

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Cosmic by Frank Cottrell Boyce (Macmillan)



1. Explore it

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

On my very first day at Waterloo High, I was the tallest person on the lower-school site.

The new uniform Mum had bought at the beginning of the summer didn't fit any more and they had to send off for an extra-large lower-school blazer. I got a special dispensation to wear my own clothes for the first half-term.

When we went to get my travel pass for the bus to school, the woman in the office wouldn't believe I was school age so we had to go home and get my birth certificate. And then the next morning, when I showed it to the bus driver, she wouldn't believe it was mine, and I had to get off the bus and text Mum, and she came down and explained to the driver of the next bus that I was unusually tall for my age.

'It's not the height, love,' said the driver 'It's the stubble.'

Mum said, 'Am I going to have to do this every morning?'

'Only till we all get used to him.'

In the end, Mum sent off for a passport for me. I kept it in my pocket in case I got questioned again. Dad said, 'That'll keep you out of trouble.'

How wrong can a person be, by the way?

Dad also gave me his old mobile phone, so that if he ever lost me again he would be able to find me. His phone's got DraxWorld on it. In case you don't know, that's this cosmic application that shows you your present location, directions to anywhere from anywhere, and also live satellite photographs of anything in the world. You can use it to look at

volcanoes erupting. Tidal waves. Forest fires. Anything. Dad uses it to make sure the traffic is flowing smoothly on the bypass.

That first day at Waterloo High, I was on DraxWorld all the way to school on the 61. I used it to look at theme parks and thrill rides. I found Oblivion in Alton Towers, Space Mountain in Eurodisney, the Terror in Camelot, Thunder Dolphin, Air... all of them. As the bus was crawling along Waterloo Road I typed in Waterloo, wondering if I'd be able to get a satellite view of me on the bus. Instead the screen filled up with ten thousand options. There were Waterloos everywhere. Waterloo Station in London. Waterloo the port in Sierra Leone. Waterloo in Belgium. You could go round the whole world from Waterloo to Waterloo.

I found Waterloos with waterfalls, Waterloos in the jungle, Waterloos in snowy mountains and Waterloos with sandy white beaches. I couldn't figure out why anyone who wanted to live in a Waterloo would think — yes, Waterloo, but not the one with the big beach, or the limitless white wastes of Siberia; no, the one with the flyover, handy for the New Strand Shopping Centre.

DraxWorld gives you directions to anywhere, so it's not like it would be hard. If you were a proper grown-up and not just a stubby boy — if you were my dad, for instance - all you'd have to do is fill your car with petrol, turn left, turn right, go straight on and next thing you know: white beaches, snowy mountains, coral reefs. Truly, grown-upness is wasted on grown-ups.

What is happening in this extract? Who are the central characters? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences? Now, think about how this extract makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you know in stories or real life? How? Think about how it is written. Do any parts of the extract 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? Do they help you make a picture in your mind?

Think about Liam, the central character whose voice we hear. What do you think you know about him, his start to secondary school, his family situation? What can you tell about his life from the words that you see? What kind of personality do you think he might have? How would you describe him? What clues do

you get to the time and place the story might be set? Does it remind you of real life and the present day, or are there things that suggest the way the story might develop?

2. Illustrate it

Re-read the passage, or 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 – people, places, objects or events; whatever stood out most to you. Then take a pen or pencil and a bit of scrap paper. You can use the back of an old envelope, letter or cereal packet; whatever is to hand if you don't have paper. Draw what you see in your imagination; anything that captures the place and the mood of this story opening. It might be interesting to share the passage with a friend or family member and see what they draw, then compare it with what you have drawn: did you draw Liam alone, or with his mum and dad, or on the bus, or maybe you drew the DraxPhone screen? 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

- How do you think Liam feels to be starting a new school? How did you feel when you started a new school, or a new year group with a new teacher?
- How do you think these feelings might be affected by the fact Liam feels different from other boys his age?
- How do you think Liam and his mum and dad all get on? What clues do you get about their different interests and personalities? How does this compare to your own family or to other families you know?

4. Imagine it

Liam looks old for his age. In the story, this has some very interesting consequences. As he says, '**grown-upness is wasted on grown-ups**'. Imagine that, like Liam, you can also pass for someone older. How do you think this would affect you? Are there things that you might do although you're not supposed to do them until you're older? What kind of things would you want to do? Do you think you'd feel the same doing them – for example, driving a car – when you were 10 or 11 as when you were say 17 or 18? Why? Why not?

Why do you think there are restrictions on the age at which you can do certain things? Maybe you could make a 'bucket list' of things you'd like to do when you are old enough to do them. Or you could imagine things from a different viewpoint, as a grown-up (or someone like Liam who people think is a grown-up) and make a list of things you might miss doing when you are seen as too old to do them any more?

5. Create it

Liam has a DraxPhone, which sounds like an amazing device. Do you think Liam thinks his dad is making the most of it? Why? Why not? Think about the DraxPhone, and create a full-page advert for all of the incredible features you'd like your dream smartphone to have. Then write a letter to your family explaining why you absolutely have to have one before you start secondary school. What are the features that would appeal to them and let you have one? Are there any features you wouldn't want them to know about? How will you persuade them? You could share your advert and letter with friends or family and see what impact it has on them: can your friends suggest improvements? Would your family be persuaded?