

THE SECOND- HAND BOY



Teaching Resources

BEFORE READING

Take a few moments to look at *The Second-Hand Boy's* cover and title. Discuss together:

- What is interesting about the book's title and cover? What is the best bit?
- Looking at the illustrations and title, what does the class think the book is about?
- What does 'second-hand' mean? Do you have anything second-hand at home or that has been passed down to you by a brother, sister or cousin?
- Does it remind you of other books you've read?
- What questions do you have about the book based on the cover?

Now read the book's blurb:

When his best friend leaves town, Billy finds himself all alone as his world comes crashing down around him. Between swerving the bullies and looking after Mum, there seems to be no escape from his problems. However, when Mum gives him a second-hand book, everything changes. Billy finds himself drawn into an icy world of parallel universes where things aren't quite as they seem...

- In pairs or as a table, discuss a time when reading a book helped you feel better.
- What was the book and what did you like about it?
- What is bullying? And how might it make someone feel?
- Would you help Billy or someone at school being bullied? What would you do?
- Billy often has to take care of his mum when she's not feeling well. Children who look after their parents or someone else in the home are called young carers. Have a discussion about what young carers have to do and why they might need extra help.



THE SECOND-HAND BOY

ACTIVITY #1

There are lots of big ideas and themes to explore in *The Second-Hand Boy*.

As you read, keep an eye out for the themes on your theme sheet below. When you find an interesting quote, jot it down as well as the page number. Then have a think about what this quote means to you. Do you have a favourite?

Discuss your quotes in pairs or as a group.

Friendship

Theme Quote & page nr
What it means to you?

Bullying

Theme Quote & page nr
What it means to you?



ACTIVITY #1

Being a young carer

Theme Quote & page nr What it means to you?

Parallel universes

Theme Quote & page nr What it means to you?

Believing in yourself

Theme Quote & page nr What it means to you?

Space

Theme Quote & page nr What it means to you?



ACTIVITY #2

Encourage the children to read the following extract from *The Second-Hand Boy* and answer the questions below:

QUESTIONS:

1. In this passage, when is the first time we get a feeling that James is from a different time?
2. “James was gingerly touching the slot at the top where you put the CDs in as if his fingers might crash through the metal.” What do you think ‘gingerly’ means here?
3. When do we first get a sense that James might not be as friendly as he first seems?
4. Aside from space stuff, what else does Billy collect?
5. Which planet has Billy made out of papier-mâché?
6. Why is Mum worried at the end of the passage?



THE SECOND-HAND BOY



ACTIVITY #2

He marched ahead, straight into my room. I guess it was obvious which one was mine as we only had two bedrooms. I looked closely at the boy by my desk, not understanding, but he was already picking about, lifting things close to his face then putting them back down again. I tried to shove my dirty pants under the bed with one foot.

“Woah! Look at all this space stuff! Did you make that?”

He pushed the papier-mâché Neptune hanging down from the shelf above my bed so it swung and tapped the wall. It was blue and silver – about the size of a football. James looked at it with big shining eyes, then at me.

Right now, I wasn't sure that I cared where he had come from.

I nodded. Marty had helped me do it last summer.

“Wicked!” he laughed. “Listen, mate, I should have given you more credit. This stuff's neat.”

I snorted. “Neat?”

James turned and stared at me. “Yeah.”

“Nobody's said ‘neat’ in about a zillion years.”

“Well, maybe I'm from a zillion years ago,” he grinned.

“What's that?” James pointed at the CD player on the corner of my desk. It was years and years old now and covered in the alien stickers I'd got in a lucky-dip bag.

“CD player.” I shrugged. “Don't think it still works though. It was Mum's about twenty years ago.”

He blinked. “What does it do?”

I stared at him. “It, err – it's a CD player,” I finished lamely. James was gingerly touching the slot at the top where you put the CDs in as if his fingers might crash through the metal. “You've never seen one?”

James raised his eyebrows. “Well, it's all right for some, isn't it?”

“It plays music.” I felt embarrassed. “I haven't used it in a while.”

I saw the amazement in his eyes, as if he'd just found out I had a full-sized rocket in the airing cupboard.

Maybe he'd only ever seen people play music on their phones – CD players were pretty old, I guessed. He frowned for a minute more, his eyebrows pressed together hard. I held my breath but he took another look around.

“Your room is awesome.”

I blushed. No one had ever liked my battered old stuff. I thought of my pebble collection and cringed. But still, nothing made sense. “Listen, James. You are real, aren't you? This isn't all made up?”

James rolled his eyes again.

“Oh, shut up being so wet. Are we going to go exploring, or what?”

I grinned. It was becoming easier and easier each time. “Yeah, 'course.”

“Right then! Let's go.”

I leant towards him eagerly. “Go where?”

“Billy?” I span round so fast I might have been a comet crashing into Bryarcroft.

Mum stood framed by the doorway in her fluffy purple slippers. “Who are you talking to?”

James let out a long whooping laugh. Mum's eyes were worried.

“Erm . . .”

I turned round, and James wasn't there.

