The Butterfly Lion
Michael Morpurgo

NOVEL NOTES
3RD CLASS

READING ZONE
English Language Programme for Primary Schools

TEACHER’S RESOURCES
Novel Notes
The Butterfly Lion
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The story begins when the narrator, a ten-year-old boy, decides to escape the misery of boarding school and return home to London by train. He gets as far as a large entrance gate beside a road where he meets an old lady and her dog. She offers him shelter from the rain in her huge house. Over tea and scones, he looks out the window and notices a white lion on the hillside opposite. It turns a shimmering blue when the sun comes out. The old lady proceeds to tell the boy the story of the ‘butterfly lion’ and someone she calls ‘my Bertie’.

Bertie grew up on a farm in South Africa with his mother and father. An only child, he longed to go beyond the walls of the compound where they lived to explore the wild, but was warned by his parents that it was too dangerous. One day, from the branches of a tree where he was climbing, he saw a lioness and a rare white lion cub at a watering hole. At first his parents didn’t believe him. Later he saves the lion cub from being attacked by hyenas and persuades his parents to let the orphaned cub live with them. After a few happy years, his father announced that Bertie must go to boarding school in England and that the lion has been promised to a French circus owner. Horrified at this, Bertie tries to release the lion cub into the wild but the cub eventually returns to the farm just as the Frenchman has arrived at the house. The Frenchman promises to look after the lion and he is taken away.

The old lady, whose name is Millie, then recounts her own childhood in the big house, Strawbridge, and her chance meeting with Bertie when her kite gets stuck in a tree. The two children become friends and meet often after that to play and go for walks. Later, Bertie attends college in Canterbury and she goes to convent school. They send letters to each other but Bertie’s final letter tells her that he is joining the army to go to war in France.

While at war in the trenches, Bertie saves two wounded friends from enemy fire, despite being wounded himself. He is awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery. Millie, who deliberately trained as a nurse in the hopes of being reunited with her friend, is in France when she reads of Bertie in a magazine. Reunited, they find an old circus poster in the village with a white lion on it. They discover that Monsieur Merlot’s circus has closed down and he is living nearby. Bertie is reunited with his lion.

Bertie, Millie and the lion return to England, where the couple get married and live in Strawbridge. The lion lives to a good age but when he dies, Bertie, after grieving for a long time, decides to remember him by carving a white lion in the chalk hillside opposite the house. The chalk lion regularly attracts hundreds of blue butterflies who come to drink after a rain shower. After his death at an old age, Bertie is buried alongside the lion on top of the hill.

After finishing her story, the old lady drives the narrator back to his college. Later, the boy discovers that the woman died over ten years before. Returning to Strawbridge, he notices that the house is in a state of disrepair. From the hillside he hears the woman’s voice and promises to look after the butterfly lion and never to forget their story.

Themes and issues addressed in this novel include war, separation, loneliness, and the supernatural.
**About the Author**

Michael Morpurgo was born in St Alban’s, England in 1943. He is a poet and playwright but is best known as a writer of children’s books. He is married with three children.

Morpurgo was educated in English schools including boarding schools which would influence the writing of *The Butterfly Lion*. He went on to study English and French at London University and became a primary school teacher. His first book was published in 1974. He has written over 120 books, including *Waiting For Anya, The Butterfly Lion, War Horse, Kensuke’s Kingdom* and *Private Peaceful*. He held the title of Children’s Laureate from 2003 to 2005.

He has been shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal four times and his children’s books have won the Whitbread Children’s Book Award, the Smarties Book Prize and the Red House Children’s Book Award. His novel *War Horse* has been adapted into a film directed by Steven Spielberg.

**Objectives**

**Curriculum Objectives**

The child should be enabled to understand the relationship between text and illustration, become an increasingly independent reader, engage in discussion about the book, use simple dictionaries effectively to find the meaning of words, and use information technology to increase motivation to read and to enhance reading development.

