



#FalkirkReadingTeachers' Book Group

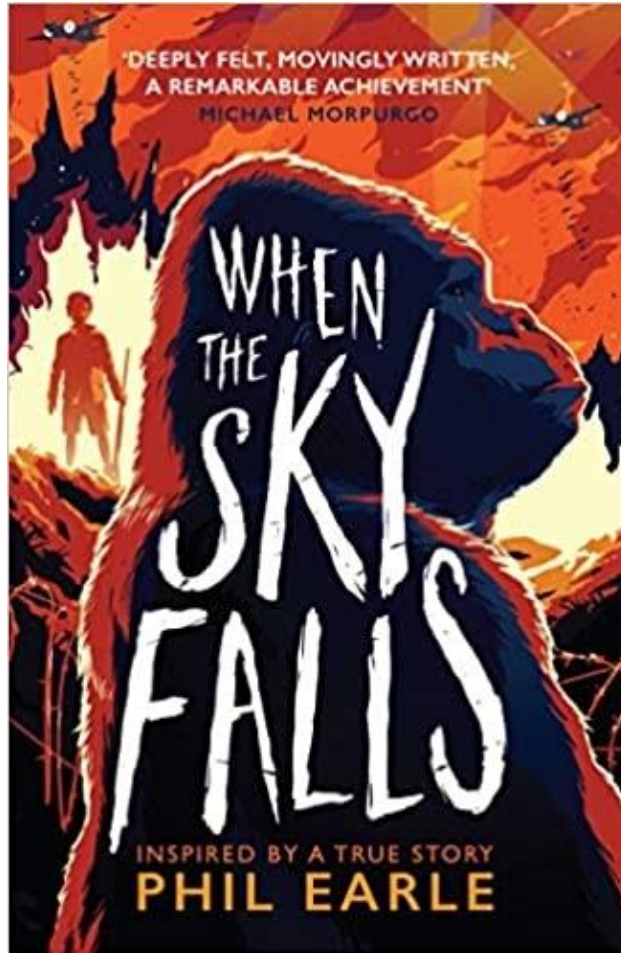
Check out the latest reviews from the wonderful reading teachers of Falkirk!

We started our book group this year with a couple of absolute beltors! *Be aware, these reviews contain spoilers*

The book everyone has been talking about 'When The Sky Falls' by Phil Earle. A World War Two story (and we know how much P7 teachers love a good World War Two story) set during the Blitz in London. Full of interesting characters, both human and animal, this is a powerful and moving account of a boy's journey through anger and acceptance.

Ages 9-13

Teaching notes [When-the-Sky-Falls-CLPE-teaching-resource.pdf\(andersenpress.co.uk\)](https://www.andersenpress.co.uk/when-the-sky-falls-clpe-teaching-resource.pdf)



1 - When The Sky Falls by Phil Earle

Andersen Press

Title: When the Sky Falls

Author: Phil Earle

Genre(s): Fiction



Joseph is sent away from his Gran during the war. She finds him difficult to control and he is angry because his dad has gone to fight in the war. Joseph is sent to live with a woman he doesn't know or like. She only loves her rundown zoo and the animals she is trying to protect during the bombing. The greatest of these is a silver back Gorilla called Adonis.

While Joseph is angry at everyone and everything, he must work with the other characters to save Adonis. One the way he finds friendship, acceptance and forgiveness.

Adonis does not survive the story, be prepared for tears!!

Curriculum Links: WWII Empathy Narrative

I found this book extremely well told and of a great quality to share with pupils. There is a mixture of pain and healing at the end of the story. It doesn't have the classic 'happy ending'. It reminded me a bit of Goodnight Mr Tom and I'd be surprised if it doesn't win an award this year. Would sit well within a war topic and covers aspects of the war such as famine and bombing but within the story of one boy's journey to find where he belongs.

Title: When the Sky Falls

Author: Phil Earle

Genre(s): Adventure (WW2 novel)



This book is set in 1941 as war is raging in London; streets are being bombed nightly and children evacuated to the countryside, except Joseph. He has been sent to stay with 'Mrs F' as his gran can't look after him anymore and his dad is away fighting and his mum left when he was little. Understandably Joseph is upset and angry about being sent away and being passed around. 'Mrs F' doesn't seem to want him either. She's not exactly welcoming and the only thing she seems to show any interest in is her work at the Zoo.

Joseph has to attend the local school where he gets off to a bad start with the headmaster, Mr Gryce who canes him on the first day. Things go from bad to worse as Joseph struggles to contain his emotions in school, deal with bullies in his class and prepare for Gryce's big reading test.

After school though, he is put to use helping in the zoo but learns that this is not as exciting as it sounds as the place is deserted. There are no visitors at the zoo, most animals have been relocated to countryside zoos and even the railings have been ripped up and used for the war effort. 'Mrs F', Syd and Joseph spend their time feeding the few animals that remain in the deserted zoo, selling dung for money and scrounging scraps to feed the inmates, particularly the large silverback gorilla, Adonis.

