



#FalkirkReadingTeachers' Book Group

Check out the latest reviews from the wonderful reading teachers of Falkirk!

First up is '**Aarti and the blue gods**' by Jasbinder Bilan

Aarti lives with her Aunt on a remote Scottish island with only a wild fox and a her favourite book about Indian gods to keep her company. Her Aunt is strict and unpredictable, showing only occasional warmth and Aarti begins to realise that her Aunt has not been telling her the truth. This is a surprising story about finding out who you really are, with unexpected twists, interlaced with magic.

Ages 9-11

Warning - there are spoilers!



1 - Aarti and the blue gods

Jasbinder Bilan

Chicken House

Title: Aarti and the Blue Gods

Author: Jasbinder Bilan

Genre(s): Fiction

Rating: 5 stars

Aarti is a twelve year old girl who lives on a small Scottish island with her aunt and no other inhabitants. Aarti can't remember anything about her birth parents but has been told by aunt that she wasn't wanted and **she** was the only one who wanted to take care of her.

The book explores Aarti's survival on the island, her love for her friend Chand the fox and touches on the Blue God Krishna.

Can Aarti survive with an aunt whose personality changes quicker than Scottish weather? Will Aarti ever find out her true family story?

Spoilers:

Watch out for Chand!

Reading for Pleasure Curriculum Links (Scotland, OWR – Hinduism)

Loved this book. Really enjoyed finding out about the day and life of Aarti on a remote island. It was a gentle book that didn't describe in too much detail how the hard day to day life must have been for Aarti living with aunt. I made the connection instantly between Chand, Ewan and Krishna but I don't know if all children would? I loved the ending.

Title: Aarti & The Blue Gods

Author: Jasbinder Bilan

Genre(s): Fiction

Rating: 4 stars

Aarti and her volatile Aunt live on an isolated Scottish island with no communication with the outside world. Self-sufficient for food, clothing and warmth, life is hard. Aarti has Chand, a wild fox, and a well-thumbed book of Indian myths for company. Aarti believes she is an orphan adopted by Aunt when she was a young child; she doesn't entirely trust her and is beginning to question where she came from. One day Aarti gains access to a locked room and goes in to find out what Aunt has been hiding. She recognises a tatty toy rabbit and memories begin to stir. Everything changes...

Spoilers:

Aarti is reunited with her parents. Neither Euan nor Chand were real – they were 'imaginary' friends or spirits seen only by Aarti when she needed them most.

Reading for Pleasure Curriculum Links (Scotland, myths)

Empathy Inference Narrative

Themes of identity, heritage, belief, family, friendship and belonging run through this novel. For adult readers the idea of abduction takes root early on. A story with vivid descriptions this is a story about isolation, overcoming loneliness, resilience, secrets and the connections between cultures.

Title: Aarti and the blue gods

Author: Jasbinder Bilan

Genre(s): Fiction

Rating: 5 stars

Arti lives on an island with her Aunt. She has a pet fox and lives a very basic and at times cruel life. One day she finds a tatty old rabbit. Memories start to surface of a different life. But what happened to her and who is she?

Spoilers:

Arti has been kidnapped by a stranger and brought to the island. When her 'Aunt' dies in a tragic accident an unexpected friend comes to help her reach home. However, her new friend turns out to be a ghost.

A beautiful book which could be used in so many ways-talking about lifestyles, bereavement, feeling lost, confronting the past but all told in a very beautiful manner. Although it is a difficult topic it is in no way a harsh story.

Reading for Pleasure Empathy Inference

Narrative

A truly beautiful book which talks about many difficult topics but leaves a very definite message of healing.

Title: Aarti and the Blue Gods

Author: Jasbinder Bilan

Genre(s): Fiction – Belonging - Family – Friendships - Folklore

Rating: 4 stars

Aarti is a 12 year old girl who lives on a remote Scottish Island with her aunt, nobody else lives on the island. Her life can be quite demanding, not only from the chores she has to do, but also dealing with the moods that her aunt has and the feeling that aunt is hiding something from Aarti. Aarti makes friends with a fox she names Chand, and together they explore the island, telling stories about Blue God characters from her favourite book and allowing Aarti to confide her feelings after she discovers a tatty old toy rabbit hidden in a locked room.

Spoilers:

Aarti has a harsh life with aunt, although you have to read between the lines as its not always explicit. Aunt suffers from mood swings and makes poor decisions, eventually leading to her death. Aarti, alone on the island, starts to discover more about her background and questions her life with aunt. Aarti discovers a boy washed ashore, apparently from a boating accident, and helps to nurse him back to health. She and Ewan hatch a plan to leave the island and return to mainland in search of their families. The plan is successful and Aarti is saved by a fisherman, but Ewan was never there ...