**Learning Outcomes**

- Record events in the story by keeping a reading log.
- Write a diary entry from Bertie’s point of view.
- Create a newspaper account of an incident from the book including text and pictures.
- Construct an alternative ending to the novel.
- Produce a character profile for Monsieur Merlot.
- Develop a poster advertising the circus.
- Learn more about other works mentioned in the book, including *Peter and the Wolf, Black Beauty, Heidi* and *Little Women*.
- Participate in a class discussion / brainstorm.
Cross-curricular Links

**SPHE**
The children can learn more about the value of friendship, looking in particular at the friendship between Bertie and the lion, and between Millie and Bertie. Different feelings and emotions such as anger, sadness, happiness, fear, worry, and loneliness can be explored. The importance of communication and staying in touch with friends and family can also be covered.

**Gaeilge**
Children can learn the correct terms for some of the wild animals mentioned in the story. For example leon, féileacán, séabra, eilifint Afracach, hiéana.

**Visual Arts**
The class could draw or paint their version of the lion carving in the chalk hillside, covered with blue butterflies, or another vivid scene from the book. A poster for Cirque Merlot and ‘Le Prince Blanc’ could be created based on the descriptions in the book. A kite design could also relate to those mentioned in the book.

**Drama**
Children can act out the scene where Bertie is told that he will be sent to school in England and his attempt to set the lion free. Alternatively the scene where Bertie and Millie meet Monsieur Merlot and the lion could be dramatised, or an improvised scene of a young Millie and Bertie at play outdoors, talking about their lives could be done.

**History**
Children could make a study of trench warfare in World War One, discussing when that war broke out and who was fighting who. In Prehistory, a study could be made of why people would have made a giant carving of a white horse, thousands of years ago, such as seen in the example at Uffington, mentioned in the book. Can children suggest their own theories for the existence of large chalk carvings?

**Geography**
There are many locations for children to research, locate on a map, and discover more about in this book. South Africa is one example. The Timbavati region is now a wildlife park. Cape Town is the port that Bertie set sail from. Bertie gets the idea for the chalk lion from a white horse on a hillside in Uffington, Lincolnshire. Children could locate Lincolnshire on a map of England and try to find a picture of the Uffington white horse. Locations in France, such as Amiens, can also be researched. The fact that Bertie’s mother’s death is caused by malaria can be discussed as part of the ‘people and other lands’ curriculum strand. Children can find out how malaria is spread and how it affects people in hot places like Africa.

Suggestions for Classroom Work

- Keep a reading log for every chapter.
- Keep a diary written from Bertie’s point of view.
- Write a newspaper account of Bertie’s heroic rescue of his two soldier friends, or of Bertie, Millie and the lion’s return to England. Include pictures.
- Write an alternative ending to the story.
Web Links

The website of the Global White Lion Protection Trust including photos and facts about the white lions of the Timbavati region:
http://www.whitelions.org/

A page about Uffington White Horse featuring photographs of the chalk carving:
http://www.hows.org.uk/personal/hillfigs/uff/uffing.htm

A 13-minute audio extract from the beginning of the book, read by the author, Michael Morpurgo:
http://soundcloud.com/harpercollinschildrens/michael-morpurgo-the-butterfly-lion-extract

Pre-reading Activities

Oral Pre-reading Questions

Chapter 1
Describe the front cover illustration of The Butterfly Lion. What does it tell us about the story, do you think?

Chapter 2
Do you think that the narrator is going to make it to the train station? Why?

Chapter 3
What do you expect this chapter will be about? Why?

Chapter 4
Describe the first illustration in this chapter. What might be happening here?

Chapter 5
Do you think that Bertie and his lion will have a happy life from this point on? Why?

Chapter 6
What does the title of this chapter tell us about what's going to happen?
Chapter 7
Where would you expect events in this chapter to take place?

Chapter 8
Do you think Bertie will become friends with the girl? Why? What do they have in common?

Chapter 9
What do you think ‘old codswallop’ means in this chapter’s title?

Chapter 10
What do you think will happen now that Millie has met Bertie again?

Chapter 11
Look at the first two illustrations in this chapter. How has Bertie’s lion changed in appearance since earlier in the book?

Chapter 12
Look at the title of this chapter. What might we expect to be explained in the next few pages?