Great adventure book, similar to Michael Morpurgo books as an animal and real life event feature heavily in this. Interestingly the story is based on a real one, told to Phil Earle.

The writing itself is very descriptive and if you were doing an IDL topic on WW2 it's a great one to use for the paragraphs describing the bombing and destruction. In terms of developing a writers craft there are lovely paragraphs where short sentences are used to great effect, similes and metaphors aplenty ...

For pupils who struggle to express emotions or show empathy for others it's a great way into that style of discussion. Although Joseph is the main character, there are others in the book suffering loss and tragedy and each deal with it in a different way. Joseph struggles to express his emotions and his link with Adonis would be a good way 'in' for pupils who find this hard too. Phil Earle is very good at

describing Joseph's frustrations and there are many times when the reader is left on the edge of their seat thinking, "Just say it! Don't be so horrible, just tell her".

There is also a very obvious message on dyslexia in the book as Joseph describes the words in his reading book 'jumping across the page' and the strategies he and Syd come up with to hide this. I would imagine this would be a relief and revelation to many dyslexic pupils that an author has so simply articulated how they feel and the challenges they face.

Themes of kindness, courage and hope run throughout the book and it is the story mainly of a little boy's newly developed love and respect for an animal that make it worth reading, set in the destructive backdrop of WW2.

If you are doing an IDL topic on WW2 and only ever pick the same novels time time again to accompany it, try this novel instead. Your class will love it.

Reading for Pleasure Curriculum Links: WWII Empathy Narrative Dyslexia

I wasn't sure what to expect when I was given this book but I loved it – I will definitely use it in class. Ideally suited to second level class in my opinion, as a novel to accompany a WW2 topic or just something different to read.

When the Sky Falls reviewed by Mr D

Title: When The Sky Falls

Author: Phil Earle

Genre(s): Children's historical fiction



It's 1941 and children are being evacuated from the cities to protect them from the ravages of the war. Joseph is moving to the city to live with Mrs F. Joseph's dad has gone off to war and his Gran can't cope with his "behaviour".

Mrs F takes him in. When Joseph goes to work with her he discovers that she has a zoo with an enormous silverback gorilla, Adonis, as its star. However, in war time there are no visitors. Joseph builds a bond with Adonis but, what will happen when the bombs come? Joseph initially despises both the gorilla and Mrs F but, grows to care deeply for each of them. As Mrs F opens up to Joseph, she reveals that she lost her family, which is one of the more poignant moments in the book. Joseph initially despises both the gorilla and Mrs F but, grows to care deeply for each of them.

Through the story the growing question is, "can they shoot Adonis when the bombs come to protect the townspeople?" In the end soldiers shoot the gorilla. It is a heart-breaking scene. This is an emotional and engaging book. It is good for exploring loss and relationships. Joseph's relationship with the gorilla is touching and sits at the heart of the story, allowing for good discussions around the nature of friendship. Wrapped around that is the story of Joseph's relationship with Mrs F, which provides lots of

opportunities to examine why we might sometimes resent those who care for us the most. There is a significant section on bullying and lots of material on bullying being learned behaviour.

By contrast, Joseph's ever-forgiving and responsible friend Syd offers a great opportunity to discuss the need to recognise that others suffer and that even when we're in pain, we can help them. It's a very powerful story. It would be a good class novel for P7 and a great alternative to the popular WWII texts.

This would be a good book to support an IDL project. There are sharp historical pieces, amazing writing, powerful relationships and also some nice launch-pads for work in STEM

As well as reading the book, I listened to the e-audio book. Phil Earle reads it himself. That would be a very powerful addition to novel work. Hearing the author's emotion would be very engaging for a class.

Title: [When the Sky Falls](#)

Author: Phil Earle

Genre(s): Fiction



It's 1941 and as the Nazi bombing of London rages on children continue to be evacuated to the countryside. However, Joseph is in an unusual situation, sent by his grandmother from Yorkshire to London to live with family friend Mrs F. After Joseph's dad had left to fight in the war his grandmother had struggled to cope with his moods which resulting in her sending him away.

Mrs F appears to be cold and distant, only caring about her run-down zoo and its few remaining animals, including Adonis a silverback gorilla. Although strong-willed and appearing to be angry at the world Joseph must work together with other characters to protect Adonis as the bombings continue. Along the way Joseph discovers friendship, love and a sense of belonging.

This book does not have the classic happy ending, Adonis is killed at the end of the story. However, it does end on the positive note with Joseph forming a loving bond with Mrs F.

Reading for Pleasure Curriculum Links: WWII Empathy Narrative Metalinguistics

Set during the Blitz this book would be a good addition to a topic on World War Two. The book is rich with detail and opportunities to explore themes relating particularly to emotion works and health and wellbeing—loss, bereavement, bullying, friendship and dyslexia. My only criticism would be that the book is quite long, however, it is available as an audiobook on BorrowBox.

