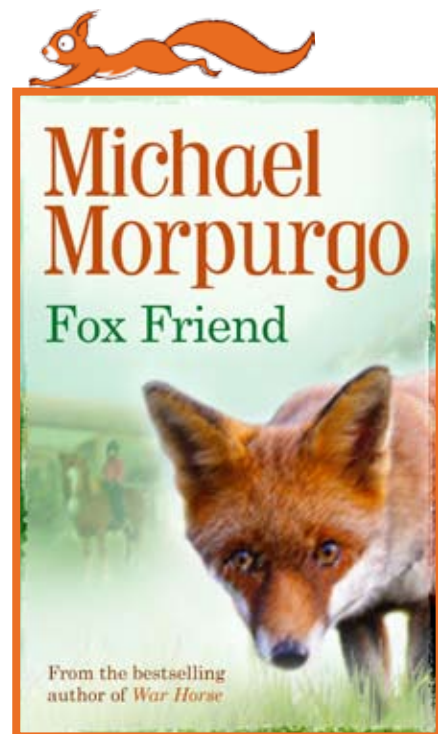


Barrington Stoke

CLASSROOM RESOURCES



MICHAEL MORPURGO

Fox Friend

PART 1 Ideas for exploring the text

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PART 1 IDEAS FOR EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read and enjoy Michael Morpurgo's moving *Fox Friend*, a brilliant quick read accessible to mixed ability groups.

The only good fox is a dead fox.

Clare lives on a farm in Devon. She has no brothers or sisters and loves to spend time with her horse, Red. She and her father do not always see eye-to-eye – they argue when Clare tells him about a fox she has seen. Her father tells her that foxes kill hens and lambs and should be shot.

Shortly afterwards, Clare is out on Red when the hunt passes. She finds an injured fox cub and nurses him back to health. When he begins to grow, she lets him go. But the cub has lost his fear of humans and returns to the farm, where Clare's father shoots him.

Shorter than some of Michael Morpurgo's other animal stories, *Fox Friend* packs a real punch. It offers an ideal opportunity for mixed ability groups to explore the ways in which this beloved author weaves themes of growing up and hard lessons about real life through a touching tale of the countryside.



I. FARM LIFE

Clare's father is a farmer. Can the class remember what animals he keeps? In **Chapter 1**, we learn that he has over 300 sheep, three Jersey milking cows and a few hens and geese.

Bring the class together and brainstorm the many jobs a farmer must do. There is quite a lot of information in *Fox Friend*. The following questions and notes may also help you structure the discussion:

What must Clare's father do to look after the sheep?

Farmers dip sheep to control lice and ticks, and also to help prevent infections like foot-rot. Sheep with any kind of illness must be treated. The ram must be brought to the ewes for breeding. Ewes are helped at lambing time. Orphan lambs must be fed. Male lambs are neutered unless they are to be kept for breeding. Sheep must be shorn and marked with the farmer's mark. Sheep must be rounded up when they have to be moved for any reason, like very deep snow, when sheep can suffocate. In winter weather sheep cannot graze and so other food must be brought to them. Sheep are taken to the mart to be sold. Farmers do not slaughter sheep or lambs – by law this must be done at a licensed site.

What must Clare's father do to look after the cows?

Many of the same things as he does to look after the sheep. The cows don't need to be dipped or shorn – but they have to be milked.

What must Clare's father do to look after the hens and geese?

The hens and geese must be fed – Clare might help with this. It is clear from the book that the hens and geese on Clare's father's farm are shut up at night.

What help and equipment does Clare's father need to help him do all of these jobs?

Farmers use vehicles like tractors and quad bikes to pull loads and travel fast over rough ground. Sheep are moved in big lorries or smaller trailers such as horse-boxes. Dogs help farmers round up sheep – these dogs must be trained. Farmers with big farms have people working for them. Often small farmers work alone. This means that small farmers usually help their neighbours when they can, or take on helpers at very busy times. Farmers' families help with many jobs, from feeding chickens to keeping account books.



Farms are a business and must make money or the farmer will have to sell up and move

Clare's father will have to make a budget and make sure he sticks to it, or at least watch how much money he spends. He will have to make money by selling milk, sheep fleeces and animals for meat or breeding. He will have to keep account books for the farm. At the end of every year he will have to tell the government how much he has earned and pay taxes. If he has any people working for him he will have to pay their wages and other costs. He may use an accountant to do this. He may also be able to apply to the government for help with some of the costs on the farm.