Chapter 13
Is there anything else you think the narrator would like ask the old lady to tell him at this stage?

Chapter 14
If the old lady died years before, how was the boy’s meeting with her possible?

Vocabulary
Pre-teach the relevant new vocabulary in each chapter. There are a few South African and French words/phrases in the book that can be explained and discussed. Add new words to the word wall, ask the students to use new words in a sentence, get the children to think of words that mean the same thing as the new words (synonyms), etc.

Comprehension Activity Sheets
Presented over the following pages is a selection of both lower and higher order questions for each section of this novel, which the teacher may choose from.
1. How old is the narrator when he decides to run away from boarding school?

2. Give two reasons why the narrator is miserable at this time.

3. What escape route does the narrator use?

4. Why do you think he tries to disguise his uniform?

5. Do you think the narrator is being brave in this chapter? Why? What other words would you use to describe him?

6. How do you think life in a boarding school compares to life in other schools?

7. Imagine that you are a person travelling in the car that the narrator hides from. Who are you? Where could you have been travelling to that day?
Chapter 2

1. Name three things the narrator notices about the old lady when he first meets her in the rain.

2. How does the old lady describe her dog, Jack, so as not to worry the narrator?

3. Why does the old lady’s house look as if it has ‘grown out of the ground’?

4. Who do you think Bertie is?

5. Describe how you think the narrator feels as he sits in Millie’s kitchen.

6. Think of any books you have read or films you have watched that had African animals in them. Write about them.
1. Why is this chapter called ‘Timbavati’?

2. Name five wild animals that are mentioned in this chapter.

3. What do you think the word ‘veld’ might mean?

4. How is Bertie’s mother described in this chapter?

5. What does Bertie most enjoy doing during the day? How does he amuse himself at night?

6. Name two of the dangers Bertie might have faced beyond the compound walls.

7. Why does Bertie’s father shoot the lioness?

8. Who is narrating this chapter? How do you know?

9. Write a diary entry from Bertie, on the night he sees the white lion cub for the first time. What thoughts do you think went through his mind?
1. How does the lion cub try to protect itself against the hyenas?

2. What makes the hyenas run away?

3. Give one reason why Bertie's father says he can't keep the lion cub.

4. Give one reason why Bertie's mother says they should keep the lion cub.

5. What changes happen to Bertie's mother after they allow the lion cub to live with them?

6. Explain why you think Bertie's mother has been so sad up till this time?

7. Can you think of a happy event that happened in your own family? Describe it. How did it make you and your family feel?

8. Why do you think the story of *Peter and the Wolf* is important to Bertie?
1. Where is Bertie being sent to school? When does he have to leave?

2. Why is the Frenchman in Africa?

3. What does Bertie do for the first time in his life when his father tells him his lion is to be taken away?

4. Why can’t the lion be set free into the wild instead of going to the circus?

5. What does Bertie make up his mind to do that night?

6. Explain why you think the lion follows Bertie after he leaves him on the top of the kopje?

7. Imagine if Bertie allowed the lion to come back to the house with him. What would he say to his parents if they found him coming in to the house?
1. Who is the first person to notice that the lion has returned?

2. What has changed about the lion’s appearance?

3. The Frenchman says ‘Incroyable! Magnifique!’ when he sees the lion. What do you think these French words might mean?

4. What promise does the Frenchman make to Bertie?

5. What promise does Bertie make to the lion?

6. Do you think the boy would have travelled by boat if he made the journey from Cape Town to England today? Why?

7. Describe how Bertie's feelings change from the start of this chapter to the end.
Chapter 7

1. Where do the events in this chapter take place?

2. Two people narrate this chapter. Who are they?

3. What is the name of the house that the old lady lives in?

4. What was the job of a governess like Nolips in those days, do you think?

5. What age is the old lady when she first meets Bertie?

6. Imagine that you have to give the old lady’s house a new name. What would you call it? Why?

7. What disease caused the death of Bertie’s mother?

8. Select a place in your local area where you could meet a friend each Sunday to play games with. Why does it make a good meeting place?
1. In this chapter we find out the name of the old lady. What is it?