Reading for Pleasure Curriculum Links (RME, Hinduism, Myths)

Empathy Diversity Inference Narrative

Opportunity to discuss family, loneliness, bereavement, mental health, abduction

Although the story is beautifully written, it wasn't one I particularly enjoyed as it reminded me of almost a children's version of Life of Pi. Personally, I feel the book tried to get too many links and ended up being a bit too flighty for my liking. I think P6/7 children would enjoy but would benefit from lots of ongoing discussions when reading.

Title: Aarti and the Blue Gods

Author: Jasbinder Bilan

Genre(s): Fictional

Rating: 4 stars

Aarti is a young girl who has lived her whole life on a remote Scottish island with her Aunt. Aarti has been told that her parents died when she was young and that her Aunt was the only person who wanted her. Aarti enjoys exploring the island with her pet fox Chand. She enjoys reading and feels drawn to a book about the Blue God Krishna.

Aarti wants to know more about her past but her Aunt has a wild temper and regularly punishes Aarti. After she finds a small rabbit toy which brings back strange memories Aarti begins to suspect that her Aunt may be lying to her.

Spoilers:

One stormy night Aunt dies leaving Aarti alone on the island.

A boy named Euan washes up on the shore and help Aarti to discover more about her past and eventually leave the island. He turns out to be imaginary and is the spirit of a boy who died long ago.

Aarti is reunited with her family.

Aunt had kidnapped Aarti when she was 4 years old.

Reading for Pleasure Curriculum Links (Scotland, Hinduism)

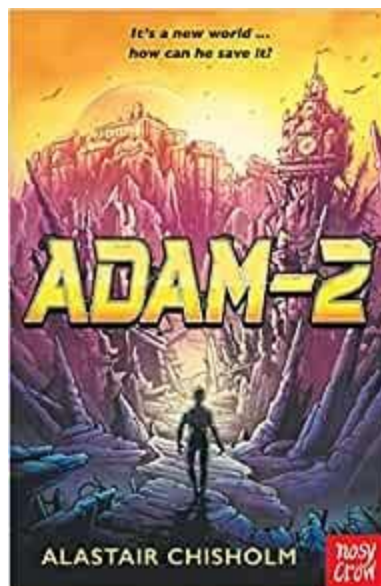
Empathy Diversity Inference Narrative

I really enjoyed this book and think that most children would too. It discusses serious topics but does so in a way which is appropriate for younger children. It also has a happy ending. There are good cross curricular links to Scotland/Scottish history, Hinduism, HWB topics of loss etc. which could be expanded upon.

We also read '**Adam 2**' by Alastair Chisholm

Adam 2 is a robot who has been locked in the basement of a building for 200 years. Accidentally found by a group of children, he emerges into a dystopian world destroyed by civil war between humans and AI. Caught between the two sides, Adam provides the key to a different future. This is a gripping, sci-fi adventure set in a ruined Edinburgh.

Ages 9-12



2 - Adam 2

Alastair Chisholm

Nosy Crow

Title: Adam 2

Author: Alistair Chisholm

Genre(s): Fiction

Rating: 4 stars

Adam 2 has been locked in a basement for over two hundred years and emerges into a civil war between humans and advanced intelligence which has ruined the world. Only Adam can save the world but neither side trusts him.

Adam is first generation AI.

Reading for Pleasure Empathy Diversity

I found the language of the book quite complex. As Linden is gender fluid the language of ze and hir was used throughout the book, and it took a while to get used to it. While the issue of Linden being gender fluid is raised and explained at the start of the book it is not something which impacts on the story. A good narrative to explain about differences, acceptance and trust and also how information can be altered over time to suit the person who is telling it. It reminded me of the phrase 'history is told by the winner'.

Title: Adam 2

Author: Alistair Chisholm

Genre(s): Fiction

Rating: 4 stars

In this book we meet Adam – 2, a robot prototype who has been stuck in a basement for 200 years, oblivious to the fact that, outside, a war is raging between humans and robots. When Adam emerges from the basement, he encounters a group of humans who are trying to survive in the ruined city of Edinburgh.

Reading for Pleasure Empathy Diversity

Narrative PSD

I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this book, as Sci-Fi is not a genre I normally choose to read. Adam-2 has a fast-paced, plot-driven narrative.

The book is set in a dystopian future in the city of Edinburgh. I enjoyed the descriptions of the city, as the landmarks described in the book were so familiar.

The book has a non-binary character, which is an issue I have not yet come across through children's literature, or any other means, in my teaching career so far. Therefore I would have to give some thought as to how I would explain this to my class, should we read this book together.

The book also covers themes of empathy, as the two opposing sides find it very difficult to trust each other, and prejudice, as each side makes assumptions about the other, according to whether they are robot or human.

The book also deals with the issue of losing a parent.

I would recommend this book for upper primary aged children and even S1/2.