



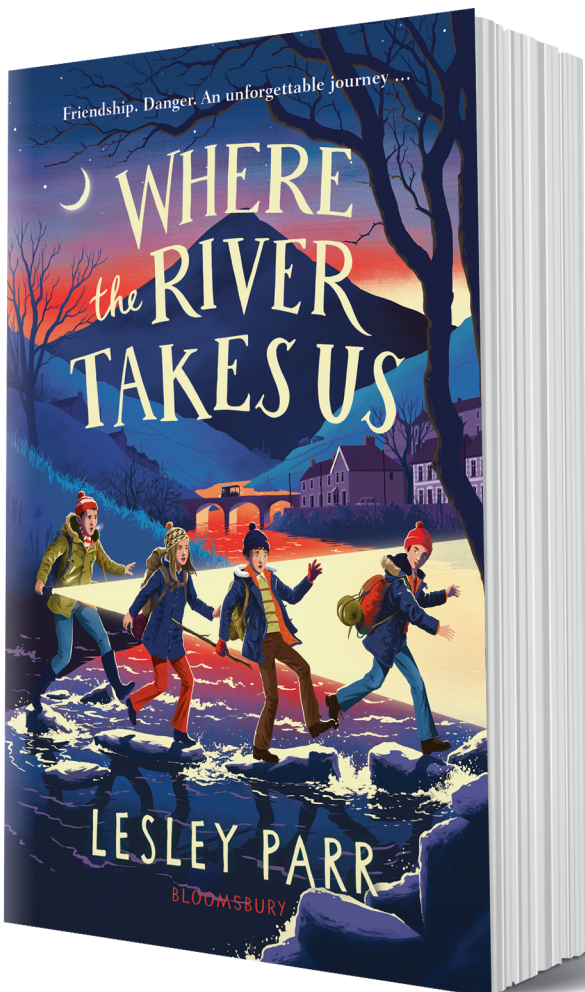
WHERE *the* RIVER TAKES US

LESLEY PARR

Educational resource pack

Dear Reader,

We are very pleased to share this educational resource pack based on Lesley Parr's thrilling third historical adventure, *Where the River Takes Us*, set in Wales against a backdrop of the 1970s miners' strikes and the three-day working week. It offers a comprehensive learning experience that will deepen readers' understandings of the book's plot, characters and settings through a blend of comprehension questions, creative writing opportunities and cross-curricular activities. Touching also on themes such as friendship, living in the 1970s, urban myths and quest stories, this story offers a thought-provoking exploration of how young people can come together to overcome adversity, navigate complex social issues and find their places in the world.



ABOUT THE BOOK

BIG CAT SIGHTING REWARD: £100 FOR CLEAR, EXCLUSIVE PHOTO

Whispers echo through the valley – tales of a wild beast roaming the mountains.

When a reward is offered for proof of its existence, Jason and his friends are determined to find the creature first. But for Jason, it's more than a quest – the money is a way for him and his brother to stay together.

So the four friends set off, following the river north, not realising that this journey will push them to their limits.

An extraordinary adventure awaits ...

**A compelling story
set in Wales in 1974,
from a prize-winning author.**



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Suitable for: Ages 9+

Explore themes of: ✓ Working-class families during the 1970s miners' strikes ✓ The impact of grief, loss and bereavement ✓ Family ✓ Friendship ✓ Urban myths and legends ✓ The Welsh countryside

Subject Checklist: ✓ Literacy ✓ History ✓ Geography ✓ Art and Design ✓ PSHE ✓ Citizenship ✓ Drama

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EXTRACT 1: CHOPPING POTATOES BY CANDLELIGHT

(taken from CHAPTER TWO: THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR)

ACTIVITY 1: A DAY IN THE LIFE WITHOUT ELECTRICITY

Objectives: Understand the concept of the three-day week; write a diary entry about how our daily lives would be affected without access to electricity.

EXTRACT 2: BIG CAT SIGHTING

(taken from CHAPTER THREE: THE BEAST OF BLAENGARW)

ACTIVITY 2: A CHANCE FOR ADVENTURE AND CASH!

Objectives: Describe the concept of a beast; design a Wanted poster about the Beast of Blaengarw.

EXTRACT 3: WHEN EMOTIONS EXPLODE

(taken from CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: WHEN THE LID BLEW OFF)

ACTIVITY 3: JASON'S JOURNEY: A CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Objectives: Infer a character's feelings, thoughts and motives from their words and actions; record reflections about the main character.

