

The Legend of Spud Murphy by Eoin Colfer

Group and guided reading

[Perhaps in a flash at the top:

- Year 5
- Less able readers

Book summary

It's the summer holidays. Marty and Will's parents are fed up with the chaos they're causing at home, so they pack the boys off to the library. Marty and Will are horrified! They think that libraries are boring. Even worse, they've heard all the stories about Spud Murphy, the fearsome librarian who rules the library with a rod of iron – and a gas-powered spud gun! When they get to the library, they find out that Spud Murphy certainly is pretty terrifying – but trying to outwit her becomes an absorbing game in its own right. And little by little, Marty and Will get sucked into the world of exciting books in the library, and end up finding out that Spud Murphy has a heart of gold after all ...

Key learning objectives

Year 5: Strand 7, Understanding and interpreting texts: explore how writers use language for comic and dramatic effects

Year 5: Strand 8, Engaging with and responding to texts: compare the usefulness of techniques such as visualisation, prediction, empathy in exploring the meaning of texts

Session 1

Introduction

- Look together at the cover illustrations and read the blurb. Ask: *What kind of book do you think this is going to be? What kind of person do you think Spud Murphy will turn out to be?*
- Read aloud to the group, to the end of page 5. Ask: *Who do you think is the main character in this story? What are Will's family like? What do you think is going to happen next?*

Independent reading activity

- Ask children to read the rest of Chapter 1 independently.
- Ask: Do you think Spud Murphy is really going to be as bad as Marty and Will think? How would you feel if you were them?
- Look at page 7, where Will's mother says 'Sometimes the only horse you can ride is the one in your head'. Ask: *What do you think she means?* Talk about how reading can sometimes make you feel as though you're really there in the book.

Homework/follow-up

- Ask children to draw a picture of Spud Murphy, based on the description in Chapter 1, and label it.

Session 2

Introduction

- Briefly remind children of what has happened so far in the story, and invite predictions about what might happen next.

Independent reading activity

- Ask children to read Chapter 2 independently, down to the end of page 20.

- Pause, and talk about how Marty and Will are feeling at this point. Ask for a volunteer to be Will and hot-seat him, asking questions to find out how he feels and what he thinks will happen next.
- Ask children to read independently to the end of the chapter (page 27) and then talk briefly about Spud Murphy – is she as bad as the boys thought?

Homework/follow-up

- Ask children to look back over the two chapters read so far and write down part of the story that they think is funny.

Session 3

Introduction

- Look at the funny passages that children have found. Which do the group feel are funniest? Can the children see anything in common between the funny passages? For example, sometimes the humour comes from exaggeration, e.g. (page 4) “‘This house is a madhouse,’ said Dad. ‘And he’s the chief lunatic,’ I said, pointing at Marty.”

Independent reading activity

- Ask children to read Chapter 3 independently, to the top of page 33. Pause, and share children’s predictions about what will happen next.
- Tell children to read to the end of the chapter independently, and then bring the group together. Were their predictions right? Ask: *Do you think what Spud does to punish Marty is funny? Does he deserve it? Do you think Spud is acting like a librarian should?*

Homework/follow-up

- Ask the children to write a list of suggestions for Marty about how he could avoid showing anyone his Barbie stamp – e.g. wear long sleeves, pretend he’s hurt himself and stick a plaster over it, scrub it off, etc.

Session 4

Introduction

- Ask one of the children to sum up what has happened in the story so far, and encourage others to join in and fill any gaps.

Independent reading activity

- Ask children to read the whole of Chapter 4 independently.
- Ask: *Have the boys changed their minds about the library now? What happened to make them change their minds? Do you think they feel any differently about Spud Murphy now?* Share children’s thoughts about this chapter – have they ever had the experience of getting ‘sucked into’ a book or a film so that they don’t notice time passing?

Homework/follow-up

- Ask children to read independently to the end of page 61 (‘It creaked like a bat squealing.’) They need to promise not to read on from that point! Ask them to note down what they think will happen next in the story.

Session 5

Introduction

- Share children's predictions about what will happen next. Did they find it hard to stop reading at page 61?

Independent reading activity

- Ask children to read independently from page 62 to the end of the book.
- Share children's thoughts about Spud Murphy at the end of the story. Ask: *Do you think she's a good librarian really? Why, or why not? Do you think Will and Marty will have problems with her again?*
- Do children think this is a good ending? Share their reasons why or why not.

Homework/follow-up

- Ask children to work in pairs to design a library that would be more fun and child-friendly than Spud Murphy's library. What books would it have? What would it look like? Would there be other activities on offer as well as reading?