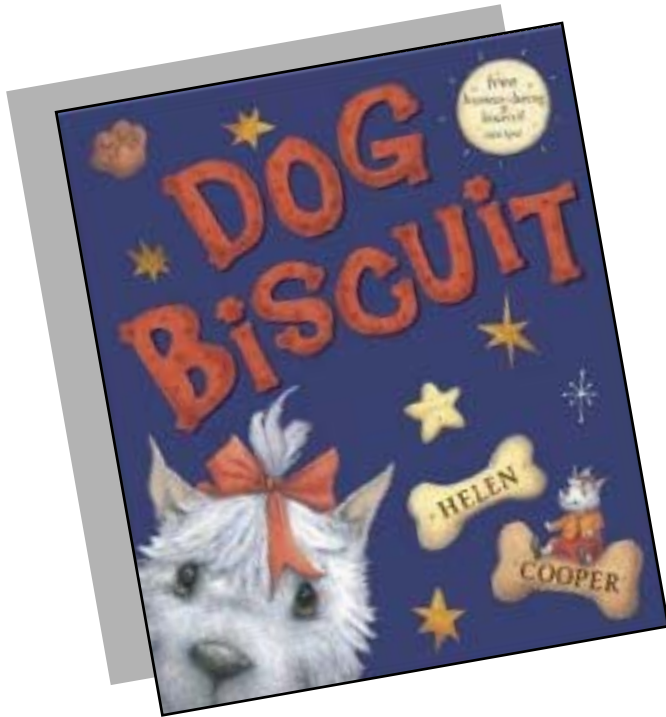


## TEACHING GUIDE by NIKKI GAMBLE

# DOG BISCUIT



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### CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Helen Cooper could be the focus of an author study for Year 2 and used as a basis for a three week narrative unit on different stories by the same author (see resource list below).

Helen Cooper's texts are rich, poetic and rhythmic. They are perfectly paced and read aloud extremely well, making the books ideal for use with the whole class and groups.

*by Helen Cooper*

The storytelling is carried in equal measure by text and pictures with many small details to be discovered on re-reading. Helen's vibrant colour palette has the capacity to evoke a strong emotional reaction in the reader.

There are common themes in many of Helen's books: the power of the imagination, which can be both liberating and frightening; children's feelings and experiences; families and friendships. The books provide plenty of scope for talking about issues in the context of the PSHE lesson.

**Helen Cooper** is the only illustrator ever to win the highly prestigious Kate Greenaway Award for two consecutive books: *The Baby who Wouldn't Go to Bed*, 1996 and *Pumpkin Soup*, 1998. Other books include the sequels to *Pumpkin Soup: A Pipkin of Pepper* and *Delicious!*; *Little Monster Did It* and *The Bear Under the Stairs*, which won the Smarties Young Judges' Award in 1994. *Dog Biscuit* is her most recent picturebook.



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Though entirely accessible for young children there is enough substance in Helen Cooper's books to engage older readers too. They will certainly appeal to adults sharing the books with children thus enhancing the reading experience.

*Dog Biscuit* is in part a homage to Charles Rennie Mackintosh and readers who know and appreciate his art will recognise the allusiveness in the text to Mackintosh's motifs, fabrics, furniture and architecture. Older children might be shown some of these influences, though not before they have had the opportunity to relish and enjoy the story on its own terms.

The musicality of the text and the contrasts between the dream world and the everyday world lend themselves to a musical interpretation of the story. Possibilities include developing a soundscape to accompany the reading or for a more sustained project with older children producing 'Dog Biscuit: the musical'. Developing a musical interpretation as an extended project would provide opportunities for cross-curricular work in literacy, music, PE (dance) and art.

Multiple copies of the book can be read by small groups either in guided or group reading (literature circles).

At all times engagement with the story must be paramount. Overly analytical teaching is counter-productive and is unlikely to develop reading for pleasure and independence. The suggestions will need to be adapted for the needs and interests of your class.

### THE BOOK

#### Synopsis:

A young girl, Bridget is visiting an old lady. Feeling peckish she eats a dog biscuit which she finds in an outhouse. When Mrs Blair spots the tell-tale crumbs she tells Bridget, 'You'll go bow-wow and turn into a dog.' And that's when strange things begin to happen. Bridget grows a new tale and is soon behaving very like a dog. Then Mrs Blair's dog visits her at night and together they join the wild hunt and doggy midnight feast. Bridget awakes upset by her dream and Mum knows just the thing to put things right. But perhaps the adventure isn't quite over. ..

### TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

#### Display ideas

- Make a display of Helen Cooper's books. Include related materials for example a book of soup recipes, biscuit recipes
- Make a display of stories that

have transformation themes (see list below)

- Make a 'Dog Biscuit' display. Include reproductions, photographs, colour swatches, books about Charles Rennie Mackintosh (art books can be appreciated by children even if they are not written for this age group)

#### Preparation

Practice reading the text aloud paying particular attention to the rhyme and rhythmic qualities. This preparation is vital for developing an expressive and well-paced reading.

#### First Reading

Before reading ask if anyone has read other books by Helen Cooper and invite the children to share their favourites.