EXTRACT 4: THE QUEST BEGINS

(taken from CHAPTER FIVE: NOT CHARITY CASES)

ACTIVITY 4: EPIC ADVENTURES: WRITING YOUR OWN QUEST STORY

Objectives: Identify examples of quest stories; create original quest stories that incorporate the elements learned.

FURTHER ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS



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EXTRACT 1:

CHOPPING POTATOES BY CANDLELIGHT

Extract taken from CHAPTER TWO: THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR pages 8–10

It's not easy to chop a potato by candlelight. I've cut my finger twice. Finding a plaster in the messy drawer isn't easy either, but I've washed the blood off the chips. Richie won't know. I'm trying to make this candle last, like he said I had to, but how he expects me to do that, I don't know. Not without sitting in the dark.

On my own.

Waiting for him to get in from work.

I thought the blackouts would at least mean no homework. No such luck, and the way Richie goes on about wanting me to have better choices than he has, he'd probably set me some himself anyway.

He's stricter about it than Mam and Dad ever were. He used to do my sums for me then. And he was fun. Now he keeps on about being my guardian, so I have to do what he says. I preferred him when he was just my brother.

I do all the fractions first, glancing up at the clock every now and again. He's late. It's nearly six. Where is he? We have to cook tea at six on the dot, because that's when the power comes back on. I sneak the last Bourbon out of the biscuit barrel to keep me going, then turn over the page, dreading the decimals I know will be there.

The key rattles in the lock, the front door opens and closes, dragging over the loose bit of carpet we never find time to fix. Richie appears in the kitchen doorway, arms wrapped around himself, foot jiggling up and down like he's twitchy about something. I suppose it's work again.

'All right?' He squints through the gloom. 'Done the chips, have you? Good boy. Won't be long now and we can get the pan on. Sorry I'm late.'

'Where've you been?'

He washes his hands in the sink; in the dark window, his reflection frowns. 'Talking to Dai Dep. Work stuff. Nothing for you to worry about.'

I was right then. I still worry though. Less work means less wages, and we were only just making the mortgage payments, even before the three-day week. It's all because there are miners' strikes, and something going on in the Middle East which I don't really understand, but it means the government can't get enough coal and oil to run things so they're cutting the power and making some people work less days.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Who is telling the story in this extract? What can you infer about their situation based on what they say?
- Have you ever experienced a blackout? How did you feel when the power went out and when it was restored?
- Why does the main character feel worried when their brother, Richie, arrives home late? What do you think might be the reason for his lateness? Why is the government cutting power and making some people work fewer days?
- Who else is affected by the miners' strikes and what's happening in the Middle East? How might this impact the wider community, where these characters live, and the whole country of Wales?
- Would you want to experience life in the 1970s? Why or why not? If you could ask someone who lived through the 1970s one question, what would it be?





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ACTIVITY 1:

A DAY IN THE LIFE WITHOUT ELECTRICITY

- Read through the extract together and use it as an opportunity to explain that in the 1970s, the UK government introduced a rule called the three-day week to save electricity. This was because the coal miners and railway workers were on strike for better working rights, meaning that not enough electricity was being made, and the government had to ration electricity so there would be enough for everyone to use. Businesses were limited to only using electricity for three days each week and they weren't allowed to work longer hours on those days. Even TV channels had to stop broadcasting earlier to save electricity. Explain that some places like hospitals, supermarkets and newspaper printing presses were exempt and allowed to use more electricity because they were very important. These measures were stopped on 7th March 1974.
- Show some pictures of modern-day technology and point out how technology has changed our lives and made us more reliant on electricity. Brainstorm a list of activities that require electricity, recording their range of responses on the board. Discuss the list and ask the children how their daily lives would be affected if they didn't have access to electricity. Encourage them to think about things like cooking, cleaning, lighting, entertainment and communication. Consider what it would be like not to have access to their smartphones, tablets or video games and how they would spend their time without these devices.
- Tell them that for this activity, they will be pretending that there is a power outage and that they must go through their day without electricity. Ask them to imagine what it would be like to wake up without electricity. You may want to provide some prompts or questions to help guide their thinking, such as:
 - What did you have for breakfast and how did you make it without electricity?
 - How was your day different from a typical school day with electricity?
 - What did you do for entertainment throughout the day?
 - Did you have to do any chores, like washing clothes or dishes, without electricity?
 - How did you manage to stay cool or warm without air conditioning or heating?
 - Did you have any difficulties or challenges throughout the day?
- Once they have some ideas, they can start writing their diary entry using the template on the next page. Encourage them to be as descriptive as possible and remind them to include their feelings, thoughts and emotions throughout the day as well.
- After they have completed their diary entries, allow some time for the children to share their writing with the class, either by reading aloud or by displaying their work. As a class, reflect how fortunate we are to have regular access to electricity and how it's improved our lives in so many ways. Finally, challenge them to think of ways they can conserve electricity in their daily lives and how small changes can make a big difference.





