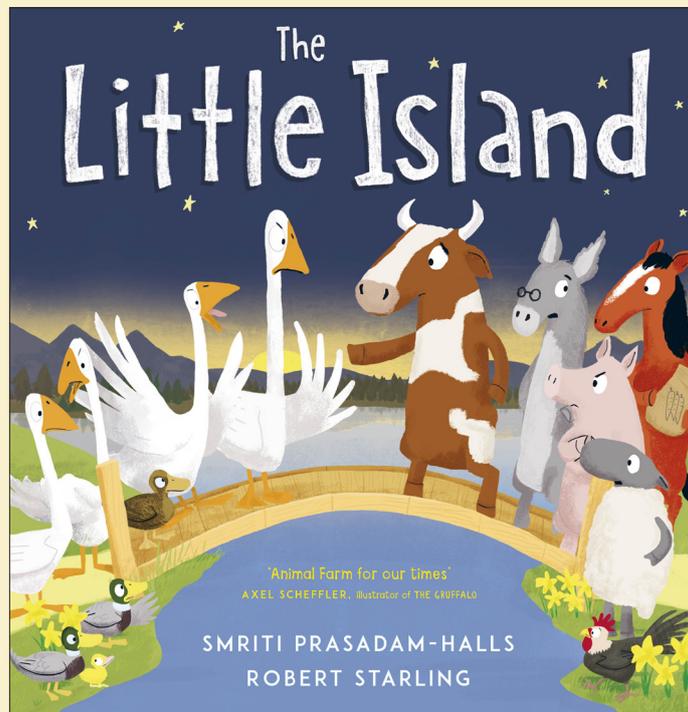


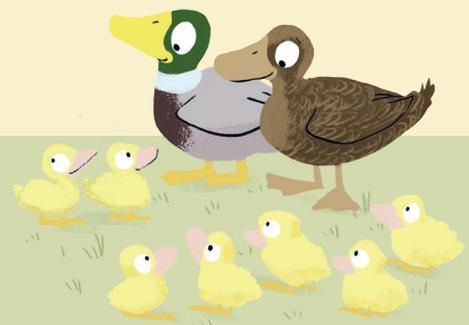
Teaching Notes for The Little Island

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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 picture books to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. 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. We hope you find them useful.

The concepts explored in the book and these teaching notes are more suitable for children aged 7+.



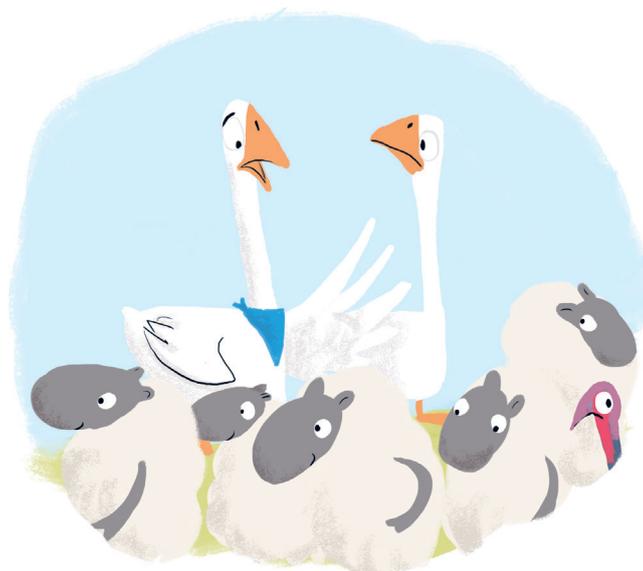

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Reading aloud and key talking points:

In order for these teaching notes to work most effectively you will need to 'keep back' the text from the children initially and not show the children the cover or the title of the book. It would be a good idea to cover the front with wrapping paper until the title is revealed at the end of the reading.