Briefly, look at the front cover and ask children what they think the story will be about.

Read the book aloud, capturing the rhythm and pace of the text.

After reading invite an open response. Ask the children what they enjoyed about the story. Was it what they were expecting? Were there any surprises? You might prompt them to relate the story to personal experience. Ask, does the story remind you of anything that has

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happened to you? Does the story remind you of any other story that you have read or heard?

Older children can be invited to jot down a few notes in a journal or 'thinking book' before sharing their responses. This helps them develop a commitment to their own ideas. Note making supports small group discussion, if each child is invited to share what they have written without comment or judgement being passed on their ideas. Initially, if children are not used to using response journals, offers some prompts to support the process.

### Second Reading

Re-read the story in small groups. Pause before turning the pages to allow the children to talk about things they notice and find interesting in the illustrations.

Encourage the children to use the language of pictures by talking about colour, shape and layout.

### Hotseating Bridget

Hotseating is a really good technique for exploring character and helping children appreciate the range of emotions that might be experienced. Select a child to take the hotseat in the role of Bridget and explain to the rest of the class that they will have the opportunity to ask 'Bridget'

questions about her experience. During the hotseating model how to ask questions that probe Bridget's feelings at different stages in the story. For example:

- Why did you eat the biscuit?
- What did you feel after you had eaten the biscuit?
- What did you think when Mrs Blair said you would turn into a dog?
- Where you surprised when Mrs Blair's dog spoke to you?
- Were you worried or excited when you felt yourself turning into a dog?

If you feel the questioning is at the surface level, you may want to take the hotseat to give more depth to the activity. Select 2 or 3 children to take the hotseat so that the class have access to differing interpretations and responses.

### Dog Biscuit: The Musical

Older children can devise a musical interpretation of the story combining narration, soundscape, original composition and using music from existing sources. The following suggestions can be incorporated into planning but there are many different ways in which this project could be approached.

One possible form of organisation is to assign groups of children different tasks: lyric writing, composition, creating a soundscape for a specific scene; writing a script etc. Alternatively, different groups could work on separate scenes, with different children in each group taking responsibility for different tasks. The scenes can then be combined to create a musical play that can then be rehearsed, reviewed and refined. A further approach is to work through each idea with the class and then assign scenes to different groups at the rehearsal/refining stage.

Use a storyboard to divide the story into key scenes. For example:

1. Finding and eating the dog biscuit – Mrs Blair's warning
2. First signs of dogginess – shopping with Mum
3. At home – eating like a pack of dogs/ready for bed
4. The Wild Hunt
5. Waking from a nightmare
6. Being comforted by mum
7. Visiting Mrs Blair and baking human biscuits

The following suggestions are illustrative of the ways in which some scenes can be represented.

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Choose those that work for you and develop your own ideas for other scenes.

1. Freeze framing key scenes in the book will help children appreciate the structure of the narrative. Working in groups, ask children to create a freeze frame image to capture what the scene is about. Use a statue metaphor to explain to the children that you should be able to walk around the frozen image and that it should be interesting to look at from all points of view. The freeze frame doesn't have to include all members of the group but everyone should help create the best possible freeze frame.

View the scenes and discuss with the children what each scene shows. When talking to them encourage them to think about the emotions experiences in each scene. What is the 'tension' in each scene? Is it clearly shown in the freeze frame? Help children to refine their work.

Create a title or caption for each freeze frame.

2. Write a script for each scene, using narration and dialogue from the book.

3. Working on a scene: turning into a dog – soundscape

There are lots of sound words

used that can be played with and interpreted, using voice, percussion instruments or digital recordings.

- Gnawed
- Gobbled
- Spilled
- Yelled 'Eating with a pack of dogs'

The list can be extended with words suggested by the children. Use a thesaurus to find words with a similar meaning. Examples – bolt down, devour, slurp, chomp.

Take one of these words, for example gobbled. How might the word be spoken? Highlight the onomatopoeic qualities of the word. Ask different children to say the word, exaggerating the gobbling sound. Select a few children to show how a soundscape can be built by adding and removing different voices; increasing and lowering the volume.

Working in small groups, the children can create soundscapes for different words. Review what each group has produced, highlighting the contrasts between different sounds. For example, how is slurp different to gobble?

Now create a soundscape by conducting the class. Agree signals for indicating which group is to make the sound; increase and decrease volume; silence.

The signal to finish the soundscape is Dad yelling '*it's like eating with a pack of dogs.*' Select one child to interrupt the soundscape by shouting these words and then hold the ensuing silence.

Further soundscape work could be done with the vignettes of Bridget getting ready for bed.

- Splashing in the bath
- Bouncing on the bed

5. Wild Hunt – 'Time for some fun': music and movement

Choose a piece of music for this scene. Possibilities are Saint Saens 'Danse Macabre'; 'The Wild Rumpus' from *Where the Wild Things Are* Opera; Saint-Saens 'Fossils' from *Carnival of the Animals*; Trevor Jones 'The Goblin Battle' from *Labyrinth*: the soundtrack. Although all of these pieces of music could work for this scene, they will lend a completely different tone; some are light and others have a more sinister feel. Discuss with the children the piece of music that best fits the scene and select one.