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EXTRACT 2:

BIG CAT SIGHTING

Extract taken from CHAPTER THREE: THE BEAST OF BLAENGARW pages 23–24

Jinx and Tam are outside Gwyn's. Their heads down, reading The Herald – the local rag. What are they doing with that?

'Jason!' Jinx says, waving a page in front of my face. 'Look at this!'

I push it away. 'I can't look at anything if you shove it right at me. What's in there that's so interesting anyway?'

Tam grins down at me. 'Money.'

'What?'

'A reward,' Jinx says, his eyes all daft and goggling like a cartoon person. 'Look!'

I take the paper and they crowd round me. Catrin's immediately pushed out, so I elbow Jinx out of the way so she can see too.

BIG CAT SIGHTING REWARD

£100 for clear, exclusive photo

See bottom right for Terms and Conditions

And?' I say. 'What's it got to do with us? The cat – if it exists – lives up Blaengarw. That's miles away.'

'Yeah, but we could go,' Jinx says. 'Between the three of us it's just under thirty-three pounds fifty each; I worked it out. Imagine what we could do with thirty-three pounds fifty, what would you buy? I'd get ...'

I want to say about six weeks' mortgage, but I don't.

...

Gary Hall and Dean Bolan are crossing the road towards us, doing that stupid, swaggery walk they think makes them look tough.

'Oi, Jinx-boy! Lend us three p,' Gary says. 'I need matches.'

Jinx stares at the paper as if he hasn't heard. He's always nervous around them, which I get, because they pick on him the most, but he's safe with Tam here. Which is weird, as Tam's never had a fight in his life – just the size of him is enough for Gary and Dean to not push things too far.

'Gone deaf or what?' Dean pokes him in the back.

'I haven't got any money left,' Jinx mumbles.

'Leave him alone,' I say.

Catrin's eyes flick from me to Dean. Tam, as usual, just folds his arms and says nothing.

'What's this then?' Dean leans over my shoulder.

'Oh, the Beast ... my uncle saw it last week.'

'Yeah, right,' I say.

'You calling him a liar?'

I shrug. 'Well, if he can prove it, he gets one hundred quid. There's a reward in here.'





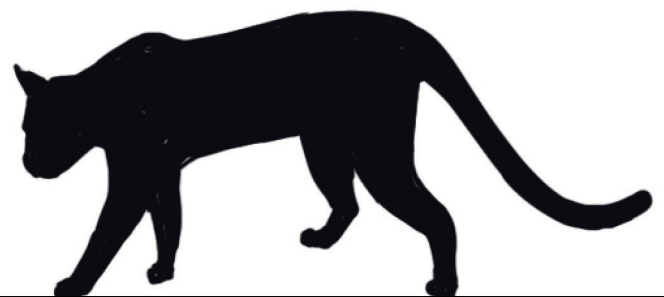
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is the amount of the reward being offered by the newspaper for a clear, exclusive photo of the big cat sighting? Do you think this is a lot of money? How much would this have been in the 1970s? Calculate this using conversion websites.
- What does Jason say in response to Dean's claim about the big cat? Why does he think it's unlikely that his uncle saw it? Why do you think people are so fascinated by stories of big cat sightings?
- Would you go searching for the big cat? If you decided to go searching for the big cat, what precautions would you take to ensure your safety?
- Imagine that you have taken a photo of the big cat and won the reward. How would you spend the money?
- Have you ever heard of any other mysterious creatures that people claim to have seen? What are they? Do you think that sightings of mysterious creatures are based on fact or are they simply urban myths or misunderstandings?





