

5. Create it

In the extract, AJ loses himself in his ultimate fantasy daydream; being an incredible runner with crowds of people cheering him on. What is your ultimate daydream? Does it involve being incredible at something like? Does it involve visiting a special place? Or living a different life from the one you have now in the future?

Think about the detail and description that S.E. Durrant uses in the first paragraph to enable us to feel as if we are watching AJ run. Can you write about your own ultimate daydream in this way? What language will you use so that your reader can capture the sights, sounds, feelings and experience of being in that moment with you? What words will you use to describe how this situation makes you feel?