Look over your list. Some of these jobs need to be done every day. Others need to be done at particular times – for example, lambing happens in spring. These tend to be very busy times, and all the day-to-day jobs still have to be done.

2. STRONG OPINIONS

In *Fox Friend*, Clare and her father both have very strong opinions about foxes. Clare thinks foxes are beautiful animals. Clare's father thinks they are pests.

“Lovely? Foxes aren't lovely,” her father said. All at once, he looked very angry. “I'm telling you, Clare, the only good fox is a dead fox. We've lost ten lambs this year. Eaten by foxes all of them. And two hens last week.”

Who do the class agree with? Clare or her father?

Fox Friend is told from Clare's point-of-view. This means that the narrator tells us what Clare thinks and feels about what is happening in the story. We only know what other characters think and feel from what they say, or what Clare works out for herself. This can also mean that the reader tends to agree with Clare.

- Do the class have any sympathy with Clare's father's point-of-view? Think back to all the jobs he does on the farm.
- Does he work hard to make the farm into a good business so the family can keep their home?
- Does he care about his animals?
- Is it natural that it would upset him when foxes eat his lambs?



3. POWERFUL POINTS-OF-VIEW

Fox Friend is told from the point-of-view of Clare, the main human character in the story. In *War Horse*, which is probably Michael Morpurgo's most famous book, the story is told from the point-of-view of Joey the horse.

Read **Chapter 5**. Larry the fox cub has grown bigger and stronger but he is still locked in the fishing hut. Working in small groups, brainstorm how Larry feels in this section of the story. Use the information in each chapter. You can use also the fact sheet '**About Red Foxes**' (p11 of the resources) to help.

Think about all of these things:

- What does Larry **see**? Is it dark in the shed, or light? Does Larry like to be in the dark, or the light?
- What can Larry **smell**? It seems that foxes have a good sense of smell. Is there anything good to smell inside the shed? Is there anything bad – for example, if Larry can't get out, where does he do the toilet? Can Larry smell anything outside the shed? Would he like to go out and investigate any things he can smell?
- What can Larry **hear**? Can he hear things outside the shed? Would he like to go out and investigate the things he can hear?
- Does Larry **feel** warm, cold or just right in the shed?
- What does Larry **taste**? Does he get hungry or thirsty in the shed? What would he like to eat or drink if he was outside?
- Does Larry **feel** cramped in the shed or does he have plenty of space? Would that be different if he was outside?
- Does Larry have enough to do in the shed? What would he like to do if he was outside?



Once the groups have brainstormed, bring the class together to share thoughts. Now take a vote on the following questions. Take a note of how many of the class vote for each option.

A. Does Larry like to be in the shed?

- LIKES IT
- DOESN'T LIKE IT
- DOESN'T CARE

B. Does Larry feel safe in the shed or does he feel trapped there?

- SAFE
- TRAPPED
- NEITHER SAFE NOR TRAPPED

C. If Larry could choose, would he stay in the shed or leave?

- STAY
- LEAVE
- WOULDN'T CARE

Read **Chapter 6.** again. Clare decides to let Larry go when she thinks about his point-of-view. Discuss the class' votes. Was their understanding of Larry's point-of-view the same as Clare's? What would they have done?

What would have happened if Clare had not let Larry go? Would he have escaped anyway? Would he ever have become a pet? Could he have become dangerous?

4. A SAD ENDING

What do the class think of the ending? Ask them to decide which of these statements best describes their feelings about it:

- I like the ending. I think it is realistic. I would not change it.
- I don't like the ending but I think it is realistic. I would not change it.
- I don't like the ending and I would change it if I could.

Discuss their responses.



6. LIFE IS HARD - AND LOVELY

One of the main themes of *Fox Friend* is that life is hard and things are not always as we wish they could be.

The grid below lists some of the ‘**tough stuff**’ about Clare’s life on the farm. Work with the class to think of some of the ‘**bright sides**’. The first one is completed for you.

TOUGH STUFF	BRIGHT SIDES
Clare has no brothers or sisters and there are no other children nearby to play with.	Clare has a lovely horse called Red and is able to take him out for long rides by herself.
At lambing time some of the ewes (female sheep) die when their lambs are born. Some of the lambs do not survive.	
Winters can be very long on remote farms. In the middle of winter the farm might be cut off by snow. No one would be able to get in or out.	
The farm is miles from anywhere and Clare can’t just pop out to the shop to buy things.	
Clare has lots of work to do helping her father at lambing time and other times.	



