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TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

A Place of Stone and Darkness

Chris Mousdale

The amazing, mysterious realm of Striggworld can finally be revealed.

The Striggs found themselves forced underground after the human creatures appeared and destroyed their home.

Over thousands of years, the Striggs developed and colonised their underground home, but even here they are unsafe; chemicals now pollute their waters and a deadly sickness threatens the flock.

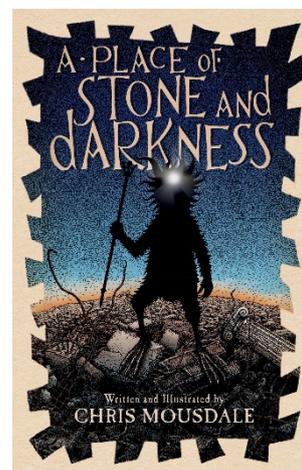
Even worse: an inquisitive young Strigg called Ellee Meddo discovers a human boy, trapped deep in a well. Humans are to be feared and saving him could mean untold peril. What will Ellee decide to do?

Are you brave enough to follow Ellee into the darkness?

About the author

Chris Mousdale is a freelance illustrator, designer and former bookseller. In 2001 he was awarded the New Zealand Post Children's Book Award's top prize for his illustrations in Joy Cowley's *Brodie*.

Chris lives in Auckland with his partner.



SPECIFICATIONS:

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RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Before reading
- During reading: Comprehension questions
- After reading: Themes, Characters, Style, Structure and Language
- Further research and creative responses

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BEFORE READING

- 1) Look at the cover of the book. What can you see? List three visual and or/verbal features that stand out to you. Share with the class.
- 2) In groups of three, read the blurb on the back of the book. Who are the characters? Which parts of the description make you want to read the story? Why? Share with the class.
- 3) On the opening pages, there are some pictures and words to help you understand the story. Choose three words from the glossary that have been invented by the author and draw them as pictures. Share with a partner.
- 4) Many cultures have stories and myths with anthropomorphised animals in them playing important roles. Look up the definitions for 'anthropomorphic' and 'mythology'. Work in pairs to explain these words to each other.
- 5) Have you ever observed a bird closely? Write a list of five birdlike characteristics that you think are unique to a bird. Can you draw a bird and add some human qualities? Share your anthropomorphic bird creature with a partner.

DURING READING

Comprehension Questions

- 1) Why do you think Mousdale starts the novel with a prologue? What do you think of this?
- 2) Why is the word 'humans' italicised?
- 3) Who is Ellee?
- 4) How does 'the boy' get his name?
- 5) Who is Blue? Why did Ellee save Blue?
- 6) Why does Ellee refer to Blue's speech as 'song'?
- 7) Why does Mousdale use the word 'bumbled' (p26) to describe Sidney-Fredney's movements? What other clues are there as to the nature of Ellee's brother?
- 8) From Strigg perspective, is it a good or bad thing that Ellee has rescued a Toppa? How do you know?
- 9) What is the spanglement? How do you know?
- 10) What is the Strigg playtime song about Toppas?
- 11) Why do other Striggs treat Sidfred differently?
- 12) What is the black and shiny disc that Sigfred shows Blue in the merzeum?
- 13) What is Kass' hidden motive for trekking beyond the safe zones?
- 14) Why is Kass suspicious at the end of Chapter 8?
- 15) Do you think Ellee was brave speaking with force to Kass in Chapter 9? Why/why not?
- 16) What is your impression of Ellee in chapter 10? What is your impression of Kass?
- 17) Why does Kass think the fear generated by Blue's discovery might be useful?
- 18) In Chapter 11, Sephonee tells Kass's origin story. What is it? Where is he from?

- 19) Can you predict what Sidfred's plan is at the end of Chapter 14?
- 20) Why do you think Ellee is so 'wary' of Kass in Chapter 15?
- 21) It is also in this chapter that we find out why Blue was down in the well. Explain in your own words.
- 22) What are the 'song shapes'?
- 23) What is Kass's first impression of Uptop in Chapter 19?
- 24) The beginning of Chapter 20 introduces a new narrative perspective. Whose is it?
- 25) What is your first impression of Minskie Bonaccord in Chapter 21? Use evidence from the book to support your opinion.
- 26) Who are the Jovem? Who are the Glezos Crew?
- 27) How does the man in Chapter 25 describe Sidfred?
- 28) What is the deceased animal discovered in Chapter 25?
- 29) What was the Faculty's previous use, as described in Chapter 29?
- 30) What is the brave thing Blue does in Chapter 36?
- 31) What is 'the shape' that is referred to at the beginning of Chapter 37?
- 32) Chapter 43 describes 'a tale of the Striggs' darkest times'. Summarise in your own words.
- 33) Why do you think Ellee insists she should be the volunteer to go up the well?
- 34) What has happened on the last page of this novel? Explain in your own words.

