

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Where do you go, Birdy Jones by Joanna Nadin (Hachette)



1. Explore it

Read the extract from the book below, thinking about what is happening and the characters you meet. You might enjoy hearing it read aloud before revisiting it for yourself.

Chapter One

Who am I?

Birdy mouths the words from the whiteboard, repeats them over and over in her head like a football chant.

Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?

But the answer always comes back the same. I don't know.

It's for her new school, Miss Higgins says.

They're all to do it; write it in the booklet and stick in pictures of their family and their friends and all. They're to tell the teachers at the Academy what they were like as a baby, what they like to do now, and what they want to do when they're grown up.

Thing is, Birdy don't rightly know how to answer any of them questions. So by the time Miss Higgins has come round the

class to peer over her shoulder she's only managed three lines:

Name: *Birdy Jones*

Age: *11*

Address: *27, Beasley Street*

She were going to put "Birdy" but then she'd have another load of nose-poking teachers and goggle-eyed kids to explain it to: how she were called it as a joke when she were little. How it stuck because of the birds. She's not sure she wants everyone knowing about that. Who else has pigeons, after all? No one in her class, that's for sure. And no one else has got a dead mam, neither.

"What about books?" suggests Miss Higgins. "You like reading, don't you?"

"Aye." Birdy nods, adding the word to the few she's got. 'Cause she does love stories. Has done ever since she can remember. Even since her dad stopped

reading to her 'cause the words got too long, though he said it was 'cause he hadn't the time, what with tucking Minnie into bed and getting out on shift. So then she just told herself tales or stole Dogger's, or borrowed books from the library and read them out loud to the birds for their own bedtime. One about a flying carpet and a phoenix who lived in the fire; one about an orphan who lived with her own grandpa and the goats he kept in another kind of loft in the mountains; and one about a wizard in a land called Oz and a girl who flew to meet him in her very own house. That one she already knew 'cause she'd watched the film on the telly with her dad once, snug under the musty crook of his arm so's she could hide when the flying monkeys screeched through the air. "There's no place like home," he'd told her then, "and don't you forget it."

What is happening and where is it taking place? What do you picture in your mind as you read? Whose viewpoint are we sharing? How is the main character feeling right now? What tells you this? Can you summarise what is happening in two or three sentences?

Re-read the extract and think about how this part of the story makes you feel. What do you like about it? What do you dislike? Does it remind you of anything you know from stories or real life? Do you have any questions about what you've read? Think about how it is written. Do any parts really stick in your mind? Do you notice anything about the language used? Reflect on how Birdy feels about answering the question *Who am I?* Would you know how to answer this question? Why do you think she might feel like she doesn't know?

Think about what we learn about Birdy in this extract beyond the three lines she's managed to write about herself. What impression do you gain about her? Would you like to get to know her as a friend? Why? Why not? Is there anything that you have in common with her? Is there anything unusual or interesting about her? Do you have any questions you'd like to ask her? Can you re-read the extract and find clues about her family life and her interests?

2. Illustrate it

Reflect on how Birdy feels faced with the task of writing about herself, her teacher peering over her shoulder at the *three lines she has managed to write*. Can you illustrate this scene in ways that show her discomfort or anxiety? Draw anything that captures the place, action or mood in this extract. How do you picture her in the classroom? What is her body position, her facial expression, her gaze? What about Miss Higgins? What are the other children doing? Do they feel the same way? Does Birdy have a connection with them? How can you show this? 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

- What does **another load of nose-poking teachers and goggle-eyed children to explain it to** tell you about Birdy's experiences at school and her relationship with her classmates and teachers? What does it say about her expectations of her new school? Why do you think she feel like this?
- How does the mood of the extract change when Miss Higgins suggests reading as something Birdy enjoys? Why do you think the author has made this the longest paragraph in the extract? Birdy agrees that she **does love stories**; what do you think she likes about them? What or who does she associate with reading or telling stories? Do you know any of the stories she recalls?
- Do you think Birdy prefers certain kind of stories to others? What do you think appeals to her about the characters, the plotlines or the theme of these stories? How does this relate to dad saying **"There's no place like home and don't you forget it."**? Why would he say this to her? Where do you think Birdy feels she belongs or feels most comfortable?

4. Imagine it

Think about the discomfort that Birdy experiences in the classroom. Imagine you were her friend or her dad and she asked for your help in response to the question *Who am I?* What would you suggest she jots down on her paper? Consider what you know or can infer about Birdy Jones. Think about the kinds of things she is interested in, the people in her life or what makes her feel at ease. Can you draw her doing something that makes her happy? What do you picture in your mind? Who does it involve? How will you portray Birdy's emotions in this scene? How will this be different from her demeanour in the classroom? Think about how she seems on the front cover with her birds. 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.

5. Create it

In the extract, Birdy begins to jot words down like 'stories' to help her answer the question **Who am I?** What kinds of words or drawings would you use to describe yourself? It might be particular interests or places or people that are significant to you. It could be your favourite films, stories, characters or song lyrics. You don't have to share this with anyone if you don't want to. This is just for you so you can write or doodle freely. Does anything you have expressed on the page evoke a special memory? Take yourself into the middle of the moment as if in a daydream. What sights, sounds, feelings do you experience? What language could you use to capture this in writing? You could express this moment in poetic form. Michael Rosen has some useful advice on Poetryline to support you with this kind of writing; How I write poems: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poet-interviews/how-do-you-go-about-writing-your-poetry-0> You could go on to observe other people in their daily lives. Who are they? What do you think they are thinking or feeling as they walk down the street, wait for a bus, cook dinner, do their work? Use this to inspire you to create poems or short stories, perhaps collecting them in a free writing journal.