ACTIVITY #2

ANSWERS:

1. We get a sense that James is from another time when he says 'neat'.
2. "Gingerly" means carefully or cautiously.
3. We first get a sense that James might not be as friendly as he seems when he rolls his eyes and calls Billy 'wet'.
4. Billy also collects pebbles.
5. Billy has made the planet Neptune out of papier-mâché.
6. Mum is worried because Billy is talking to someone who she can't see.



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AFTER READING

Now that you've finished reading the story, answer the discussion questions below:

What were your first impressions of Billy? (p1-10)

The bullies show up early in the book. How does the author make them seem scary? (p10-12)

We see a lot of quotes from the book Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce. What was the book about and do you want to read it now?

James can be funny but when do we see the very first signs that he's not as nice as he seems? How could he have been kinder to Billy? Have a discussion about what qualities make a good friend.

Billy believes it when James tells him he has come out of Tom's Midnight Garden. But do you believe it? Or was it all in Billy's head? Discuss what you think and why you think that.

Lindsay becomes Billy's true friend – why are they suited as friends and what do they like about each other?

In Chapter 9, Billy hides that he is a young carer from Mr Clarke. Do you think things could have been easier for Billy if he'd asked Mr Clarke for help?

Did Lindsay defeat the bullies in the right way? If you were in her shoes, what might you have done differently? (p321-322)

CREATIVE ACTIVITY IDEAS

1. Marty writes letters to Billy about all his adventures from across the world. Imagine that you have moved to another country (like France, Australia or the USA) – write a letter to your best friend back home. What would you tell them about? What is different about where you've moved to? Would you draw pictures like Marty does? Would you tell your friend how much you missed them?
2. James comes out of a second-hand copy of Tom's *Midnight Garden*. He's dressed in funny trousers and has long hair, like he came from a different time. Now imagine this has happened to you – what would it be like if someone from another time came out of this book! When would they have been alive? What would they look like? Maybe they came from the 1980s, the 1960s, or even earlier back in Victorian times. Draw them.
3. Billy's nickname is "Space Rat" because he loves space so much. What do you think a space rat would really look like? Draw or paint it below!
4. Billy's nickname is "Space Rat" because he loves space so much. Think about all the things you love and give yourself your own nickname!



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FURTHER READING

If you loved *The Second-Hand Boy*, you might enjoy these books that explore the theme of young carers:

Toffee, Sarah Crossan

As Allison flees her home, she never anticipates finding refuge with Marla, an elderly woman grappling with dementia, who confuses her with a long-lost friend named Toffee. Accustomed to concealing her true identity and moulding herself into others' expectations, Allison adopts the persona of Toffee as she begins to care for Marla.

Yet, as her connection with Marla deepens, Allison starts pondering: where does one find a home? What defines a family? And, above all, "who am I underneath the facade?"

Running on Empty, SE Durrant

AJ loves the liberating sense of speed and freedom he gets on the running track. Grandad, his mentor, not only taught him to run but also took on the responsibilities neglected by AJ's parents. With Grandad's sudden death and Aunt Joan expecting, AJ, navigating middle school and impressing a stern track coach, grapples with the task of maintaining the house and ensuring his parents' well-being in his grandad's absence.

Running on Empty is a touching narrative of a caring family finding resilience amid challenges.

Love Frankie, Jacqueline Wilson

Frankie, nearly 14, is facing challenges, especially as her mum grapples with MS. A surprising friendship with a former bully adds complexity, leaving Frankie uncertain. As she grows closer to them, Frankie wonders if it's more than friendship. *Love Frankie* sensitively addresses teen confusion about sexuality amid the struggles of growing up in a tricky home environment.

A Bad Day for Jayden, Tony Bradman

Tony Bradman's compelling novella, *A Bad Day for Jayden*, offers a poignant glimpse into a challenging day in the life of a boy caring for his mother. Jayden's Mum won't get out of bed, his best friend has dumped him, and school is just too hard. Everything is going wrong, and when a supply teacher turns up to take the next class, Jayden's sure things will get worse. But Mrs Wilson is not quite the teacher Jayden expected. Maybe she can help turn his bad day around...

Tender, Eve Ainsworth

Eve Ainsworth's first book, *Tender* dives into challenging topics with a genuine and heartfelt approach. Marty is facing a tough time as his mum struggles to get out of bed, and for him, bedtime brings on overwhelming thoughts. The death of his dad has derailed Marty's life, causing him to nearly drop out of school, all while fearing what might happen if social workers discover how unwell his mum has become. The story takes a turn when social workers introduce Marty to a young carers group, where he crosses paths with Daisy.

The book sheds light on the harsh realities of mental illness, grief, and the teenage experience of being a caregiver. Despite this, the book shows a beacon of hope during the characters' darkest days.

The 10pm Question, Kate De Goldi

Twelve-year-old Frankie Parsons has a head full of questions. Only Ma takes him seriously, but unfortunately she is the cause of the most worrying question of all, the one Frankie can never bring himself to ask. Then a new girl arrives at school with questions of her own, questions that make Frankie's carefully controlled world begin to unravel...