

TEACHERS' NOTES



ISBN 9781406389371 • £7.99 • paperback • 9 years +

The internationally bestselling author of *Beetle Boy* writes a thrilling mystery adventure about friendship, bravery and the wonderful world of birds, starring a birdwatching detective called Twitch.

Twitch has three pet chickens, four pigeons, swallows nesting in his bedroom and a passion for birdwatching. On the first day of the summer holidays, he arrives at his secret hide to find police everywhere: a convicted robber has broken out of prison and is hiding in Aves Wood. Can Twitch use his talents for birdwatching to hunt for the dangerous prisoner and find the missing loot?

  @WalkerBooksUK @MGLnrd www.twitchersclub.com


WALKER
BOOKS

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. They could be used to support whole class, group or individual reading. We hope you find them useful.

Before You Start:

- As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal or give children individual reading journals to record and organise discussions and responses to the text. The children could also be asked to consider the author's use of language and how she creates a particular effect or image at key points throughout the text.
- The length of the book means that you will need to consider how you wish children to engage with the text. You could use a blend of reading aloud by the adult; re-reading by the adult or the children and discussion of key passages; pupils reading sections of the text independently between sessions, depending on their experience, then summarising what they have read; revisiting specific passages and episodes and engaging in specific activities to deepen response and comprehension.

Cover and Chapter 1: Rock Dove to Chapter 3: Aves Wood

- Begin by sharing the cover, drawing the children's attention to the cover illustration. *What can you see here? Who do you think this character might be? What do you think they are doing and why? How do you think they are feeling? What clues do you get from their body language and facial expression, their clothing and what they are carrying? Do you recognise the birds? Do you know anything about them? Where and when do you think the story might be set? What leads you to think this?* Record the children's responses around a photocopy of the cover and return to these as you read the book, comparing the children's initial thoughts to how the story actually unfolds.
- Now, read aloud and consider the title of the book, '**Twitch**'. *Does this word mean or suggest anything to you? Why do you think the book might be called Twitch?* Support the children in investigating the word – both the noun and verb – and its derivatives, such as *twitching, twitchy, twitcher*, and any associations it may have for them. Make a note of these words, their meaning and any associations the children have with them to refer to later.
- Read aloud and consider the subtitle. *What is an escaped convict? Do you think a birdwatcher can 'outwit an escaped convict?'* *What do all these things make you think about the story that lies ahead? Does it remind you of any other stories you have read or heard, in books, films, TV or real life? Does the cover make you want to read the story? Why? Why not? Have you heard of M. G. Leonard, or read any of her other books? If so, what does your experience of her other books lead you to expect here?* Continue to note the children's predictions around the copy of the cover.



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

- Read aloud *Chapter 1: Rock Dove* (page 11 to page 16). Give the children time and space to reflect on and discuss what they have heard and consider:
 - *What do you think is happening in this chapter? Who are the main characters and what do you learn about them?*
 - *What do you learn about the character of Twitch? How do you think he got this name? What does the fact that his name is the title of the book make you think about the story and his role in it? How do you think he gets on with Jack and his sidekicks Vernon, Ozuru and Terry? Do they remind you of characters you have met in other books or films or people you have met in real life?*
 - *Why do you think Jack behaves the way he does, and why do his sidekicks back him up? What do you think it is about Twitch that makes Jack pick on him? Do you think Twitch is right to step in to protect the pigeon? What would you do in his position?*
 - *How do Jack's words **"You'll regret this, Twitch [...] This isn't over!"** make you feel? What do you think will happen next, what does it suggest to you about the way the story might develop?*
 - *What more do you learn about Twitch from what happens after he has rescued the pigeon? Do you think he is right to walk out of school? Why do you think he is prepared to get in trouble for this?*
- Go on to read aloud *Chapter 2: Worms for Food* up to page 22, **'... eat this worm, birdbrain.'** Again, allow time and space for the children to reflect on what they have heard, then discuss.
 - *What do you find out in these pages about the pigeon that Twitch rescued, his school's reaction to his truancy, and how Jack treats him afterwards? Was this what you predicted?*
 - *What else does this scene, where Twitch is forced to eat worms, tell you about the way he is treated by his schoolmates and why? What do you think he should do? After hearing children's suggestions, invite them to write a brief **note of advice** to Twitch suggesting ways in which he could deal with the bullying he is experiencing. This issue could be explored in further follow-up PSHE sessions.*
 - *Do you think Twitch will have to eat the worm? What do you think will happen next?*
- Now read on from page 22 **"Vernon, hold him", Jack instructed...** to the end of the chapter.
 - *Was this what you expected? What might have happened if Billy hadn't stepped in? Why do you think **'the children scattered [...] like a flock of startled starlings'** when he turned up?*
 - *What does Twitch notice about Billy, and what thoughts do you have about him? What do you find out about Billy – and about Twitch – from their conversation? Why do you think Twitch is suspicious of Billy even though he just helped him out?*
- Complete work on this section of the book with an exercise to deepen the children's response to the key setting of the story, looking at what thoughts and feelings the description gives us about this place. Begin by reading aloud the opening of *Chapter 3, Aves Wood* (page 28, **'The Aves Wood Nature Reserve...'** to page 30,



