

TEACHER NOTES
for
Rachel Rooney



A
KID IN MY
CLASS



1

The Cover

INTRODUCTION

It is useful to let children look at the whole book before opening it to read what's inside. A lot of good discussion can be had by considering the cover and endpapers.



THE LESSON

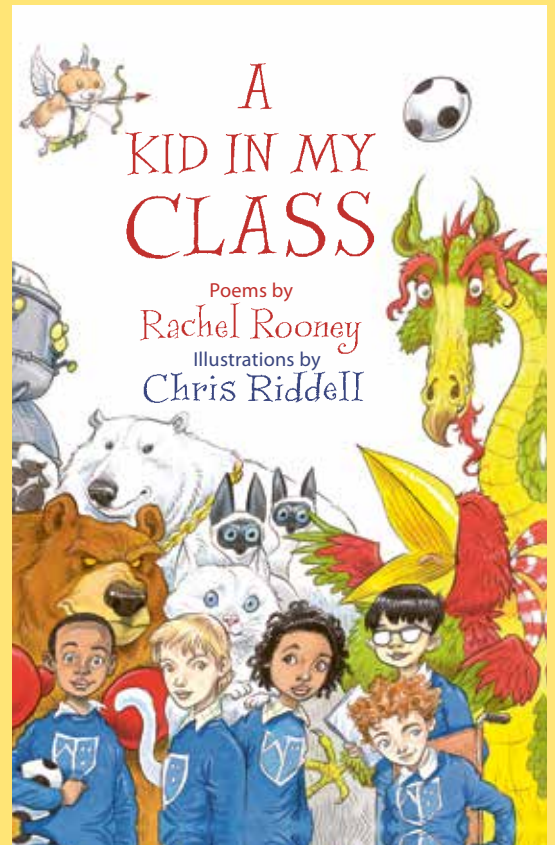
Look at the front cover.

Invite the class to pose questions or make comments about the picture it shows. (Make sure to open the book out flat to include the whole wraparound jacket illustration.) You might want to start off the questioning like this...

“Hmm... I wonder why there’s a flying hamster in the corner there... and why is it firing a bow and arrow? Does anyone think they know?”

Although the children won’t have read the poems yet, it is important to invite them to connect any prior knowledge to the pictures.

Record all the questions that the children have by writing them on a large sheet of paper, or recording electronically. Alternatively, get the children to write their questions on separate sticky notes and at the end, display them all on a large sheet for the whole class to consider.



WRAPPING UP

Look at all the questions collected so far. Encourage the children to add further questions (or comments) as they read the book – they may be able to answer some of their questions after reading!

Also, consider the connection between title and cover:

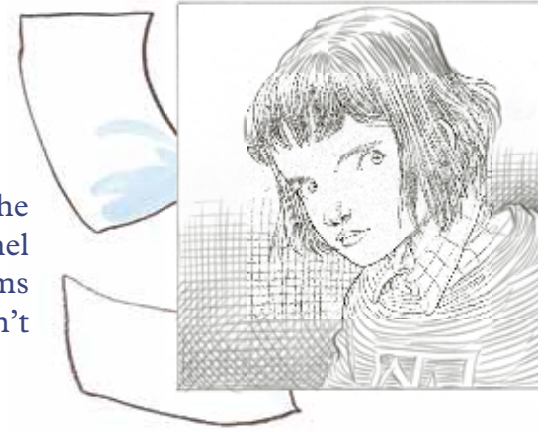
“This book is called ‘A Kid in My Class’. I wonder why there are lots of animals and fantastic creatures as well as the five children. Is this a fantasy class do you think? Or could the beasts mean something else...?”



'The Poet'

INTRODUCTION

In 'The Poet' many ordinary things are seen as 'poems' to the child-poet. In this activity, the children can explore how Rachel Rooney ('The Poet') notices 'the ordinary' and creates poems that explore things that many of us take for granted and don't necessarily 'see'...



THE LESSON

Read 'The Poet'. (p. 16)

Make a list of all the things in the poem that 'The Poet' thinks are poems in themselves, e.g. the light through the blind.

Now encourage the children to look closely at the list.

Ask:

- What do you notice?
- What do you think The Poet might be like if you got to meet them and talk with them?
- What is it in the poem that makes you think this?

Rachel Rooney says about her own personality that she can spot a number of the children drawn in the poems. As a poet, this poem must have a link to her! In so many of the poems in the book, she notices ordinary, everyday things and focuses on them to create her own poem. Choose a selection of the poems to read and explore: what are the 'ordinary' things that the poet makes 'extraordinary'?



