

TEACHING GUIDE by NIKKI GAMBLE

Traction Man meets TurboDog and Traction Man is Here



by Mini Grey

 Kids at
Random House

ISBN: 978-0224070485

ISBN: 978-0099451099

CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Both Traction Man books could be used as a basis for a narrative unit on adventure stories or a unit on stories with familiar settings for pupils in lower Key Stage 2. They are well suited to a wide age range and are sufficiently complex to engage older readers in Key Stage 2. The texts are rich in cultural allusions and intertextual references to a range of texts, most obviously comics and film but advertising and environmental print are also featured. The books are thus well suited to group and guided reading with children aged 9+. The books will have particular appeal to readers who respond well to visual and multi-modal texts.

THE BOOKS

Traction Man is Here

With an action outfit for every occasion, Traction Man patrols the house. Whether he is saving

Mini Grey was born in the front seat of a mini in an icy car-park in South Wales. She grew up in a village in Buckinghamshire with plenty of places to make camps, climb trees and pretend to be horses. As a child Mini created many bizarre objects from cardboard, clay, papier mache, dough, plaster, toilet rolls and crisp packets.

At university Mini became involved with set-building at the Bloomsbury theatre and eventually got asked to design some shows. After her degree she worked making latex puppets in a basement in Covent Garden until she was offered a place on a theatre design course. Mini loved theatre designing but she didn't earn much money. She trained to be a teacher and worked for six years in South London. She especially liked running after-school clubs in model-making and pottery.

Mini had always done bits of illustration in her spare time, and had an ambition to have a book published some day. She did a two-year MA in illustration, and made a strange pop-up book and an animation about it. Minis' most recent book is *Traction Man Meets Turbo Dog* a sequel to the very popular *Traction Man is Here!*



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toys (in latex space suit and Perspex helmet, teamed with Rocket Boots); searching the sink for the lost wreck of the sieve (in sub-aqua suit, fluorescent flippers and infra-red mask) or rescuing damsels in distress (in jungle pants, camouflage vest and a bandanna), Traction Man is never less than stylishly turned out and expertly accessorised. He is the last word in heroic fashion flair - until, that is, the day that he is presented with an all-in-one knitted green romper suit and matching bonnet by his owner's granny. Can Traction Man overcome the humiliation of his desperately dowdy new look and rediscover the action hero within or will the burden of the knitted green monstrosity be too great?

Traction Man meets Turbo Dog

Traction Man is back! And so is Scrubbing Brush, his brave and rather bedraggled pet who stays by his side through thick and thin. But one night Scrubbing Brush mysteriously vanishes and in his place is the utterly hygienic Turbodog, in indestructible Purple Plastic with Flashing Eyes, Electronic Bark and three AA batteries.

Traction Man Meets Turbodog

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Before reading

Set up a stimulus display. Here are some suggestions for display themes:

- Mini Grey, author display featuring books (see list below) posters, reading recommendations, props and artefacts, reviews, news articles (e.g. Prizes)
- Traction Man display: this might include copies of the books, a collection of 'toy stories', material from the film Toy Story, photographs of the children's favourite toys, picture of traditional toys and digital toys
- Imaginative play: use the Traction Man stories as a focal point for a display of books (in books comics and other media) featuring imaginative play. Some suggestions are given at the end of these notes.

Reading the Book in a Literature Circle

This is a small group activity and works best where there are 3 – 6 children in a group. Each child will need their own copy of the book and a notebook or reading journal.

Give each child a copy of the book and invite them to spend time reading the book and looking at the pictures. You can either allow time for children to familiarise themselves with the book at the beginning of the ses-

sion, or alternatively the children can read the book independently prior to the session. Ask them to keep their thoughts about the book to themselves at this stage.

After reading, ask the children to make notes about their initial responses in their reading journals or notebooks. It is important that their ideas are committed to paper. If they are not already familiar with this approach, they may need support. Provide some suggestions about what a response might be. Make it clear that this is not a checklist of ideas and they can include other things that you have not mentioned. Possible responses:

- This book reminds me of something that happened to me
- This book reminds me of another book I have read or a film that I have seen
- My favourite pages were XXX because XXX
- I found xxxx puzzling
- I have read these books by Mini Grey and I have noticed these similarities XXX
- Responses can also include drawings, poems or other creative ideas

Once the children have made notes in their journals, invite them to read them to other

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members of the group. At this stage the other children should listen without comment. This ensures that all responses are equally valued and makes it clear that this is not about right and wrong answers.

Now ask the children to consider whether they learnt anything new about the book from listening to what others had to say about it.

In the next stage, return to reading the book but this time encourage discussion in the group. Start by looking at the front cover. Ask the children to talk about whatever interests them. They should agree when they have exhausted their discussion and turn the pages together. Repeat this process until the book has been read and discussed. Children can take it in turns to read the pages before discussing the things they found interesting.

When the book has been read and discussed ask the group to list the three things that they found most interesting about the book to feedback to the class in a plenary session.

Things to talk about

There are many possibilities for discussion arising from this book. Here are some suggested topics. Select those that seem

most appropriate for your class or group.

- Have you ever been given a brand new toy to replace an old one but still preferred the old one?
- Have you ever seen a new toy advertised and really wanted it, only to find that you have been disappointed once you owned it? Why were you disappointed? What did you learn from this experience?
- Why do you think Traction Man and the boy in this story prefer Scrubbing Brush to his brand new shiny Turbodog? Which would you prefer? Why?
- What does loyalty mean? How important is loyalty to you? Can you remember a time when you displayed loyalty to a friend or they were loyal to you? How did that make you feel? How would you feel if someone was disloyal?
- Who do you think narrates/speaks the words in this story? Why do you think that?
- Where do you think the boy is when Traction Man is rescuing Scrubbing Brush?
- Which parts of this story do you think are the funniest? Why do you think that?
- Did you like any particular

language/words/phrases that were used in this story

- What jobs do the mum and dad in this story do? Why do they get rid of Scrubbing Brush? Do you think they are wrong or right to do this?