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

'...the peaceful chirps and buzz of the woods to return'. Ask the children to visualise the scene in their mind's eye as you read, closing their eyes and picturing the scene unfolding as if it were a scene in a film. Read the section aloud two or three times and then ask them to describe to a partner what they pictured. Give the children simple art materials to depict their visualisation.

- Following this, ask the children to share what they imagined and drew and to identify key vocabulary or phrases which support their understanding or interpretation. For example, '**rare plants**' or '**some of it was meadow and a large part of it was wetland**' or '**boggy swamp**' or '**heady scent of pine resin**' or '**tree roots and badger setts**' or '**the ground became mushy and sodden**' or '**stretching out in front of him, its surface shimmering like a mirage in the heat**' or '**tangle of brambles**'. Ask the children why particular words or phrases stood out to them. *What made them so vivid or memorable? What impression is created by the author through the descriptions? How do these descriptions make you feel? What do you think is special for Twitch about this place? Why does he come here?*
- Read aloud the rest of the chapter from page 30, '**Reaching down into a green mass of unfurling fronds...**' Allow time and space for the children to reflect on what they have heard then discuss:
 - *How do you think being in the wood makes Twitch feel? What do you learn about him from the hide he has constructed? Why do you think this place is so important to him?*
 - *What role do you think Aves Wood will play in the story, knowing its importance to Twitch and his plans to spend the summer holidays there?*
 - *How do you think he feels when he sees police in the wood? How do you know?*
 - *What do you think the police might be looking for? What do you think the two girls Twitch spots might be doing? Why do you think they might not want to be seen?*
- Having discussed the contents of these three chapters, summarise the key events in the story so far, you may wish to start building a shared storymap, recording these key events to add to over the course of the reading. Ask the children to note their predictions for the rest of the story based on what they have read so far.

Chapter 4: A Silver Kingfisher to Chapter 8: Maiden Flight

- After reading the next five chapters, ask the group to summarise this part of the book together, working towards a shared interpretation of what has happened, recording key events on the shared storymap.
- Come back together to discuss:
 - *What more have you learned about Twitch from his home life, his care for pigeons, chickens, swallows and other wild birds, his relationship with his mum and his neighbour Amita, his attitude to his paper round?*
 - *How does Robber Ryan's escape from prison add to the story? What do you think it might mean for the story moving forward? What do you think it would be like to know a dangerous criminal might be somewhere near your home? How might his mum react? How might the possibility of Ryan being nearby affect Twitch's plans for*



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

the holiday, spending time in Aves Wood?

— *What more do we learn about Jack in this part of the story? How do you feel when you see the bully bullied? How do you think the author wants us to feel about him?*

— *What do you find out Tippi and Ava, the girls who dropped the kingfisher bracelet, from Twitch bumping into them? What do you notice about their behaviour? Why do you think he thinks **'there was something suspicious about those two'**?*