2. Name five wild animals that Millie encounters on Nanny Mason’s nature walks.

3. Where are Millie and Bertie going after their last summer term together?

4. What does Bertie give to Millie to remember him by?

5. How are the letters Millie wrote to Bertie different from the ones he wrote to her?

6. Imagine you are Millie. Write a letter in reply to Bertie’s letter about joining the army. In it, tell him about any worries or fears you have for him.
1. Why is the narrator disappointed when he sees the kite Bertie has made?

2. Who is narrating most of this chapter?

3. What country do the soldiers who fire machine guns at Bertie and his friends come from?

4. Do you think Bertie’s attempt to save his friends in no-man’s-land is very brave? Why?

5. Explain why you think both sides, German and British, stop to cheer Bertie on in the end?

6. Why does Bertie not think that what he did was brave?

7. The Victoria Cross is the greatest award for bravery that a British soldier can be awarded. Choose a famous award or prize that you would like to receive and explain why you would like it.
1. Why does Millie have to push Bertie in a wheelchair?

2. What reasons does Bertie give Millie for not writing to her for several years?

3. How is Millie able to make the café owner understand what information they need about The White Prince?

4. Why did Monsieur Merlot have to close his circus?

5. How has the war damaged the buildings?

6. Bertie and his lion are reunited in this chapter. Describe a time when you met someone who is important to you that you hadn’t seen for a time. How did you feel?
1. How does Millie react to meeting the lion for the first time?

2. How do they travel back into the village?

3. Why does Bertie give the lion ‘a good scratch’ between his eyes?

4. How does Monsieur Merlot react to meeting Bertie again?

5. Imagine the conversation that the colonel might have with another soldier over a meal later that evening. How would he describe what had happened?

6. The lion is sometimes used a symbol of Britain. What is used as a symbol of Ireland? Name some other symbols used by other countries around the world.

7. When Bertie, Millie and the lion return to England, newspaper headlines include ‘The British Lion Comes Home’. Write down some other headlines that newspapers could have used for this event.
1. Why could the lion not have escaped from Strawbridge even if he had wanted to?

2. Where is The White Prince buried when he dies?

3. Why does Bertie choose that spot to bury the lion?

4. What design would you carve into a chalk hillside, if you could? Why?

5. Why do the blue butterflies come to cover the chalk lion?
1. Where is Bertie buried?

2. What does the old lady say to the narrator that she had also said to Bertie years before?

3. Mr Cook calls the narrator by his surname. What is his surname? Have you heard that name before? Where?

4. How long ago did Millie die?

5. Have you seen plaques which remember people or events? Where did you see them? Who or what were they remembering?

6. Why do you think ‘And the Lion Shall Lie Down With the Lamb’ was written on Bertie’s plaque? Where does this quote come from?
1. Why is this chapter called ‘Adonis Blues’, do you think? Think of your own title for this last chapter.

2. Does the first paragraph in this chapter remind you of the first chapter of the book? Why?

3. What does the narrator notice about the house when he sits up on the hill?

4. What does the narrator promise to do for Millie?

5. Describe some of the emotions that you think the narrator would have felt on the hill. How would you have felt in that situation?

6. Do you think the book has a good ending? Why? How does the ending make you feel?

7. Read the first page of Chapter One again. In what way does it match the events in the final chapter of *The Butterfly Lion*?
# Book Report Sheet

If you don’t have enough space to write your answers, use the notes section on the following pages.

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<tr>
<th>Pupil’s name:</th>
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<th>Title of book:</th>
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<th>Illustrator:</th>
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Setting (where the story took place): 

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<th>List the main characters:</th>
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Describe your favourite character: 

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<th>Describe your favourite part of the story:</th>
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This book was:  

- [ ] Exciting  
- [ ] Boring  
- [ ] Complicated  

(✔️ tick all that apply)  

- [ ] Interesting  
- [ ] Slow-moving  
- [ ] Imaginative  
- [ ] Scary  
- [ ] Fast-paced  
- [ ] Amusing  

Did you like the book? Why?/Why not?  

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<tr>
<th>Grade the book (✔️ Tick one)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Rate the book out of ten:  

/10