Examples:

POEM	EVERYDAY THINGS THAT 'THE POET' NOTICES AND EXPLORES
Copycat	Teasing
Keepy-Uppy Kid	Football skills

WRAPPING UP

After the lesson, are there any other 'ordinary', 'everyday' things about school life that would make a good poem? Maybe the children could write their own collection!



3

Kennings for 'Fidget'

INTRODUCTION

In 'A Kid in my Class', Rachel Rooney uses a range of forms to express her meaning. In this activity, the children are invited to consider the form she uses for 'Fidget' and ultimately suggest reasons why she wrote the poem that way for that subject.



THE LESSON

Read 'Fidget'.

Discuss what the poem describes. You may also like to explore the world of 'Fiddle Toys' with the class. What different kinds are available? Which are their favourites, and why? How would you describe what the Fidget might do with a particular toy – bubble burster, button pusher, click clacker...

Now talk about what the children notice about the words Rooney uses. After a brief discussion, focus on the fact that all the descriptions of the Fidget are in paired word groups (e.g. Knuckle Clicker, Hole Puncher).

Establish that Rooney uses kennings to describe her character. Each of those paired words are a single 'kenning'. Explore why she has used kennings...

1. Is there anything about the sound of them?
2. Is there anything in the patterns she makes?
3. Is there anything about the shortness of each description?
4. Is there anything about the structural regularity of the kenning?

Encourage children to think about the subject of the poem - the Fidget. Can he not sit still (so the kennings keep changing to create an unsettled tone)? Or can he not concentrate (the kennings are so short, like his attention span)?

Now ask the children to choose a poem (or work on one from the collection as a class). What kennings would you use to 'rewrite' the poem you've chosen?



WRAPPING UP

Listen to the children's new kennings to describe particular characters. Do they 'work' well for that character? Or not? If not, why do you think they don't work... and why do they work so well for 'The Fidget'?



4 Performing poems

INTRODUCTION

The range of poetic styles and subjects in the collection calls for an understanding of a wide variety of performing styles. In this session, the children look at a mini-collection of poems from 'A Kid in My Class' to focus on how they feel they should be performed aloud.



THE LESSON

Good examples of the poems that would inspire great oral performances include: Keepy-Uppy Kid, Copycat, Drama Queen Award, Joe Bloggs, Whizz Kid, The Questioner, Prefect.

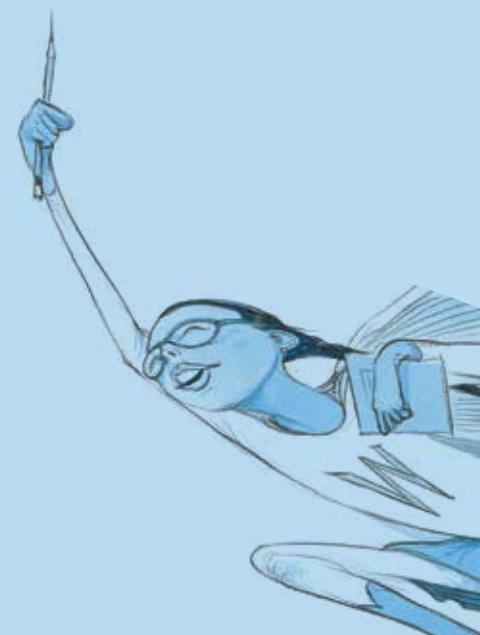
Introduce the idea to the children that by reading the poems out loud, you can reveal more of the story that the poet is telling. There are a number of poems in the collection that have special features that you can unlock when you know how to read them aloud. Read through a few of the poems given in the list above.

- What do you notice about HOW the poems are written?
- Are there any patterns you notice?
- Who is 'saying' the poem? One person? More than one? A child? A grown-up?

In pairs or threes, take one poem that you particularly enjoy. How should it be performed? Think about the following techniques:

- Using more than one voice
- Reading with a special rhythm (if the poem needs it)
- Using facial expressions
- Using your voice in different ways (sounds, volume...)

Remember to think about WHY you are making these choices: they should help the listener to understand what the poem is trying to say about its subject.



WRAPPING UP

After the lesson, encourage the children to practise their performances, and make video or audio recordings of how they feel the poems would best be recited. Share these as an audio-visual collection with another class - what do they feel works best about the performances?



Illustrations

INTRODUCTION

Chris Riddell's drawings show both the 'real life' portrait of the child, then something more metaphorical, imaginative or original about the subject of the poem.

In this lesson, the children learn to make connections between the poems and their illustrations, to understand how the illustrations show realism and metaphorical interpretations of the poems, and to consider what Riddell's intentions might be.

(After this lesson, it's a good idea to look at the cover again - discuss what the cover shows and how it connects to the whole book's contents.)