- Reflect on the character of Twitch. Support the children in completing a **Role on the Wall** for him. To do this, have a prepared template of a boy onto which the children can record their ideas. Ask the children to write words or phrases on the outside of the outline sharing what they know about his outward appearance or other information about him from the story events. Then, use these to begin to infer and deduce his internal feelings and characteristics and note these on the inside of the outline.
- To promote a higher level of thinking, ask the children to consider what we know from what he says and what is said about him by other characters and by the narrator, and what we have to infer from body language, gestures and actions. Support the children in making explicit links between the external and internal. For example, *what does something Twitch does – rescuing Scabby, taking on the harder paper round – tell us about his personality? Or, how does Twitch's personality – his love of all living creatures and sense of right and wrong – make a specific action seem most likely?*
- Encourage the children to keep returning to the Role on the Wall as you continue to read the story, using a different colour each time to highlight the knowledge they gain as they read on.
- Support the children in unpicking Twitch's feelings about Jack: he sees him being bullied by Peaky and Madden twice, but also sees him bullying his gang.
 - *What do you think Twitch thinks when he sees Jack being bullied? How does this make you feel – do you feel sorry for Jack, even though he himself bullied Twitch?*
 - *What do you think motivates Twitch to help Jack when he first sees him with the older boys (page 42), by pretending to speak loudly to a police officer and frighten Peaky and Madden off? How do you think Jack feels about being rescued in this way?*
 - *When Twitch sees Jack with Peaky and Madden the second time after releasing his pigeons (page 81, why do you think he feels **'he had to do something'**? What do you think will happen next?*

Chapter 9: Alarm Call of a Peregrine Falcon to Chapter 14: Two Birders in a Bush

- After reading the next six chapters in the story, ask the children to summarise what they have heard, to enable them to arrive at a shared understanding of what has happened and how the story has developed, recording the key events on the shared storymap and discussing the impact these have on Twitch.
- Invite children to consider how the author conveys the tension of Twitch's second rescue of Jack, imitating the



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

alarm call of the peregrine falcon, while making Peaky and Madden think Robber Ryan had thrown a knife at them (page 82 to page 84). Provide copies of the text while you re-read aloud and ask the children to **text-mark**, looking at the language and structure of this episode, identifying features that stand out for them. Invite the children to prepare their own **performance reading** of this section, thinking about how they might convey the excitement to an audience.

- Come back together to discuss:
 - *How is the relationship between Twitch and Jack developing? What do you think has contributed to this development?*
 - *Why do you think Twitch accepts Jack; and Jack seems to want to befriend Twitch?*
 - *What do we find out about Jack and Twitch that explains their actions: Jack in bullying Twitch, Twitch in defending Jack, and not caring about being popular?*
 - *How do you think each might feel about spending time with the other in this way? Do you think the two will simply be friends now? What problems might there be in the two becoming friends?*
- Support the children in creating a second **Role on the Wall** for Jack, as well as updating the one they have already created for Twitch, adding any insights into his character that these chapters provide.
- Support children in organising their thinking about other key characters in the story – the members of Jack’s gang; Peaky and Madden; Billy; Mum and Amita; Tippi and Ava – by adding a quick **pen portrait** of each to the Reading Journal. A pen portrait is an informal description of a person or a group of people, a character sketch in words. A pen portrait may discuss ‘hard’ facts, such as age or gender, but it should also focus on ‘softer’ aspects, such as attitudes and appearance. Information you could include in the pen portrait might be name, appearance, background, relationship to other characters and role in the story, likes and dislikes, as well as any other ideas they have expressed and the children’s own inferences about them from what they have read.
- Consider how the plot is moved onwards by what happens to the two boys.
 - *Why do you think Billy warns Twitch against becoming friendly with Jack?*
 - *Who do you think might have left the footprints that the boys discover, and lit the camp fire?*
 - *What do you make of the further sighting of Ava and Tippi? Who do you think the blonde woman with them might be?*
 - *Do you think Twitch really did see Robber Ryan or is Constable Greenwood right to be sceptical?*
 - *How do you predict the boys’ friendship will develop, and what might happen next in the story to affect it?*

Chapter 15: What’s Eating Gilbert? to Chapter 21: Robber Ryan

- Complete these activities after the children have read the next seven chapters, so that they can effectively summarise, discuss and respond to the next section of the story. Record the key events on the shared



TWITCH Teachers’ Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

storymap, and allow time and space to reflect on what they have read and to support each other in interpreting the events described and how these affect Twitch (and Jack) and advance the plot.