- Choose three words to describe Traction Man? Why did you choose those words?

Looking more closely

After using some of the discussion openers above, you may want to look more closely at particular features of the text and illustrations. Here are some suggestions:

- The way everyday objects are transformed into characters e.g. the mystic Shrooms, handbag and make-up, an old sock, remote control, cushion, old food in the dustbin, the Ancient Potato
- Look at how sequences of pictures can be used to show action (e.g. sleeping Tiddles and awake Tiddles; attacking the Bin Things with Germo)
- Use of different shaped speech bubbles and fonts. Why do Turbodog's speech bubbles have jagged edges? Why are different fonts used for Traction Man and Turbodog's speech?
- Investigate the use of onomatopoeia: clank, whirr, bleep

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etc

- Investigate the language used by the Bin Things. How does speech help to convey character?
- Perspective and point of view: in the picture showing action man looking at the garden shed, from what angle do we see the shed? What effect does this have? On the following page, from what angle do we see Traction Man? What effect does this have?
- Look again at the first page of the story can you see the places that Traction Man visits on his adventures?

Writing

Creating stories with found object characters

Mini Grey uses everyday objects and transforms them into exciting characters for her stories. Notice how some characters can be made to look friendly or sinister. Children can be shown how to create characters from objects found in the classroom or at home. Collectively brainstorm character ideas for a collection of objects. Ask the children to invent and draw their own characters. In pairs or groups, have them share character ideas and then use them as a basis for writing new stories. Offer prompts to help the children generate story ideas. For

example: where does your character come from? What is your character's greatest fear? What does your character like doing best? Who are your character's friends? Who are your character's enemies? What is the biggest challenge facing your character today?

Creating stories based on favourite toys

Ask children to bring a favourite toy or picture of a favourite toy to school. In pairs, ask them to talk about why this toy is their favourite. Who gave it to them? How long have they had it? Ask the children if they know any stories or films about toys that come to life. Briefly share their knowledge of these stories.

Now ask the children to imagine that their toy could speak. How would it describe its life in the toybox? In pairs or small groups, improvise toy monologues. Model this activity, if the children need clarification.

The children can create a storyboard for a story featuring their favourite toy as the main character. Add onomatopoeic words.

Use the storyboard as a prompt for oral storytelling. Add sound effects and dialogue when telling the story.

Design an advert for your new toy

Draw attention to the endpapers and specifically the advertisement for a Turbodog. Use a visualiser to project an enlarged image of this page onto a screen. Discuss the language used. Which are the most important words? How is attention drawn to these key words? Introduce the concept of a 'selling point'. What do you think the selling point is for this dog? (e.g. new, hygienic, high quality, speaks). Who do the children think this advert is most likely to appeal to the boy, or his parents? Encourage them to explain their thinking.

Make a collection of toy advertisements and have children discuss them:

- Who does the advert appeal to?
- How do pictures, words, colours, layout work in the advertisements?
- Where are these advertisements found? (e.g. comics, women's magazines) Does it make a difference to the way that the toy is advertised?

Collectively devise criteria for designing an effective advertisement (encourage the children to think about the importance of targeting an audience and the difference that this makes to the words and images that are used)

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Ask the children to design an advertisement for a new toy using the agreed criteria from discussing a wide range of toy advertisements.

Once finished, ask children to share their adverts and evaluate each other's working using the criteria.

Traction Man Comic – the next adventure

Traction Man Meets Turbodog is the second Traction Man Story and there is plenty of scope of developing further adventures for this character. Use the familiar characters and a familiar setting to write a sequel.

Draw attention to the endpapers, which present a comic strip story 'Mission to Mars'. Brainstorm some ideas for further Traction Man stories.

In pairs, ask the children to make a list of the characteristic features of a comic.

Look at examples to discover things like framing speech and though bubbles, narrative boxes, onomatopoeic words

Ask the children to create their own comic story. For some children you might set the additional challenge of having them create a story in exactly two pages.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books by Mini Grey

Egg Drop

Biscuit Bear

The Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon

The Pea and the Princess

All published by Random House

Stories about Play, Imagination and Found Objects

Anders Brundin, Joanna Rubin Dranger, and Frank Perry (2007) *Dudley the Daydreamer* Winged Chariot Press

Thomas Docherty (2007) *To the Beach* Templar

Kes Gray, Garry Parsons (2004) *Billy's Bucket* Red Fox

Richard Hazel Hutchins (2008) *Mattland* Annick Press

Hamilton, Helen Lanzrein (2007) *The Secret Cave*

Colin McNaughton, Satoshi Kitamura (illus.) (2005) *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day*

Jan Oke (2005) *The Naughty Bus*

Antoinette Portis (2008) *Not a Box* HarperCollins

Antoinette Portis (2008) *Not a Stick* HarperCollins

Maurice Sendak (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are* Puffin

David Wiesner (2008) *Hurricane* Clarion

Film

Toy story

Nikki Gamble is lecturer, writer and education consultant specialising in children's literature, drama and arts education. She taught undergraduate and postgraduate students on primary teacher training programmes for eleven years.

Nikki is Director of Write Away, an organisation that seeks to promote literature and the arts in education. She is currently Associate Consultant at the University Of London, Institute Of Education. Nikki is Congress Director for the IBBY World Congress 2012 and recently elected member of the IBBY Executive Committee.

Recent Publications include *Family Fictions* (2001) (with Nick Tucker); *Exploring Children's Literature* (2008) (2nd edit) *Writers' Secrets* (2008).