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Highlight the movement words in this scene:

Romped

Tumbled

Leapt

Bounded

Run

Write these words on a large sheet of paper. Work out a short movement sequence. Start with one word e.g. romped. Create three still shapes that illustrate the word romped. Now put the three shapes together in a sequence.

Practise the sequence with music. Now work on a second word and create a second sequence. These two sequences can be put together and repeated.

You might extend this work by challenge the children to perform the movement in a dog-like way. Extracts from *Cats* and *Lion King* (the musical) might be shown to illustrate how dancers create animal-like movements.

Swept (on the night wind)

Display the double page spread with these words. Draw attention to the movement path created by the lines which extend

from Bridget's house into the dream world.

Using swirling movements, children can trace imaginary pathways across the space.

Encourage children to use different heights (high, medium and low) and to use all body parts to create the movement.

### 6. Waking from the nightmare

Look at the spread 'She thought of the baby....'

Discuss this image with the children. Consider how the colours and shapes are different to those on the preceding pages. How is Bridget feeling in this picture? How are the feelings conveyed in the text and the illustrations?

Make available a range of percussion instruments. Model interpreting a picture with musical composition. Look at different parts of the picture, for example the moon exploding. What instrument could be used to create that sound? How would the instrument be played? Would it be a single sound, continuous sound or a repeated sound? Loud or soft? Look at the expressive lines coming from Bridget's mouth. What do they tell us? Which instrument would be best to make that sound? Experiment with different instruments and

select the most appropriate one. Think about how the instrument would be played: a short sound or a long sound? High pitched or low pitched? Repeat with different parts of the picture.

Show how to create notation to represent the music. What symbols will you use? Which order will you use? How will you show the length of time that an instrument is played or the number of times a sound is made?

Divide the class into small groups and ask them to compose and write the notation for a short piece of music to go with the words:

*'...howled so loudly made so much din that the moon exploded and the sky fell in.'*

### 7. Being comforted by mum: a lullaby

Choose a piece of music that contrasts with that selected for the wild hunt scene. Possibilities include an soft instrumental version of 'Can You Feel the Love Tonight?' from *The Lion King*; 'Ninna Nanna' (Sleep Now) from *Siente: Night Songs from Around the World*; 'Est Nino Linda' (This Beautiful Child) from *Siente: Night Songs from Around the World* to evoke the mood.

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While the children are listening to the music, ask them to write the words of comfort that mum might say to soothe Bridget.

In pairs or small groups, they can use these ideas to write a simple lullaby, which can be sung or spoken with music played softly in the background.

8. Write a song. Use the music from a well known song and write your own lyrics.

This could be a song for a finale or a recipe song to accompany the baking of the human biscuits.

9. When you have worked on the individual elements for 'Dog Biscuit: the musical' they can be put together in a continuous narrative, rehearsed and performed. Year 6 children could perform this for KS1 classes, for example.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### Books by Helen Cooper

The Bear Under the Stairs

Little Monster Did It

The Baby Who Wouldn't Go to Bed

Tatty Ratty

Pumpkin Soup

A Pipkin of Pepper for the

Pumpkin Soup

Delicious!

#### Transformation stories

David Almond, Stephen Lambert (illus.) (2005) *Kate, the Cat and the Moon* (At night Kate is transformed into a cat and together with a 'cat as white as the moon' she roams the town and fields.')

Raymond Briggs *The Snowman* (a young boy wakes up in the night to find his snowman has come alive. Together they have an adventure flying to the North Pole to meet Father Christmas).

Helen Cooper (1996) *The Baby Who Wouldn't Go to Bed* (the baby's bedroom is transformed into a dreamscape in which familiar objects form the topography of the fantasy setting).

Chris Riddell (2007) *The Emperor of Absurdia* (a young boy tumbles out of bed into a crazy

dreamland of wardrobe monsters where trees are birds, umbrellas are trees, and the sky is thick with snoring fish).

Maurice Sendak (1970) *In the Night Kitchen* (In his dreams Mickey falls into the night kitchen, a surreal dream world that is apparently below his bedroom).

Maurice Sendak (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are* (Max's room is transformed into 'a forest all around' and he sails away to the land of the Wild Things where he is made king).

Kit Wright, Peter Bailey (illus.) (1994) *Tigerella* (Ella is an ordinary girl by day but pursues her life as a tiger by night, playing amongst the stars with the little bear and Orion the Hunter)

#### Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Find out more at the website of the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society [www.crmsociety.com](http://www.crmsociety.com)

**Nikki Gamble** is lecturer, writer and education consultant specialising in children's literature, drama and arts education. She taught undergraduate and postgraduate students on primary teacher training programmes for eleven years.

Nikki is Director of Write Away, an organisation that seeks to promote literature and the arts in education. She is currently Associate Consultant at the University Of London, Institute Of Education. Nikki is Congress Director for the IBBY World Congress 2012 and recently elected member of the IBBY Executive Committee.

Recent Publications include *Family Fictions* (2001) (with Nick Tucker); *Exploring Children's Literature* (2008) (2nd edit) *Writers' Secrets* (2008).