AFTER READING

Themes

- 1) Discuss the following themes.
 - a) Human impact on the environment
 - b) How bravery and courage help us face our fears
 - c) The importance of friendship
 - d) Animal cruelty
 - e) How our differences make us unique
- 2) Rank these themes from most important to least important. Use evidence from the book to support your ideas.
- 3) Choose your number one theme and write a paragraph telling us why you think it is the most important. Share in pairs and discuss.

Characters

Ellee, Blue, Sidfred and Kass are all important characters in this book.

- 1) Write down your first impressions of each of these characters.
- 2) Find quotes from the book to support your opinion.

- 3) What do you think the author wants you to know about Minskie from the following descriptions?

The delightful Minskie Bonaccord supports the main characters in their various quests to restore order to their world. On page 256, she is described as 'one-hundred-and-fifty-four centimetres tall and in need of a good meal'. When confronting the enemy, we hear that 'a blankness opened up inside her, a dark place where bad experience was only partially erased.'

- 4) The Strigg character Snuzz says of Sidfred to Ellee: 'your brother is a remarkable Strigg.' (p244). Do you agree? Why/not?
- 5) How would you describe Sidfred at the start of the novel? How does this differ to his character at the end of the novel?
- 6) When you read a book, you can use your imagination to think about what the characters look like. In this book, Chris Mousdale has drawn his own illustrations. Look at the picture of Blue and Minskie on page 228. Do your imaginings match the author's? What is the same? What is different?
- 6) Kass is a character who changes throughout the book. Make a timeline that shows Kass's character progression from the start to the end of the novel.
- 7) Ellee is a brave character who has a very important main role in the novel. Make a list of Ellee's character traits. Use examples to support your ideas. Do you think these qualities are appealing in a main character? Why/not?

Style, Structure and Language

Genre:

This book has a particular genre that means there are certain aspects a reader can expect from a reading experience.

- What is the genre of this book? List the characteristics of the genre. Give examples from the book for each characteristic to support your thinking.

Structure:

- 1) As discussed earlier, this book has a glossary. Why do you think this is? Is it helpful? Explain why/not.
- 2) The author has also used a prologue in this novel.

- a) What is a prologue?
- b) Why do you think the author chose to start the story in this way?

3) In addition, there are three parts to the book.

Why do you think Chris Mousdale decided to use this structure?

- c) Write a summary paragraph for each part.

Narrative perspective:

This book has been written in third person, which means we can understand the thinking and feelings of different characters from the perspective of an outsider looking in.

- d) Describe where the story gives us the perspective of the following characters. Use examples from the book to support your ideas:
 - Ellee
 - Blue
 - Sidfred
 - Kass

Figurative language:

An author can use figurative language to describe things in an interesting way. There are many examples of this in the book. A simile is a comparison using 'like' or 'as'; a metaphor compares directly. Here are some examples from the book:

Similes:

- Raffy was destroyed by the madness that swirled around the Toppas **like a dark swarm**.(96)
- 'He was an easy target, **like a rat in an open yard**.'(193)

Metaphors:

- 'There were broken columns and wide **ribbons of concrete, pancaked flat** where they had fallen.' (166)
- 'The sky's edge **blistered** deep orange and the **veil of darkness** had all but slipped away.' (181)
- 'According to Sidfred's calculations, there was more than enough power still wound into the giant system to enable them to open **a small rip in the fabric of time**.' (380)

- e) Can you find any other similes and metaphors in the book? List them.

Sometimes similes and metaphors are extended, or made longer, to continue the imagery for a reader.

Extended simile:

His attempts to remember the conversation with Owk were **like trying to recall a dream on waking**. What was so recently vivid was already dissolving at the touch of a memory. (128)

Extended metaphors:

'Were the Toppa builders who did this trying to **knit the land and the sky together**? Their **crude stitches** had scarred the edges of the earth.' (p166)

'Sabotage — almost certainly kids, the **little rats** from the detention centres. Why didn't the sanitisation units stick around and **exterminate them all**?' (p252)

- f) Can you extend the following similes and metaphors?
- The light was shining like a beacon on the harbour.
 - The ship was a ghost at sea.
 - At the edge of the cave, stones sat like white teeth.