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ACTIVITY 2:

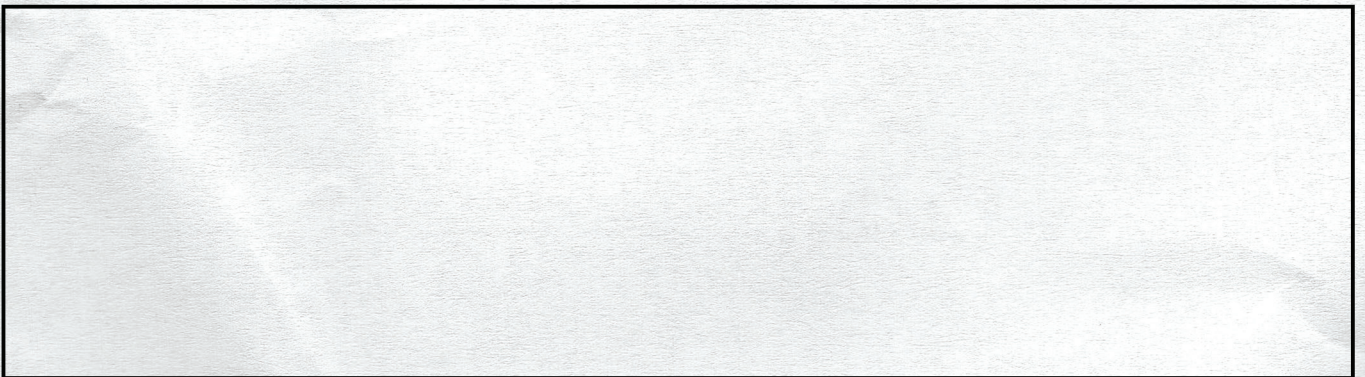
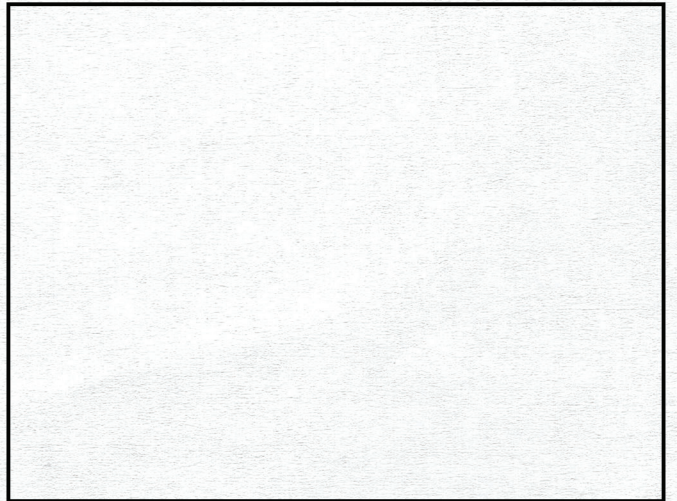
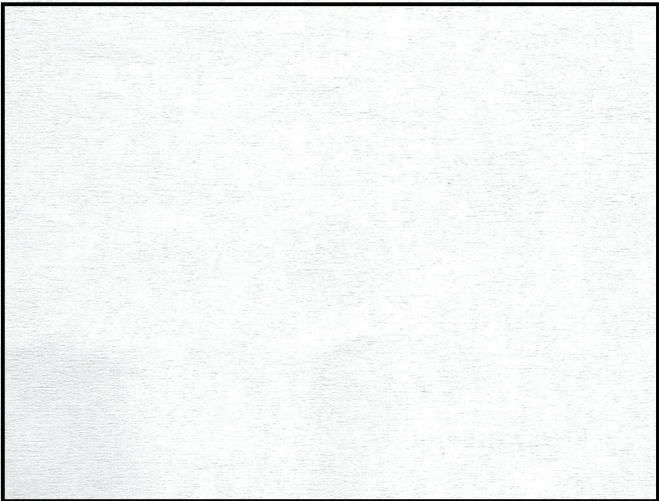
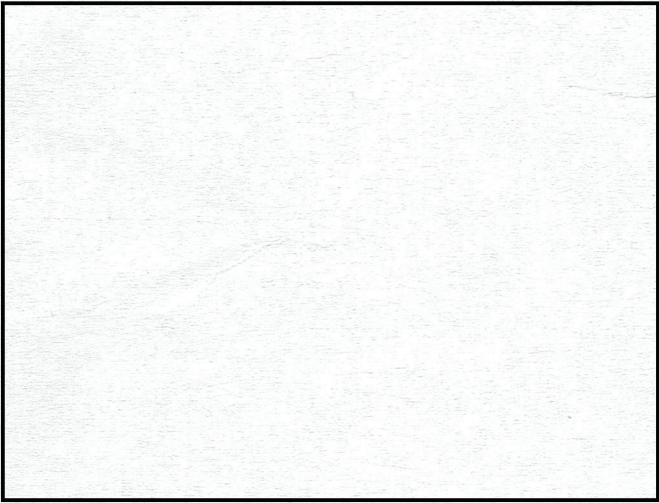
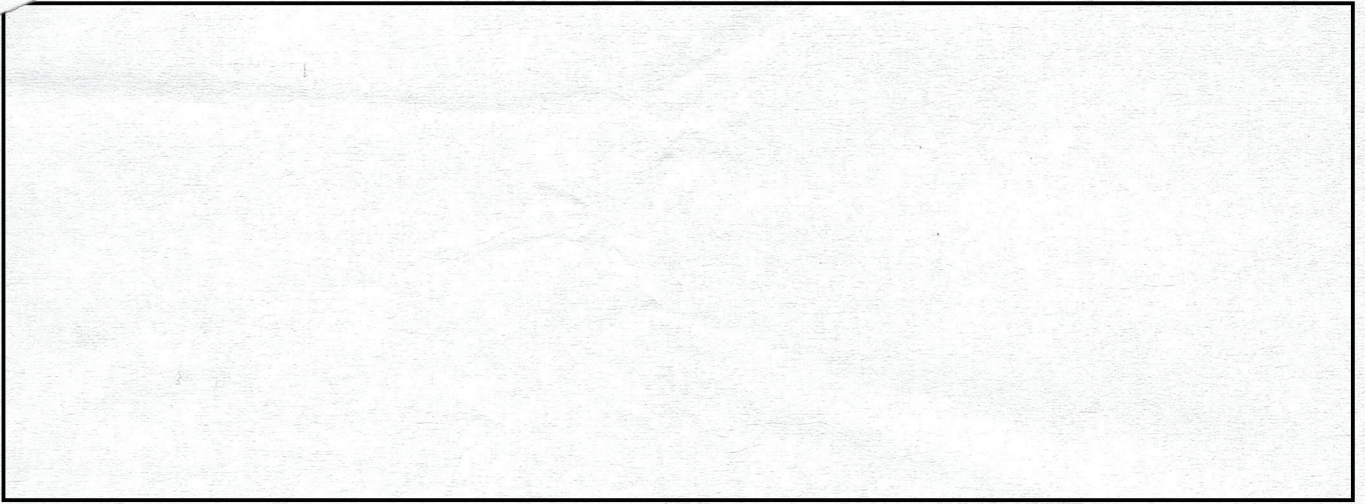
A CHANCE FOR ADVENTURE AND CASH!