- *What are you left thinking about after the boys' encounter with Ava and Tippi when they follow the girls back to their Nan's barge? Do you – like Twitch – think the girls might be hiding something? What could it be? Why do think the sisters then follow the boys back to the hide?*
- *How do you think Twitch might feel when he encounters Ozuru fishing with his dad? What do you learn about Ozuru's part in bullying Twitch, and his attitude towards him?*
- *What do you learn from Twitch's conversation with Billy? Why do you think Jack didn't turn up at the hide? Do you think Billy is right to question Jack's motives, encouraging Twitch to wonder if Jack was just pretending to be friendly? Why do you think Twitch '**wanted to like Billy**' even though he acts '**shifty**'?*
- *How does the conversation Twitch overhears between Jack, Vernon and Terry make you feel? Do you think there is an explanation for Jack seeming to betray Twitch? Does it make you think Billy was right to make him doubt their new friendship? Why do you think Twitch decides to visit Billy at the campervan, confide in him, and tell him about the hide?*
- *In Chapter 17, what do we learn about Twitch's feelings? How do you think he feels about Jack releasing the birds? Can you think of a plausible explanation why Jack failed to turn up, seemed to mock Twitch with his gang, and then visited the hide to release the birds on his own?*
- Following this discussion, invite the children to write a brief **note of advice** to Twitch, comforting him and explaining Jack's action.
 - *How do you feel about Twitch's growing friendship with Billy? Why might this relationship be important to Twitch?*
 - *Why do you think Billy doesn't want to tell the police, but suggests booby-trapping the hide instead? Why do you think he is so interested in Ava and Tippi, and the barge? Why do you think Twitch calls the birds they see sparrows when he knows they are swifts?*
- Invite the children to discuss the scene at Amita's allotment (Chapter 20, page 195), especially the conversation the two of them have.
 - *What can you tell about the relationship between Twitch and Amita? How does their conversation compare to the one he had with Billy? Why do you think he wonders whether he jumped to conclusions about Jack?*
 - *Why do you think Twitch doesn't answer the door to Jack when he calls to play football? Why do you think he decides to go and release his pigeons on his own instead?*
 - *How do you think he feels as he approaches the den? Did you predict that Twitch would meet Robber Ryan? Did you expect Robber Ryan to be a woman? Why? Why not?*
 - *What does Gwen Ryan's revelation about Billy make you think about or feel? Do you think he is right to run from her, or should he let her explain herself?*



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

- How do you feel when he then bumps into Billy? Why do you think he hands him the evidence from the hide? What do you think Billy means when he talks about the **'three kingfishers'** he found having breakfast? What do you predict will happen next?

Chapter 22: Barge In to Chapter 31: The Twitchers

- After the children have read the final ten chapters of the story, allow them time and space to summarise and reflect on what they have read, how the resolution of the story has affected them, and how they feel about the book as a whole. Record the key events on the shared storymap, and allow time and space to reflect on the story as a whole and to summarise the five or six big shapes of the story. Come back together to discuss:
 - How do you feel about the way the story ends? How does the author draw everything together? What thoughts are you left with by the resolution of events? Do you have any unanswered questions?
 - Do you feel this is the right outcome for Billy/Fergal Doherty? For Jack, and those who bullied Twitch? What about Gwen Ryan, Tippi, Ava and Nan? How do you think each of the characters feels? How do you know?
 - How do you think the author wants us to feel about Twitch and Jack, and their return to normality – and to school in the autumn? Why do you think Twitch might be apprehensive at the start of the new term in Chapter 31? Do you think Billy's warnings about Jack might be justified? How do you feel about the formation of the Twitchers (page 292)?
- Invite the children to choose and read aloud short extracts of this final section that they particularly enjoyed, sharing the reasons why they selected them. This might include the slow-motion escape of the barge upstream, Twitch's tense escape from the hide where Billy is holding Gwen hostage, the co-ordinated "murmuration" attack. Use this as the basis for further **text marking**, asking the children to identify, for example, how the author sustains tension, paces action, uses dialogue for effect or leaves a cliff-hanger, depending on the excerpts the children choose.
- Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to the text as a whole through booktalk, with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls 'the four basic questions'. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:
 - Did you enjoy this story? What did you like or dislike?
 - What puzzles did it contain?
 - What links do you see to other stories you already know, or things that you know about from real-life experience?
- The publisher describes *Twitch* as **'an exciting, mystery adventure about friendship, bravery and birds, as well as a celebration of the natural world.'** Do you think this is an accurate description? If you had to summarise the book succinctly in this way, what would you say about it? Collect the children's ideas on sentence strips to display around a copy of the front cover in the class reading corner or school library. Who do you think would enjoy this book? Why? What would you tell them about it to encourage them to read it? What would you hold back, so as not to spoil their reading experience?