THE LESSON

Give out some of the pictures that Chris Riddell has drawn to illustrate individual poems.

Ask:

- Why is there a picture of a child in a box on each page?
- Why is there a bigger picture surrounding/next to the small box portrait?

Share the page with 'Cool'.

Ask:

- **What words do you think of straight away when you see the picture? (Prompt the children if needed. What do you see? What do you feel?)**

Make a list of their words.

Now compare the list of words to the poem itself. Which of the words connect to the poem? Which don't?

You can repeat this activity with the children working independently. Ask the children to choose a poem and accompanying illustration that interests them, and repeat the questions above. Children can make their own lists to fit with the poem they have chosen individually.



WRAPPING UP

Ask:

Do you think Chris Riddell is trying to make his illustrations:

1. A picture of what the poem says?
2. A picture of its own?
3. A picture which has some of the poem in it and some of his own 'story' in it?

Are all the illustrations like this?

Can you find an example of (a) (b) and (c) from the whole book?



6

'Dear Reader'

INTRODUCTION

At the very beginning of the book, Rachel Rooney says she can spot herself in a number of the characters described in the poem. This lesson connects the content of the poems to the reader on a very personal level. Reading should be about both viewing lives and stories as well as reflecting back things about ourselves – both the good and bad!

(Please note: sensitivity should be employed to ensure that no child feels put on the spot to talk about any particularly personal things they do not feel comfortable to share. Also make sure that the classroom is a safe space and ensure that children don't say 'This poem is like X'.)



THE LESSON

Ask the children to draw a picture of themselves in the middle of a piece of paper.

Pass around small sticky notes so that each child has access to a small stack of them.

Read the 'Dear Reader' section to the class.

Look at the lists of the different children depicted in the book.

Ask:

- Which of these children do you feel is a bit like you? Write one on a sticky note, and stick it around the picture you have drawn.
- Which parts of the poem really made you connect to this character and poem? Copy any parts onto the paper around the sticky note.

Repeat the above two action points with other poems, writing the character on a post-it and a quote from the poem on the paper. Remind the children that Rachel says there are different poems that connect to her (and it might not be the whole poem!)

By the end of the activity, the children should have four or five quotes that they feel are particularly connected to them.



WRAPPING UP

Encourage any children who would like to share the quotations they have chosen to read them to the class. Remind the other children to be respectful of the child's choices.

Finally, ask:

Why do you think Rachel Rooney suggests that you do this sort of thinking using her book 'A Kid in My Class'? What has it shown you?



Groups

INTRODUCTION

This is an activity which is all about having fun with the characters that the children have read about in 'A Kid in My Class'. And the children get to be the teacher!

Once they have read, discussed and thought about the poems in the book, they will be quite familiar with the range of characters in the book's pages.

This is a good activity to get the children to talk about the connections between poems/characters and to appreciate the variety and similarities amongst the 'class' that Rachel Rooney has depicted.



THE LESSON

Imagine that the children in the poems are all members of a class: the children pictured in thirty-two of the poems would form a full class, in actual fact! (There is a thirty-third child, but that she forms the sad absence of the girl pictured in 'Friendship Bench'.)

Teachers often have to organise children into groups, to do their work in the class or to stick together on school trips. What if you were the teacher for the class in the book? How would you organise this class?

Ask the children to make their own plan of a classroom with table groups of 2, 4 or 6 and organise the children from the poems into groups. Ensure the children have the names of the poems to hand (these are printed on a separate 'cards' on the Activity Sheet at the end of these notes, each of which can be cut out and moved physically around the plans that the children make).

While the children are sorting the groups, you might like to stop from time to time and ask:

- Are any of the children particularly easy or difficult to group? What makes them so?
- Are there any particular ways in which you are organising the class?
- How are you making the groups work well together? Are there any pairs of children who would be better *not* sitting together?! Why?



WRAPPING UP

Ask each group to choose one of the groups they have made, and ask a spokesperson from the group to talk about why they put the children together.

- Was this an easy or difficult task to do? What made it easy or difficult?
- Does the class that you have sorted into groups feel like a real class? Is there anything about the class that seems unbelievable?



Activity sheet for 'Groups'



First

The Poet

Whizz Kid

Tomboy

A Girl

Her~Ku

Best Friender

Twins

Talking Hands

Daydreamer

Accident Prone

Joe Bloggs

Keepy~Uppy Kid

Cool

The Crush

Joker

Don't Walk, Run!

Ravenous

Tough Kid

Wordsmith

Sticker

The Artist

Dishonest

New Boy

Shy

Fidget

Seeker

Copycat

Inscrutable

Drama Queen

The Questioner

Perfect