Other language features:

Alliteration:

The following are examples of alliteration: '... Kass **worked** his **wingtips** into the **widening** cracks ... Ellee's **stand struck steel** reinforcement.'" (p185); 'Athán and Sephónee **felt first** the humid breath of the gathered rock. It was a **fug of fear** — rising up from a hot and dirty flock of Striggs cowering beneath the **weight** of the **world**.' (392)

- g) What is alliteration? Find three other examples in the book.

Idioms and colloquialisms:

Minskíe Bonaccórd uses a lot of informal language in her speech. Examples of this include '**Too right, mate**.' (p211), 'don't want to **ruin your lid**.' (p216) and 'we're **dead meat** if we stick around.' (p233).

- h) Find three more examples of informal speech used by this character.

Pun:

When Sidfred, Ellee, Blue and Kass are at the carbuncle, Sidfred says: 'I'd already considered the, ahem, possible pitfalls, if you'll excuse the pun.' (p145)

- i) What is a pun? Why is this a pun?

Extra for experts:

- j) How many language features can you find in this excerpt? Choose from metaphor, simile, alliteration and onomatopoeia.

***'To the northwest lay the sea and its relentless tide, swallowing up the land. Crumbling columns and stranded freeway flyovers breeched its surface like basking concrete monsters.'* (p163)**

Vocabulary:

There are some complex words in this book. Here are some examples.

- Eccentricities (p21)
- Fertile (p32)
- Consensus (p41)
- Respiratory (p54)
- Expectorate (p66)
- Preposterous (p90)
- Raucous (p92)
- Transfixed (p97)
- Decoy (p102)
- Quarantine (p103)
- Perimeter (p104)
- Hubbub (p118)
- Reconnaissance (p118)
- Decipher (p129)
- Frigid (p130)
- Bludgeoned (p133)
- Pulverising (p140)
- Precariously (p148)
- Fissures (p184)
- Flummoxed (p202)
- Silhouettes (p226)
- Meagre (p236)
- Beseech (p257)

- Prodigious (p282)
- Bamboozled (p300)
- Audacious (p364)
- Visage (p373)
- Intermittent (p379)
- Cacophony (p397)
- Inert (p405)
- Velocity (p407)

k) Choose ten words you don't know and write the definitions for each word. Use each in a new sentence.

Further Research and Creative Responses

- 1) There is an important ceremony in this novel called Spangletime. *'Spangletime was the formal ceremony that ushered a young Strigg into adulthood. The whole flock came together and there was singing and speeches.'* (p35) Create a poster that shows human ceremonies around the world.
- 2) In Chapter 4, Skingee Notta is described as a blind chimera (42), amongst other things. What is a 'chimera'? Create a sculpture of your version of a chimera. Use papier mâché or clay.
- 3) In the prologue, we learn that 'the *humans* had come. Nothing would be the same again.' (p9). Research a time and/or place in world history where humans have arrived and things have changed in some way, either positively or negatively. You might consider choosing from these topics: first human drawings, first farming/agriculture, first human buildings, the taming of animals, diseases that have travelled with humans, human impact on climate change, the invention of a technology.
- 4) Write a book review and post it on the 'Goodreads' website.
- 5) Choose a minor character from the pictures of characters at the front of the book. Write a story about a day in their life.
- 6) Draw a picture of Sidfred's 'Bonglestang Launcher' invention from Chapter 15.
- 7) In Chapter 16, Sidfred mentions 'your Hillary and Tenzing' (146) to Blue. What does he mean? Research who these people are. Present as a poster or a Prezi to the class.

- 8) In Chapter 23, Sidfred is imprisoned. The cage is an awful place for him. Think of another type of bird that is commonly caged. You could choose a budgie, parrot or even a chicken! Write a one page story from the bird's perspective.

- 9) Minskie Bonaccord tells Blue that there was fracking Uptop (211). Pair up and research fracking to present to the class.

- 10) Blue is wearing 'bell-bottoms' throughout his adventures. Research what these are and when they were most fashionable. Design a pair of bell-bottoms for Blue with a classmate.

- 11) Using the author's illustration of 'The Clinic' on page 222 as a prompt, write a one page description of the building. Try to use language features such as metaphor, simile and alliteration.

- 12) Design your own model of a time machine. You could present this as a diorama or a poster.

- 13) Blue's cellphone is an important device in the story. Design the perfect cellphone. Present to class and explain why your phone has its chosen features.