PART 2 ABOUT MICHAEL MORPURGO



Michael Morpurgo went to school in London, Sussex and Canterbury and then went to University in London. He has written over 100 books and has been named the UK Children's Laureate. This is an important honour for a writer who has made a huge difference to books for children and young people.

Michael Morpurgo often writes about animals, and also about farm life. Perhaps his most famous novel is *War Horse*, which was made into a famous stage play in the West End of London, and then a feature film by Steven Spielberg. *War Horse* is about a farm horse called Joey who is called up to fight in the First World War. Joey's owner, Albert, follows him to France to try to get him back.

Michael Morpurgo knows all about farm life, because he lives on a farm in Devon. He and his wife set up a charity called '**Farms for City Children**'. Many thousands of children from big cities have enjoyed a week of 'muck and magic' on a farm thanks to the charity.



You can read more about Michael Morpurgo on his own website:

WWW.MICHAELMORPURGO.CO.UK



PART 3 OTHER ACTIVITIES

STORIES ABOUT FOXES

There are some very famous stories about foxes. Stories about foxes tend to fall into three types:

1. Stories where foxes are shown as cunning or wily tricksters. This is common in folk tales and gives us the saying 'as sly as a fox'. A famous example of this type of story:

FANTASTIC MR FOX BY ROALD DAHL

Mr Fox steals from three mean and greedy farmers to feed his family. The farmers try to dig up his den, but he and his family dig deeper. While the farmers stand guard over the entrances to the den with guns, Mr Fox digs directly into their chicken coop and steals their chickens!

2. Stories where foxes are shown as cruel, or 'baddies'. They often scare small animals and birds. A famous example of this type of story is:

THE TALE OF JEMIMA PUDDLE-DUCK BY BEATRICE POTTER

Jemima is a very silly duck who meets a 'gentleman' with whiskers and a tail, who says she can come and build a nest in his house. The farm dog saves her from the 'gentleman' – a fox who plans to roast and eat her!

3. Stories where foxes are silly and get caught out. Sometimes they get caught out because they try to be too smart. A famous example of this type of story is:

THE FOX AND THE GRAPES - ONE OF AESOP'S FABLES

The fox would like to eat some grapes but they are growing too high. The fox slinks off, saying the grapes look sour anyway. This story gives us the saying 'sour grapes', which is when a person doesn't get something (like a place on a team, or a job, or a boyfriend or girlfriend). The person is disappointed and so says that he or she doesn't care because the thing is rubbish.



Ask the class to try to find more stories about foxes in the class library (it may help to look at books for the younger children as foxes are very common in picture books, from Chicken Licken to Rosie's Walk, The Gruffalo and many more). Decide which type each story is.

Which type do the class like best?

The class could read some of the simpler books to children in a younger class and find out which ones they like best.



FACT SHEET: ABOUT RED FOXES



FAMILY:

Red foxes belong to the same family as dogs and wolves. Females are called vixens. Every March they have a litter of 5 babies, called cubs or kits. Kits stay with the vixen until they are 6 months old.

APPEARANCE:

Red foxes are about 90cms long and weigh about 4.5kgs. Their fur is red, black or grey with a white tip on the tail. They have strong legs and hard feet. Their claws stay out all the time, like dogs' claws.

BEHAVIOUR:

Foxes do not bark but they do howl and whine. They like to hunt at night, in the dark. As they travel they mark places with pee as a reminder of where they have been. They are fast runners and when they are scared they prefer to stay in the open and run than to hide.

HABITAT:

Foxes like open fields and forests. In the wild a fox will hunt over a large area of up to 5 square miles. Now more and more foxes live in towns and cities. They can find more food in a smaller area there. They don't like other foxes to live too near and they will fight to drive them off.

Foxes live in dens when they have cubs. They often have more than one den and they move between them. Some dens are the old burrows of other animals. The foxes add other exits so they can escape more easily!

FOOD:

Foxes will eat most things. In summer they like fruit, berries, nuts and grains and bugs like beetles, grasshoppers and crickets. In winter they eat small animals like mice and rabbits, birds and bird eggs and even dead animals. They use their sharp senses to catch their prey. Some foxes will kill chickens on farms but this is rare. Foxes who live in towns and cities will eat rubbish.

LIFESPAN:

In the wild, foxes live about 5 years. The main danger to them is man. Fox hunting is now illegal in the UK but some farmers still shoot them as pests. Other farmers think that they help because they eat bugs, mice and other creatures that can eat crops. In the city, they are often knocked over by cars.

