



A Literary Leaf for

# Overheard in a Tower Block by Joseph Coelho Year 5



**Literary Leaves - a book-based Comprehension resource Creating Critical Readers through Whole Books**

- Vocabulary explicitly taught
- Non-fiction and poetry links made
- For use in guided or whole-class

## National Curriculum comprehension coverage (coverage in bold)

Pupils should be taught to:

Maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:

- **continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks**
- **reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes**
- increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions
- recommending books that they have read to their peers, giving reasons for their choices
- **identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing**
- making comparisons within and across books
- learning a wider range of poetry by heart
- preparing poems and plays to read aloud and to perform, showing understanding through intonation, tone and volume so that the meaning is clear to an audience

Understand what they read by:

- checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context
- asking questions to improve their understanding
- drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
- predicting what might happen from details stated and implied
- summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas
- identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning

**Discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader**

Distinguish between statements of fact and opinion

Retrieve, record and present information from non-fiction

**Participate in discussions about books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, building on their own and others' ideas and challenging views courteously**

**Explain and discuss their understanding of what they have read, including through formal presentations and debates, maintaining a focus on the topic and using notes where necessary**

**Provide reasoned justifications for their views**

## Content domain coverage

Sessions	2a	2b	2c	2d	2e	2f	2g	2h
1				✓				
2	✓						✓	
3		✓		✓				
4							✓	
5	✓							
6	✓						✓	
7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9		✓	✓					
10								✓

## Book summary

Gazing at the stars from five storeys up, smelling the bins from five storeys below. Overheard arguments, overheard laughter. A disappearing father and a Mermaid-Queen mother; statues that sing for flesh and blood; bullies who kick you under the table; perfect red trainers - and the things that lurk in the library... Award-winning poet Joseph Coelho's astonishing new collection is a powerful and moving poetic narrative about growing up in the city.

## Approach to use for whole class reading

Take a group who are less fluent for reading to support decoding but work through the same passage as the whole class. If books are purchased individually, children work independently. If books are purchased for pairs, then pair together most children in mixed ability pairs to work on questions and read together.

## Approach to use for guided reading

Each session can work in isolation and could form part of a carousel using one session at a time for pre-reading on one day, focussed reading with teacher the following day and then finally as a follow-up task on day 3.

## Vocabulary development

Where relevant, sessions will begin with a short list of words to define before reading. This is an important part of each session as children will be encountering new and/or subject-specific vocabulary throughout the book which will be crucial to their understanding. Defining words could be as simple as matching words to definitions written on post-it notes but will be an essential step not to skip.

## Recording responses to text

The children need a book to record responses in, ideally a workbook which is marked for understanding of text (rather than writing) This can be called a Reading Response book or a Reading Journal, though many schools use this term for the book the children take home to record thoughts about their home reader. For the purposes of this 'Literary Leaf, we have referred to these as Reading Response books.

## Session notes

### Session 1 – Safest to wildest (2d/e)

Show children the title of the book and tell them they are going to make predictions about the book using the title.

Ask them the following question:

*What do you imagine you might hear in a tower block?*

Ask children to identify four to five different things that they might imagine could be overheard in a tower block where lots of different people live and ask them to write them down on separate post-it notes.



Now ask children in pairs to rank these predictions/responses from their 'wildest' to their 'safest' suggestion about what might be overheard, justifying why they think so each time.

## Session 2 - Literal to figurative (2a/g)

Explain that we are going to be reading a poem about a tower block (perhaps the one from the title) and that children might identify some of the things they made predictions about in the previous session.

Tell children that poets like to use imagery to paint an image in the reader's mind. Sometimes they do this by describing an object as if it were something else or with a powerful description of the thing itself. Before reading, 'tune children in' to the idea of imagery by asking them to match the objects that appear in the poem to the image created by the poet (see resources):

TV aerials	mouth of the block
satellite dishes	stone cold
bin chute	hiss for more
dinners	rumble of hunger
tissues	soaked in tears
whistle of wind	dead branches
slam of doors	dead eyes

### Read *Binley House* as a group (pages 10-11).

Now ask children to check, and rematch if necessary, the literal object to the figurative image it is described as in the poem. *Why might these figurative devices have been used? What other figurative devices are there, e.g. simile, personification?* Ask children to sort the pairings into three groups: *simile, personification, metaphor*. They may need to refer to the whole line of the poem to do this accurately. *Is there any crossover?*

Ask children to write a full response to the following question: *How does the poet describe the block as being like a zombie? What images does he use?*

## Session 3 – Good times, bad times (2d)

### Re-read *Binley House* as a group (pages 10-11), taking it in turns to read each stanza.

The poet describes 'the good times, the bad times'. As a group, list some of these in the table below:

Good Times	Bad Times

- 1) What impression does the author give of living in a tower block? Do you think it is a good or bad thing? What words tell us this?
- 2) What could be the cause of the 'slam of distant doors'?
- 3) Re-read the last stanza. Can you rewrite the last part of the poem in prose?