- Write the words 'The Beast of Blaengarw' on the board. Pick out the word 'Beast' and ask the children to describe what a beast is in their own words. After discussing what they think beasts are and where they come from, point out how they are imaginary creatures that appear in myths, legends and fairytales. They can be giant or tiny, friendly or scary, and can possess magical powers or abilities. Show images of some beasts from books and films, like dragons and unicorns, which have become very famous and loved by people all over the world.
- Explain that the Beast of Blaengarw in this story is a mysterious and elusive creature that is rumoured to exist but has never been definitively seen or captured. After this, discuss the different theories and beliefs surrounding its existence. Some people believe it to be a large cat, while others think it could be a different type of wild animal. Some might even believe it to be a mythical creature. Encourage the children to share their own opinions about the Beast in terms of its size and appearance, where everyone's ideas are valued. Mention that there have been several reported sightings of it in the area, but none have been confirmed and that the local newspaper is offering a reward for anyone who can provide clear and exclusive photographic evidence:

BIG CAT SIGHTING REWARD

£100 for clear, exclusive photo

- Highlight the amount of money being given as a reward and encourage the children to think about what they would do with the money if they were to win the reward.
- Introduce the idea of 'Wanted posters' and tell the children that they will be creating their own Wanted poster for the Beast of Blaengarw. Discuss what information is important to include, such as a clear description of the creature's appearance, any distinguishing features and the reward amount. You could also talk about the use of bold lettering, illustrations and eye-catching colours to create an attention-grabbing poster that will stand out and be easily recognisable.
- Once the children have a clear idea of what they want to include, they could start working on their posters using the template provided, or you could provide them with various materials and tools to create their posters. Alternatively, they could also use digital tools such as online poster makers or graphic design software.
- After the posters are complete, display them in the classroom or around the school to encourage other children and staff to take notice and join in the hunt for the Beast of Blaengarw.