- Before you begin to read, look at the front endpapers. Encourage the children to look carefully at what they can see. How could you describe this place? What do you notice about the place? What story do they think is about to happen here? Does it remind you of the location or setting of anything else you have seen or read?
- Now look at the inside title page and discuss the title and the illustration underneath it. What do they already know about islands? Does this give them any more clues about the story? Where do they think the main action will take place? Do they think the rest of the location they just saw will play a part in the story ahead? What are the two geese looking at? How do they feel about what they see? How might this link to your ideas about the story?
- Read aloud the first double page spread. In this spread, the key concept of 'liberty' is introduced. What do the children understand about this word? What do they think it means to be 'at liberty to live and work where they chose'? Re-read the page again. Do you get any sense of what might happen later in the story? Why do you think the author has chosen to point out, at the end of the spread, 'It wasn't perfect and they didn't always agree (animals almost never do).'?
- Now read aloud up to 'lush green reeds and golden fruit trees.' Pause here to reflect on the story so far. What picture do the author and illustrator paint of the setting? Look at the use of expanded noun phrases that richly describe the island; how does the language used make you feel about the setting? Now, look more closely at the layout of this spread. Why do you think they have chosen to separate the text on the page as they have? How does this relate to the illustration? Might this tell us anything about the ducks and geese?
- Turn the page and read the next spread 'One day, the geese began to gossip.' What do they understand about the word gossip? Look at the clever use of idiom in the next sentence 'Soon they were in a flap.' What does this mean? Why has the author chosen to use this phrase? Look carefully at this spread and encourage them first to focus in on the separation that is occurring. Consider the choice of language used by the geese; 'other animals', 'our part of the farm', 'we aren't safe'. What is happening here? Are the geese justified in their opinions? Look at the loaded language the geese are using; how do they provoke an emotional rather than a rational response? What should they do if they aren't happy? What do you think they will do?



- Now read aloud the next spread. Does this match what you thought they should do? How does this page make you feel? Children may look at how the use of colour, the scale of the geese on the page and the language of the geese changes in this part of the story. What are they learning about the character of the geese? Why do they think the geese think they have authority here? Explore the language used in more depth: ‘our island’; ‘declared’; the way they speak using superlatives such as ‘redder’, ‘greener’, ‘better’; the use of modal verbs ‘We should leave’; the way they describe a past idyllic life. What are they trying to do? Look even more carefully at the carefully crafted facial expressions and body positions of the characters, do you think all the geese agree? Why or why not? Compare and contrast the views of the geese with the ducks and turkey. How do they feel about this? How do we know? Children may draw on what they can see in the illustration or the contrast in the language used around the ducks; ‘a dreadful idea’, ‘loved living and working together’. Now re-read the final sentence. What is the impact of starting this sentence with ‘But’?
- Read aloud the next spread and use this to explore the concept of hierarchy. Who is in charge in this spread? How do we know? Encourage the children to look carefully at the choices made by the illustrator about the scale, position and props of the characters as well as their facial expressions. Now move on to a more nuanced discussion; are all the characters happy with the situation? How do you know? Why do you think they are going along with the geese’s plan regardless? It would be good for children either to have a copy of the illustration that they can closely read at this point or to have it displayed on a larger scale so that they can observe small details like the tears of some of the working ducks.
- Turn the page and read aloud the next spread. What are the consequences of the geese’s decision? How do you know? Again, encourage your readers to pay careful attention to both the text and illustration on the page. They may highlight the pragmatic choice of ‘At first’ to start the spread, juxtaposed with ‘But’ to begin the next sentence, they may look at the repetition used by the author to highlight how hard and drawn out everything is, ‘harder, much harder. There were so many jobs to do now.’ and the jobs being listed in patterns of three. Also look at the change from wide double page spreads to small vignettes of the animals. Why do you think the illustrator chose to do this? Re-read the final sentence on the page – what else does this tell us about the geese? Continue this reflection by reading aloud the next spread, looking again at what the judicious choice of language and careful observations in the illustration tell us about the situation the geese have created, for example the power of the verbs chosen, the repetition of ‘we’. You could try out different ways of reading the repeated refrain of the geese, considering the impact of where the emphasis on key words is placed, e.g.:

“**We** mustn’t complain! At least we are happy.”

