

Traditional children's characters being forgotten

Today, let's talk about traditional children's characters in books read by English children past and present. The classic books we were brought up with and whose characters we know are today being shunned by the latest generation, who prefer to play on their computer. In a recent survey of 500 seven to 14-year-olds conducted by Worcester University some surprising results were found. One in five British children thought that *Long John Silver* is a character from *Peter Pan* while the same proportion believes *Aslan* was a giraffe, researchers found.

Due to his reinvention as a popular film character, more than half of the children knew that *Aslan* of C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was a lion, but others guessed that he was a giraffe or a bear. 17% believed the wardrobe was the gateway to *The Secret Garden* and eight per cent thought it led to *Willy Wonka's chocolate factory!* Researchers found that classic characters like *Jemima Puddle-duck* and *Pippi Longstocking* could drift out of the nation's consciousness, with only one in four children aware that either existed.

Surprisingly only half of the children questioned claimed to have heard of the boy wizard *Harry Potter*. (This I find rather surprising, as I thought everyone knew about *Harry Potter!*) In the survey *Harry Potter* was still slightly ahead of *Robinson Crusoe* (46%) and *Alice in Wonderland* (45%). When asked which books they had actually read there were promising signs for some of the most popular children's stories, with *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (33%) *Wind in the Willows* (29%) and *Winnie-the-Pooh* (28%) among the favourites.

Yet classics like *Anne of Green Gables* (6%), *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (6%) and *Swallows and Amazons* (9%) fared less strongly. Asked to name their favourite author, Roald Dahl topped the poll with a third of all votes followed by JK Rowling with 21%. Professor Jean Webb, who oversaw the survey: "Thankfully, to counteract this possible downturn in children experiencing the classics, there is still a very strong interest in our rich literary heritage."

Category: Books / Children's Books / Characters
Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate

Discuss the following children's book characters:-

- 1) Peter Pan
- 2) Long John Silver
- 3) Aslan
- 4) Jemima Puddle-duck
- 5) Pippi Longstocking
- 6) Harry Potter
- 7) Winnie-the-Pooh
- 8) Alice
- 9) Robin Hood

Discuss the following children's books

- 1) The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe ('Narnia' book series of 7 books)
- 2) Harry Potter book series of 7 books
- 3) Alice in Wonderland
- 4) Wind in the Willows
- 5) Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (*Note - they made a film using this title in 2005. In 1971, the movie was called Willy Wonka's chocolate factory*)
- 6) Winnie-the-Pooh
- 7) Anne of Green Gables
- 8) Swallows and Amazons (book series of 7 books)
- 9) Robinson Crusoe
- 10) The Secret Garden
- 11) The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood

EXERCISES

1. Children's books: Think of three children's books. Go round the room swapping details with others.

2. Dictation: The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

3. Reading: The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

4. Vocabulary: Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

5. The article: Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

6. Traditional children's characters: In pairs think of five other traditional children's books you know of. Then add five children's characters from these or other books not in the article. Write them below. Discuss together.

Children's books	Children's characters
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

7. Let's roleplay 1: Discussion FM: In pairs/groups. One of you is the interviewer. The others are one of the following people. You are in the *Discussion FM* radio studio. Today's interview is about: *Traditional and modern children's books*.

1	A student
2	A teacher
3	A spokesperson from your country's Ministry of Education
4	A children's book publisher

The teacher will choose some pairs to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

8. Let's think! In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with **Children's books**. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

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9. **Let's roleplay 2:** In pairs. You are in a classroom. Start a conversation about: 'Children's books'. 5-minutes.

10. **Modern children's books:** In pairs, think of three modern children's books. Add their author's. Talk about them.

Modern children's books	Author
1 _____	1 _____
2 _____	2 _____
3 _____	3 _____

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class

11. **Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) What book did C.S. Lewis write?
- 2) Name the university.
- 3) What animal is Aslan?
- 4) Who is Harry Potter?
- 5) Who oversaw the survey?

Student B

- 1) One in five children thought...?
- 2) How many children were surveyed?
- 3) What age were the children surveyed?
- 4) Name the authors.
- 5) One in four children was aware of what?

12. **Your top three favourite children's books and authors:** Think of your top three children's books and their authors. Compare lists with your partner and discuss together.

Your top three children's books	Author
1 _____	1 _____
2 _____	2 _____
3 _____	3 _____

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class

13. **Presentation:** In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation on: **Children's books**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation.

14. **Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **Children's books in my country**. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

15. **Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Children's books _____
- b) Traditional children's characters _____

DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) Which is favourite children's book?
- 3) Who is your favourite children's author? Why?
- 4) Who is the current favourite children's author?
- 5) Which children's characters do you remember the most?
- 6) Have you read any *C.S. Lewis* books?
- 7) What do you think of *Peter Pan*?
- 8) Have you read *Winnie-the-Pooh*?
- 9) Have you read *Swallows and Amazons*?
- 10) Have you learnt anything in today's English lesson?

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you've read?
- 2) Have you learnt anything in today's English lesson?
- 3) Have you read any of the *Harry Potter* books?
- 4) What do you know about *Jemima Puddle-duck*?
- 5) What do you know about *Pippi Longstocking*?
- 6) Have you read *Robinson Crusoe*?
- 7) What do you think about *Alice in Wonderland*?
- 8) Have you read *The Secret Garden*?
- 9) What children's books would you read to your children?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's discuss! Children's characters from children's books

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

Create and discuss the following...

20 children's characters from children's books
--

The teacher can moderate the session.

GAP FILL: READING:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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thought

wardrobe

giraffe

classic

survey

either

characters

traditional

Surprisingly only (1)_____ of the children questioned claimed to have heard of the boy (2)_____ *Harry Potter*. (This I find rather surprising, as I thought everyone knew about *Harry Potter*!) In the survey *Harry Potter* was still slightly ahead of *Robinson Crusoe* (46%) and *Alice in Wonderland* (45%). When asked which (3)_____ they had actually read there were promising signs for some of the most popular children's (4)_____, with *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (33%) *Wind in the Willows* (29%) and *Winnie-the-Pooh* (28%) among the favourites. Yet classics like *Anne of Green Gables* (6%), *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* (6%) and *Swallows and Amazons* (9%) fared less strongly. Asked to name their favourite (5)_____, Roald Dahl topped the poll with a third of all votes followed by JK Rowling with 21%. Professor Jean Webb, who oversaw the survey: "Thankfully, to (6)_____ this possible (7)_____ in children experiencing the classics, there is still a very strong interest in our rich (8)_____ heritage."

books

half

author

wizard

counteract

downturn

literary

stories

GRAMMAR:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings:
Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20

1	characters	11	researchers
2	consciousness	12	surprisingly
3	either	13	thought
4	wardrobe	14	traditional
5	reinvention	15	classic
6	literacy	16	wizard
7	giraffe	17	actually
8	shunned	18	yet
9	generation	19	favourite
10	Worcester	20	counteract

LINKS

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/9339323/Traditional-childrens-characters-being-forgotten.html>

<http://in.news.yahoo.com/traditional-childrens-characters-being-forgotten-uk-140829814.html>

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