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EXTRACT 3:

WHEN EMOTIONS EXPLODE

Extract taken from CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: WHEN THE LID BLEW OFF pages 167–170

I've done it before. Lost it. Completely and totally lost it. Catrin was there. And I know it frightened her.

When someone you love dies, you expect to cry. When two people you love die at the same time, you imagine you'd never stop. But I couldn't cry at all. Not for weeks. People – relatives – friends – nosy sods who barely knew us but wanted to get involved – had sat at our kitchen table, or on our settee, and wiped their eyes. At the funeral, so many were at it, I reckon Gwyn must have sold out of tissues. But not me.

Which gave them more to talk about. I heard them at the wake, in the street, down the shops.

'Aww God help, he's in shock.'

'It's a worry though.'

'Cold, I call it. Not crying when your parents have died.'

'Perhaps there's something wrong with him.'

And it was like everything they said – the kind things and the mean things – all added to the weight pressing down on me. Because no one tells you that grief will be heavy. Actually physically heavy. It was as if my bones were made of lead. It was an effort to exist.

And the heaviness pressed down but the anger and pain bubbled up, like a pressure cooker. Catrin was with me when the lid blew off. We were in my bedroom. Aunty Pearl was down the Co-op, but she'd asked me to sort out anything I had for the jumble sale the Scouts were doing. Catrin said we could tidy my room at the same time and I thought we might as well. She was sorting my Beano annuals into date order – she loves doing things like that too – when I found them.

Cards from my twelfth birthday. My stomach flipped and my mouth went dry because I knew, somewhere in that pile was the card from Mam and Dad. The last one I'd ever get.

My heart thudded in my ears.

I found it. It had Snoopy and Woodstock on the front. It said Happy Birthday and Mam had stuck one of those little stickers on that she liked to buy from Gwyn's. See-through, with gold swirly edging. In the middle, it said *Son*.

One word. Three letters.

That's when it hit me. I wasn't anyone's son any more. I was just Jason North. The Ponty Orphan.

I didn't read it, just put it carefully in my desk drawer. And then it started. The pain and anger bubbled slowly at first, and I ripped all the other cards to shreds. Catrin didn't even notice that. The bubbles swirled till it felt like there was a whirlpool inside me. It grew, churning and spinning. And the only way to let it out was to unleash chaos. Catrin looked up and, all of a sudden, I couldn't stop.

And I didn't care.

I grabbed anything I could lay my hands on. The bits of birthday card, the pile of too-small clothes for the jumble, my alarm clock. I chucked them in all directions. I tore out drawers and smashed them against the wall. I hurled my pillow on the floor but it just flumped. No good. I needed things to clatter and smash and break.





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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What happened when Jason found the cards from his twelfth birthday? Why did it lead to an outburst in his bedroom?
- Who is Catrin? How did Jason's behaviour affect her? How did she react to his sudden display of anger and pain?
- What did people say about Jason's emotional state after his parents' death? Why did his lack of tears make others think there was something wrong with him? How did this add to the weight of grief that he was already feeling?
- Can you think of a time when you or someone else has experienced grief? How did it affect you or them? What did you or they do to cope with it? Do you know what empathy means? How did you show empathy or how was it shown to you?
- Does grief affect different people in different ways? Is it possible to experience grief without even realising it?





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ACTIVITY 3:

JASON'S JOURNEY: A CHARACTER ANALYSIS

- Begin by prompting the children to recall what they know about Jason's character from the book in order to refresh their memories. Encourage them to share their thoughts and ideas about what kind of person he is, his personality and how he interacts with other characters in the story. For example, you could ask: What adjectives would you use to describe Jason's character? Why? Can you give examples from the text that support your description of Jason's character? How does Jason change throughout the book? You can draw inspiration from Extract 3 to generate ideas for this task. Encourage the children to be as descriptive as possible and to write their answers in the 'Character Traits' section of the character profile. Some examples could include grieving, determined, brave, vulnerable, conflicted, resilient, curious, independent.
 - Next, think about Jason's skills. When considering Jason's skills, it is important to think about the strengths that he demonstrates throughout the book. Encourage the children to think about instances in the book where Jason displays his skills. For example, they might remember a scene where he displays characteristics such as determination, or moments where he shows his ability to think creatively to solve a problem. You could also consider both positive and negative skills when analysing Jason's character. Once the children have identified Jason's skills, write these into the 'Skills' section of the character profile.
 - In the 'Relationships' section of the character profile, the children can also discuss how Jason's relationships and interactions with other characters in the story, such as Catrin and Aunty Pearl, have been impacted by the death of his parents and how they have evolved over time. For instance, Catrin, his best friend, has been a constant source of support for Jason since the tragedy. She is there for him through his breakdown in the bedroom and she tries to help him pick up the pieces afterwards. Choose several scenes from the book that depict significant moments in Jason's relationships with other characters and use role-playing and re-enactment as a tool to delve deeper into his emotions and motivations.
 - Lastly, to understand Jason's hopes and dreams, examine his motivations and desires up to this point in the book. What has he been striving for? What obstacles has he faced? Gaining a good understanding of his past actions and motivations can help you to start to speculate about what they might hope to achieve in the future.
- It's also worth considering the character's personality and values when thinking about their hopes and dreams. What kind of person is Jason? What matters most to him? In addition to these factors, it's important to think about the context of the story. Is Jason's world stable or in turmoil? Are there external forces that could affect his hopes and dreams? Are there other characters who could help or hinder them? Write short summaries of his aspirations and ambitions in the 'Hopes and Dreams' section of the character profile.
- In addition to his character traits, skills, relationships and hopes and dreams, you could also look at other aspects of Jason's character such as: his appearance and how it might reflect his personality or traits; his dialogue and how it reveals his emotions and feelings; his motivations to act or behave in a certain way and how this affects his decisions; his conflicts and how he responds to them, including whether he changes or grows; and his backstory and how it contributes to his current actions or behaviour.



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CHARACTER PROFILE TEMPLATE

Character Traits

Skills

Relationships

Hopes and Dreams





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EXTRACT 4:

THE QUEST BEGINS

Extract taken from CHAPTER FIVE: NOT CHARITY CASES pages 39–40

'I'm in!' I yell, speeding across the waste ground and pulling my brakes so hard I nearly go over the handlebars. Jinx swerves away from the ramp and rides over.

'In what?'

'Looking for the big cat. I want to do it.'

Tam joins us.

'You'll come on the quest?' Jinx grins. 'Brilliant!'

'The what?' me and Tam say at exactly the same time.

'The quest. For the Beast of Blaengarw.'

We burst out laughing.

'What?' Jinx asks, holding up his hands and laughing too. 'A quest is when you search for something, seek it out. Looking for the cat is a quest.'

'If you say so,' Tam says. 'But I'm more interested in why Jason's changed his mind.'

I glance around. Too many kids – including Gary and Dean, who have already started to demolish our ramp, but that doesn't matter now. 'Not here,' I say. 'Blue Bridge.'

We ride through the streets to the river. The Blue Bridge is our place, where we dangle our legs and skim stones and make fires to bake spuds. We leave our bikes on the bank and go on to the smooth pebbles that make a kind of beach.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How would you describe what a quest is? Why is Jason motivated to embark on one? What caused him to change his mind? Can you think of any other reasons why people might go on a quest? Would you ever consider going on a quest?
- What type of creature do you think the Beast of Blaengarw could be? Does this extract or any previous ones provide any clues about what it might look like? If you were going to find it, what strategies would you use to track it down?
- What words of advice would you give to the children about preparing for their quest? Do you think any of them have been on a quest before? Should they tell anyone else about it? Could the quest have any potential dangers?
- If the characters don't find the Beast of Blaengarw, what might happen? How might an unsuccessful quest affect the characters' friendship? If the quest fails, do you think the characters would be willing to try again or would they give up?
- Find out what an urban myth is. Are there any 'urban myths' or legends in your culture about creatures similar to the Beast of Blaengarw? What do you think the Beast of Blaengarw might symbolise or represent in the story?