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

After reading:

- Consider the different characters, the plot and the setting. Repeat the Aves Wood visualisation activity from Chapter 3, with different settings, e.g. the interior of the hide, Twitch's garden or bedroom, the interior of the barge (before or after it has been ransacked), the Peacock Room...
 - *How does the author use the different settings of the hide, Aves Wood, Twitch's house and garden, the allotment, the canal and barge? How important do you think they are to the story? What insights do these settings give us about Twitch, his life, what is important to him and his characteristics and motivations?*
 - *Which character, aspect of the story, incident or episode interested you the most? Did any of the characters remind you of characters in other books, films, on TV or people in real life?*
- Review the story in chronological order and consider the different emotions that Twitch has felt throughout the story, the high and low points, using the storymap to support recollection of key events and the **Role on the Wall** to support discussion of his emotional journey. Use **hot-seating** to explore the feelings of Twitch or any of the characters further; in hot-seating one member of the group role-plays a central character and is interviewed by the other children. This activity involves children closely examining a character's motivation and responses. The children could work collaboratively to choose words that describe a character's emotions at different points of the story. Write these on post-it notes, then organise them to demonstrate shades of emotional intensity that they have felt in the story and create a **graph of emotion**. You could also explore the emotional journey of other characters such as Jack or Gwen Ryan.
- If possible, leave copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time if they want to, by themselves or socially in a group or to take home and re-read for themselves.
- The publisher has said that *Twitch* is '**the first book in The Twitchers, a brand new mystery adventure series celebrating friendship, bravery and the incredible world of birds**'. *What kind of adventures do you think Twitch, Jack and friends might go on to have? What might happen in a sequel to this book? How might the characters and the relationships between them develop? Would you like to read further adventures? Why? Why not?*
- Find out more about the inspiration for this story from the author's note (page 299) and her website <https://www.mgleonard.com/twitch>. Consider the quotation from Emily Dickinson at the start of the book: '**I hope you love birds too. It is economical. It saves going to heaven.**' *What do you think this means? Why do you think M. G. Leonard includes it? What do you think motivated her interest in birds? How does being a birdwatcher help Twitch in this story?*
- Support children in finding out more about birds and birdwatching. On her website, M. G. Leonard writes about the '**endless rewards of having a relationship with the natural world!**' *What do you think these rewards are for Twitch?* Children could carry out research into birds and present their findings in a form they choose and may even like to use a field guide like Twitch and Jack and log their sightings.



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

Other titles by M. G. Leonard or to support exploration of themes from the book:

Battle of the Beetles series by M. G. Leonard

- **Beetle Boy** (Chicken House)
- **Beetle Queen** (Chicken House)
- **Battle of the Beetles** (Chicken House)
- **The Beetle Collector's Handbook** (Scholastic)

Adventures on Trains series by M. G. Leonard and Sam Sedgman, illustrated by Elisa Paganelli

- **The Highland Falcon Thief** (Macmillan)
- **Kidnap on the California Comet** (Macmillan)
- **Murder on the Safari Star** (Macmillan)

Other books that connect to themes and issues raised in the book:

- **Where do you go, Birdy Jones? Joanna Nadin** (Little Brown)
- **King of the Sky, Nicola Davies, illustrated by Laura Carlin** (Walker)
- **Skellig** and **My Name Is Mina, David Almond** (Hodder)
- **Millions, Frank Cottrell-Boyce** (Macmillan)

Books and websites related to pigeons and other birds, and the natural environment

- **RSPB My First Book of Garden Birds, Mike Unwin and Sarah Whittle, illustrated by Rachel Lockwood** (A&C Black)
- **Beautiful Birds, Jean Roussen and Emmanuelle Walker** (Flying Eye Books)
- **Wild Child, a Journey through Nature, Dara McAnulty, illustrated by Barry Falls** (Macmillan)
- The Royal Pigeon Racing Association: <http://www.rpra.org/>
- RSPB Big Schools Birdwatch: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-teachers/schools-birdwatch/>
- <https://twitchersclub.com/>



TWITCH Teachers' Notes © The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

Illustrations © 2021 Paddy Donnelly. You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

These Notes may contain links to third party websites. Walker Books does not endorse such website(s) or their contents and is not responsible for such contents and makes no representations or warranties regarding the contents, accuracy or functionality of such website(s)