“We **mustn’t** complain! At least we are happy.”

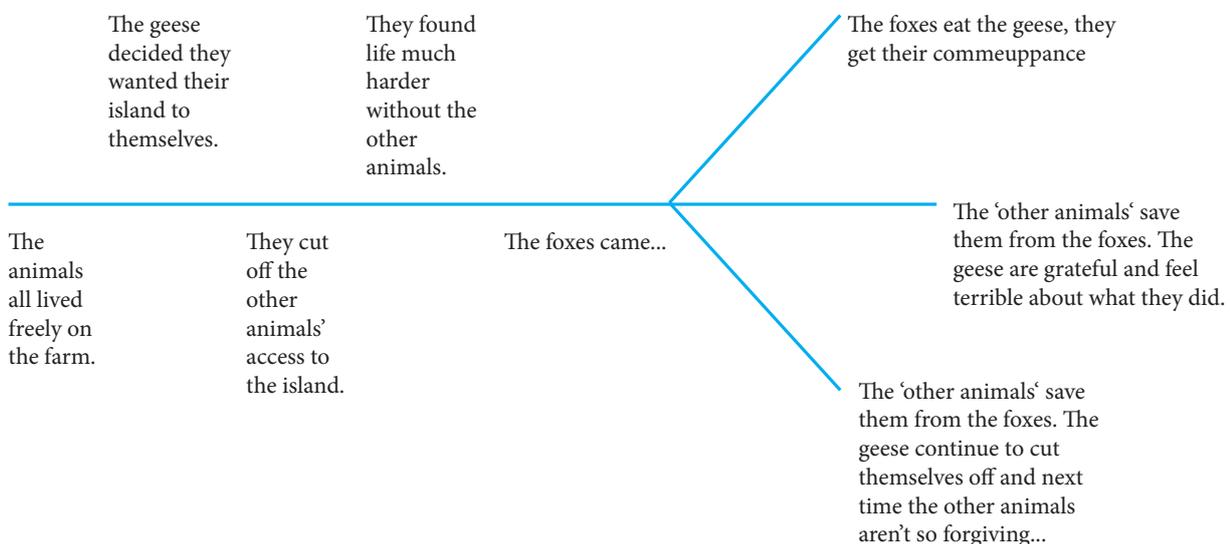
“We mustn’t **complain!** At least we are happy.”

“We mustn’t complain! At least **we** are happy.”

“We mustn’t complain! At least we are **happy!**”