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ACTIVITY 4:

EPIC ADVENTURES: WRITING YOUR OWN QUEST STORY

- Read Extract 4 together and use it to introduce the concept of a quest or journey and discuss examples from popular books, films and TV shows. Encourage the children to think about what makes a good quest or journey, such as interesting characters, unexpected obstacles and meaningful goals.
- Next, tell the children that they are going to write their own short stories or comic strips about a fictional quest or journey that changes a character's life. Begin to guide them through the process of creating their own characters and setting for their story by brainstorming ideas as a class for their character's backstory, personality and motivations, as well as the world they will be exploring on their quest or journey.
- Once the children have developed their characters and setting, they can begin to plan out their individual stories or comic strips. Encourage them to think about the different stages of their quest by breaking it down and focusing on the different elements to structure their stories, including the challenges their character will face, the lessons they will learn and the ultimate goal they will achieve.
- To support them, provide prompts or story starters to help them to get started on their own stories. For example, they could imagine a character who sets out on a quest to find a magical object that will grant their greatest wish, but along the way they discover something more important than what they thought they wanted.
- As the children write their stories, assist them with feedback and guidance to help them develop their ideas and improve their writing skills. They may also want to share their stories in pairs, in small groups or with the class at different points and provide constructive feedback to their peers.



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COMIC STRIP

A comic strip template consisting of seven panels. The panels are arranged in three rows: the first row has two panels, the second row has three panels, and the third row has two panels. Each panel is a white rectangle with a black border, designed for drawing and writing.



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FURTHER ACTIVITY IDEAS

- The 1970s miners' strikes had a significant impact on working-class families. Research and make presentations about the causes, effects and significance of these strikes. Discuss the challenges faced by working-class families during this time and how they coped with reduced power usage and fewer job opportunities.
- Find out more about wild cats, such as lynxes or bobcats, that are found in forests. Children could also learn about the ecology of the region in which the book is set, including the rivers and forests, and the animals that live there.
- Attempt some of the activities that the children in the book engage in, such as drawing hopscotch on the pavement with chalk (page 4), playing a game of Dares (page 112), and trying out Poohsticks (page 174). Additionally, investigate other games that children commonly played during the 1970s. Reflect on the ways in which childhood during this time period differed from childhood in the present day.
- Consider the cultural and societal differences between the 1970s and the 2020s, such as changes in technology, fashion and popular culture. Think about how these differences might have affected how children spent their leisure time and played games. Were there any particular challenges or obstacles that children in the 1970s faced when it came to play and recreation?
- Create a map of the area that Jason and his friends explore on their quest. Encourage the children to visualise the setting of the story and gain a better understanding of the geography of the landscape, including the location of key landmarks and features, such as the river, forest and bridge.
- After finishing the book, take some time to reflect on the themes it explores. Consider the significance of the struggles of working-class families during the 1970s miners' strikes; the impact of grief, loss and bereavement; the power of hope and perseverance in challenging times; family and friendship; urban myths; and the Welsh countryside. Put them in order based on their importance to you. Think about how these themes are interwoven throughout the narrative and how they impact the characters and their experiences. You may wish to explore other books that touch on similar themes.
- Analyse the possible reasons why you think the author chose the title 'Where the River Takes Us'. Consider how this title reflects the story's themes and the journey that the characters undertake. Discuss what alternative titles you might give the book to capture its essence and design your own interpretations of the cover to show your understanding and what you've learned from reading it.
- Imagine what the future might hold for the characters following the events of the book. Consider where they might be a year after the story concludes, and how they might have grown and changed in that time. Write an epilogue or short continuation story from the perspective of one of the characters. Consider the challenges they may have faced, as well as any triumphs they have experienced.
- Create your own piece of artwork inspired by the descriptions of the Welsh landscape in the book. Think about the colours and textures you could use to capture the vibrancy of the Welsh countryside. Imagine the rolling hills of the valleys, the rugged forests and the meandering river that Jason and his friends journey through as you connect with the natural world and the picturesque views of Wales.
- What do Welsh words like 'mun' and 'bach' mean? Find other examples of the Welsh language, slang, dialect and colloquial expressions used in conversation; create a glossary of words and phrases.



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You've now reached the end of this resource pack for *Where the River Takes Us!*

We really hope these notes have proved to be an interesting and insightful introduction to the themes and ideas found within this book.

We would love to see examples of any work created as a result of this pack, so please do email them over to us on:

childrensmarketing@bloomsbury.com

or share on Twitter tagging us at

@KidsBloomsbury @WelshDragonParr @MrEPrimary

or Instagram at

@lesleyparr11