## Session 4 – Extended metaphors (2g)

Read *Light-Bringer – Prometheus 1* (pages 22-23).

Ask children if any of them have heard of the Prometheus myth from Greek mythology. Share with them the story of Prometheus and also that the 'Lightbringer' was also a name given to Lucifer/the devil.

The imagery all the way through the poem refers to fire/light etc. Provide children with a photocopy of the poem and ask them to annotate it by identifying examples of imagery and having a good guess at what they think it is being used for, e.g. *quick as a firework describes how speedily Prometheus moves.*

Tell children that an extended metaphor is sometimes referred to as a 'conceit' in a poem.

- 1) Why do you think the poet has chosen to use light/fire as the extended metaphor in this poem?
- 2) What effect does this metaphor have on you as the reader? How does it change the poem?
- 3) Can you think of any other fire metaphors or similes that the poet might have used in this poem? List them below.

## Session 5 – Words in context (2a)

Show children the following list of words (see resources) and ask them to predict the meaning of the words, using skills such as identifying the word class, looking for words-within-words and also making connections to other known words.

Word	Prediction	Meaning
malefic		
clanged		
droning		
quivered		
ventured		
linger		
savoured		

Now read *The Watchers* (pages 36-39).

Find the above words in the poem and ask children to use the poem to now decide upon the meaning, using a dictionary where necessary to clarify their definitions. *Were their predictions correct?*

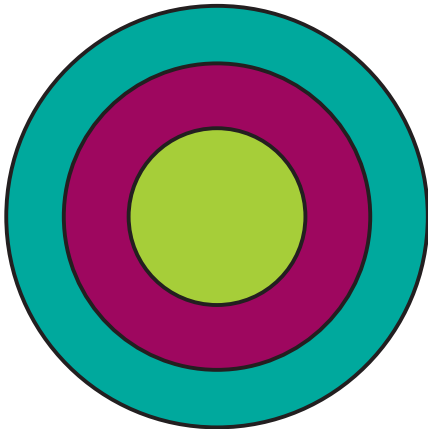
Discuss the meaning of the poem and what is happening and what they think it is about. Now answer the following questions, modelling the first explicitly before letting the children answer the rest independently.

- 1) Where are the statues? How do you know?  
*The statues are by the railway tracks because it says 'down by the crossed tracks'.*
- 2) What words tell us the statues are bad?
- 3) What word tells you that the stones bounced loudly off the statues' heads?
- 4) What word is closest in meaning to the word quivered:  
a. trembled  
b. a sound similar to singing  
c. danced
- 5) What phrases tell us that they were afraid to go near the statues?
- 6) What word tells us that the child's journey was unsafe?
- 7) Which synonym could be used in place of 'savoured' in the second to last verse?

## Session 6 – Literal (and figurative) retrieval (2a/g)

Re-read the second half of *The Watchers* on page 38.

Complete a **zone of relevance** (see resources) to select language for how you think the children felt about the statues:



tense	peaceful	turbulent
menacing	threatening	intimidating
hostile	hopeful	bleak
warm	comforting	bright
cold	perilous	disturbing

- 1) Why do you think the girl's finger stung? What had happened to her finger?
- 2) What was the surface of the statues like?
- 3) What was the 'smudge of red'?
- 4) Why did the children run screaming?
- 5) Why do you think this poem is called *The Watchers*? Who are the watchers and why might they be watching?
- 6) Does this poem remind you of anything else you may have read, particularly any poems?

## Session 7 – Assorted response

Read *The Guy* on pages 66-67 as a class.

Explain that, based on the poems we have covered so far, children will have the opportunity to respond to questions from a variety of assessment areas. Answer the first as a group in order to model a succinct response.

Teachers may wish to provide questions cut up on strips for children to select and answer in any order.