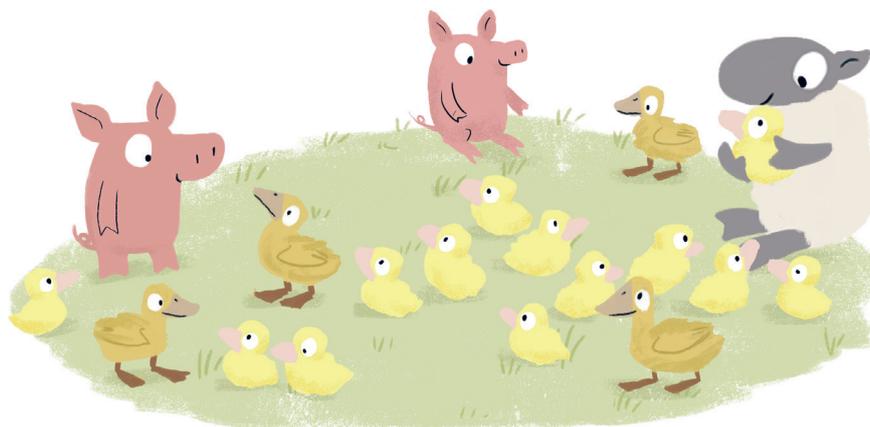


- Now turn the page and read aloud the next double page spread. Explore the contrast between the impact of the decision on the geese themselves and on the ‘other animals’. Look at the literal separation between them highlighted in the page layout, the gutter cutting them off from the mainland, the addition of frost to their beaks – they are being ‘frozen out’, the stillness of the left hand side of the spread versus the movement and action on the right. Look at the author’s use of superlatives, ‘hard’, ‘harder’ to reinforce the gravity of the impact of their decision. Look at the two geese here and try to imagine what they are thinking as they look onto what is happening on the mainland. Encourage the children to jot down their ideas of what the characters might be thinking or saying at this point. Get them to write this down on a small sheet of paper or post-it note and then decide whether the geese would say this out loud or think it privately to themselves, considering what we know about their characters so far. When they have decided get them to draw a thought or speech bubble around their words and to Blu-tac or stick this to a copy of this spread. Explore the concept of the geese vocalising their thoughts – what would it mean now to say they might have been wrong? Encourage the children to think about their situation from a personal perspective. What should they do now? Now think about what we know about the characters of the geese from the story so far. Do you think they would follow your suggestions? What do you think they will actually do next?
- Now turn the page and read the next spread. Was this a surprise to them? Does it take the story in a different direction from the one they thought? How do they think this will change the direction of the rest of the story? Encourage the children to consider what they already know about foxes both in real life or in other stories they have read. Consider the choice of adverb the author has chosen, ‘slyly’ and the common idiom ‘sly as a fox’ – what does this mean? Continue to read the next spread and explore the other adverbs used to describe the foxes’ actions. What is the impact on you as a reader of the choice to repeat ‘silently’ each time? Compare the two sides of the spread, the sinister stillness of the left hand side of the spread with the fast paced action on the right hand side. What do you think will happen next? You could make a series of prediction pathways with the children. Summarise the large shapes of the story so far, and look at a number of possible ways the story could continue, e.g.:



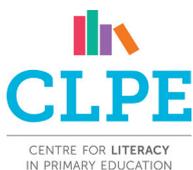
- Continuing reading aloud, up until ‘It hadn’t been perfect and they hadn’t always agreed (animals almost never do). But they liked it.’ Look carefully at the illustration on this page, which character is our attention drawn to? What makes this character stand out? Track back through the book and find other examples of the goose with the blue bandana. What do you think you know about this character in particular? How do you think this character is feeling at this point of the story? How does this compare with how they were feeling at other parts of the story?

- Now read on to ‘...they began to build a bridge.’ Explore the careful repetition of ‘slowly, very slowly.’ Is this an easy resolution for everyone? How might the different animals be feeling now? Are such big divides always easy to resolve? Allow children to make personal connections to the text, exploring the idiom ‘build a bridge’ that has been carefully chosen in the text.
- Re-read the book as a whole from start to finish, this time revealing the front cover. Reflect with the children on why we kept the front cover reveal until after we had read the book. What might have happened if we had seen the cover before we started reading?
- After reading, encourage the children to tell you what they liked about the book. Was there anything they disliked? What did it make them think about? Do they have any questions about the book? How did it make them feel? Continue to explore parallels that the children draw from real life experiences, they may make links with the EU referendum, the current debate around the environment, or personal experiences of being affected by gossip or feelings or experiences of being led or being ostracised by others, mediate these discussions sensitively and appropriately.
- Consider the illustration chosen to accompany ‘The End’. Why do they think this illustration has been chosen? Do they ever feel a weight of having to learn from the mistakes of an older generation?
- You could go on to explore their feelings and reactions to the text in the form of a review quote, that could appear on the back of the book or in a poster advertising it; If you were asked to review this book or provide a comment for the jacket what would you say and why?



Links to wider current issues:

Depending on the age and emotional maturity of the children, you may wish to explore links between this book and wider current issues. You might link the reactions of the geese to mainstream media headlines around immigration; views that have been highlighted by the Brexit campaign. You may wish to explore the concept of propaganda here, you could link this very directly to newspaper headlines such as those referenced on this Free Movement Organisation webpage: <https://www.freemovement.org.uk/daily-mail-immigration-appeals/> or propaganda posters such as the Leave campaign’s ‘Breaking Point’ poster. If the children are mature enough, you could also explore the concept of othering, related to the poignancy of the phrase ‘the other animals’.



These resources were created in partnership with CLPE.

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