

# Shared reading

SECTION

3

## Extract 1

- Read Extract 1. How is Michael feeling when he steps inside the garage? (Afraid because he has heard *something* in there.) Why have his parents forbidden him from going in there? (It is in danger of collapsing.)
- Focus on the verbs in the extract, highlighting *scuttled, creaked, cracked, scratched* and *snapped*. Can the children suggest how this creates a threatening atmosphere? (Unseen things inhabit the garage and Michael is disturbing them, invading their space.)
- Ask the children to pick out adjectives that

conjure up age and decay: *ancient, broken, crumbly, dead*. Notice, too, the use of repetition and alliteration for emphasis, asking the children to pick out examples of each (*scratching and scratching, creaked and cracked*).

- Circle the repeated word *something* and ask the children why this is more effective than saying *a beetle* or *a wasp*. (It is more frightening that they are not identified, and Michael doesn't know what they are.) Suggest that this will be a key feature of Skellig himself: we are not sure who or what he is.

## Extract 2

- Read the extract. How can we tell that Michael is describing a dream? Can the children pick out the memories that have become muddled? (The blackbird fledglings that Mina showed him, the baby's illness, the hospital doctor who treats arthritis and Doctor Death, the family GP.)
- Encourage the children to share their dreams, then see if they notice anything else typical of a dream. (Michael tries to reach for the baby, but his arms are like stone; a noise wakes him at a critical point.) What emotions does the dream show? (He is worried for the baby, but powerless to help her.)

- Challenge the children to separate phrases that suggest comfort from those that show danger (*tucked up, soft and warm; squeaked and squealed, teetered*).

- How do the doctors appear in this dream? (Scary and threatening with their sharp surgical instruments.) Who *does* make the baby *good as new* in the end? Recall how Skellig seems to restore the baby to health. (He holds her tenderly and dances with her.) Suggest that the doctors and Skellig are opposites: cold, clinical, surgical techniques against tenderness, love and faith.

## Extract 3

- Read Extract 3, then ask why this seems an *endless night* to Michael. How are he and his dad feeling? (They are very anxious because the baby is to have an operation on her heart and may not survive.)
- Examine how the author conveys this tension. Pick out devices such as chanting the time, emotive descriptions like *the dead hours* and *a sunken heart* and incomplete sentences. Ask the children to identify these incomplete sentences (most of the first 14 sentences lack verbs). Discuss how this makes the text read in a jolting, staccato

way, reflecting Michael's anxious thoughts. Encourage volunteers to complete the sentences and discuss how this slows the pace and loses the edge, tense tone.

- How else can we tell that Michael and his dad are uptight? (The bickering and swearing, the spoiled breakfast and smashed jam jar.)
- Discuss with the children how Michael really feels about *the bloody baby*? (He loves her and is desperately worried about her, but he also feels pushed aside because his parents are so preoccupied.)

PAGE

7