Assessment area	Question
2a	Give the meaning of the word binding in this poem.
2a	Find and copy one word meaning fat.
2b	Through whose eyes is the story told?
2b	What has happened to the narrator's Guy in the last verse?
2c	What happens in the poem?
2d	Which words give you the impression that the Guy is not very well made?
2d	Can you explain what the coppers are and why they keep slipping through the Guy's fingers?
2e	Do you think that the narrator collected much money for their Guy? Explain your answer with evidence from the text.
2f	What are the clues that the narrator is impressed by the other Guys?
2g	How has the poet made you feel about the people who made the Guy?

## Session 8 – Question Quotas

### Independent reading of *Wandering* (pages 68-69).

Discuss the meaning of the poem including identifying any unfamiliar language and possible meanings. *What is the structure of the poem throughout? Why is this effective?*

*Why do you think the poet has used the image of a seed in the final stanza?*

Explain that you would like children to come up with their own questions using some of the same question stems from the previous session.

- 1) Find and copy one word meaning \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) Which words give you the impression that \_\_\_\_\_?
- 3) Do you think \_\_\_\_\_?
- 4) What are the clues that \_\_\_\_\_?
- 5) How has the poet made you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?

## Session 9 – Select and Summarise (2f)

### Read *Electri-city* (pages 80-81).

Complete the following table about the ideas from the poem (see Appendix 4):

In <i>Electri-city</i>	
The children are...	Ideas...
The adults are...	Emotions...

Now, model answering the first question and then children to answer the rest independently.

- 1) What do you think the poem is about?
- 2) Whose 'side' is the poet on?
- 3) Why are the adults 'flat'?
- 4) What word is closest in meaning to 'flat' here?
  - a) smooth
  - b) boring
  - c) lifeless?
- 5) Why have you got to be connected?
- 6) Why is POW! written in capital letters and with an exclamation mark?
- 7) Why do you think the author has used a 'city' to create this extended metaphor?

Additional open-ended writing outcome: Could you create a metaphor for a city and write a poem about it?

## Session 10 – Connecting up (2h):

**Words to define before reading: teetered, doleful, lulled**

**Read *Teetering Towers* on pages 74-75 as a class.**

*What poem(s) that we have already read does this remind you of?*

Ask children to complete a similarities and differences table for the two poems.

Similarities	Differences

- 1) What was the music like that they heard?
- 2) Who was making the sound?
- 3) Why weren't they expecting the statues to be warm?
- 4) What were the secrets they had promised to keep?
- 5) Does the poem remind you of any personal experiences or something that has happened to you? Describe how.
- 6) How did the poem make you feel? Can you explain why?

## Objects and imagery

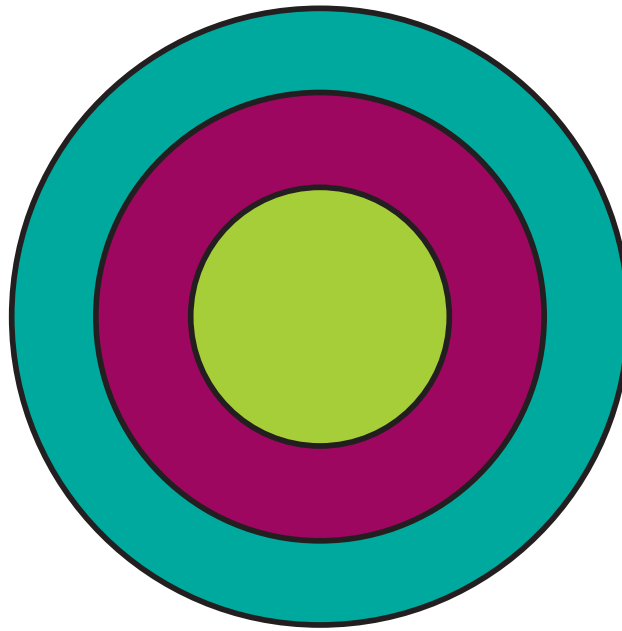
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satellite dishes	stone cold
bin chute	hiss for more
dinners	rumble of hunger
tissues	soaked in tears
whistle of wind	dead branches
slam of doors	dead eyes

## Predicted meanings

Word	Prediction	Meaning
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## Zone of relevance



tense	peaceful	turbulent
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warm	comforting	bright
cold	perilous	disturbing

## In Electri-city

In Electri-city	
The children are...	Ideas...
The adults are...	Emotions...