Title: [When The Sky Falls](#)

Author: Phil Earle

Genre(s): Fiction



It's 1941, twelve year old Joseph is an unusual evacuee - he is leaving rural Yorkshire and moving to London during the Blitz. Angry with everyone and everything after his dad left to fight in the war, Joseph's gran couldn't cope with his behaviour and sent him to live with Mrs F. She's a taciturn woman who owns a rundown zoo with only a few animals remaining that need care and food. When the air raid siren sounds Mrs F heads to the zoo with a rifle. Why? Joseph needs to find out.

Adonis, a silverback gorilla is a central character and in getting to know Adonis Joseph learns a lot about himself. Mrs F is gruff, blunt and has her own secrets. Sid is a feisty orphan who befriends Joseph. Can they save each other from the relentless bombing and hunger? Will they find the love and acceptance they need?

No happy ending! Adonis doesn't survive. Keep a box of tissues handy – there are so many sad moments.

Reading for Pleasure Curriculum Links: WWII Empathy Narrative

Inspired by a true story this book is hard to put down. Set in WWII it would be a great addition to a Home Front topic. Wide range of threads running through – loss, bereavement, dyslexia, bullying, war, friendship, family, animal welfare, anger. Easy to become invested in the characters and right to the final pages I hoped for a happy ending.

Our second book is 'The Small Things' by Lisa Thompson. A gentle story of friendship and the worries children have over 'fitting in' with their friends. Published by the amazing Barrington Stoke, it is a high interest level/low reading ability book printed on dyslexia friendly paper.

Ages 8-12

[Introducing The Small Things by Lisa Thompson - Barrington Stoke](#)



Title: *The Small Things*



Anna is a quiet shy girl who has a few friends in her class who always seem to have more exciting lives and hobbies than she does. She would love to be able to talk to them more and tell them that she's had an exciting weekend but mostly she does boring family stuff with her mum and brother. So when a new girl called Ellie joins the class, Anna is excited to make a new friend.

Ellie however can't attend school in person as she hasn't been well so communicates virtually with her class using a robot which the class name the "Ellie Bot". Ellie can see and hear everything that happens in class and in school via the Ellie Bot but can't be there in person. The pupils are very excited to have Ellie in the class and Anna is chosen to show her around.

To impress Ellie, Anna begins to make up stories about what she does at the weekend and soon these stories spiral out of control. Anna is left finding it hard to get out of the lies she has told without ruining her new friendship with Ellie.

It's a lovely short novel in bold, spaced out, dyslexic friendly text. Ideal as a reading book or targeted to pupils who may relate to these issues. Also good for programmes such as *Emotion Works* or any work on emotions in HWB lessons.

Pupils who lack self confidence or feel inadequate compared to some peers in class will identify with Anna. They will learn that the 'small things' are ok and things to be proud of and to enjoy. Anna's family is a loving one who do normal every day things at the weekend whereas some of her friends attend a variety of extra curricular activities, attend various expensive clubs and have busy social lives. I suppose there is also an appeal on both sides of the fence, as by the end of the book, some pupils in the class admit to feeling tired because of all the activities they do.

Anna learns to value her own talents and skills and what she can bring to a friendship. The whole technology side of the story with the Ellie Bot is very topical, given the Pandemic, online learning and pupils self isolating from school. There is a lot of potential for discussions on the role of ICT in the classroom and the use of artificial intelligence. (As an aside, if you are interested in this, you should also read *Troo Friend* by Kirsty Applebaum).

Ellie's story isn't fleshed out much in the story other than she is immunosuppressed due to some illness – it isn't specified what. There is potential here to discuss childhood illnesses and if the occasion ever arose, this may help a pupil in your class.

Reading for Pleasure Reluctant Readers Narrative Struggling Readers Dyslexia Friendships Technology

Simple but effective book which emphasises celebrating the 'small things' and encouraging children to be proud of who they are. I also found it a little emotional at the end.

I think this would suit an 8 year old reader, dealing with emotions as they get older as peer pressure comes into play. It may also suit a slightly older, less engaged reader.

The Small Things reviewed by Mr D

Title: The Small Things

Author: Lisa Thomson

Genre(s): Children's fiction



Anna is an anxious child, she longs to be popular but, she thinks that her life is boring and no-one will really be interested in her life. Who'd want to be friends with a girl who doesn't go anywhere or do anything?

When Ellie joins the class things are different. Ellie is ill and she joins the class through a remote robotic device. When her new virtual class mate starts to make friends with Anna, she tells a few white lies to make herself sound interesting. Then the lies grow and it gets out of hand. It's all going to crash down around her and all because she thought she was boring.

Anna, of course, realises the error of her ways and seeks to make amends. Ellie forgives her and it all ends happily. Ellie recovers well enough to join the class in person and she forgives Anna. Anna then starts to appreciate what she's got.

This is a good story for exploring the pressures children face in school to fit in: the competition to have the right clothes or stationery or shoes. Do you even play the right games or do the right sports?

This book would be good as a novel study for a P5 or P6 class where the children are given some free-rein to role-play sections. It's a good basis for HWB lessons on relationships. It's also good for discussions on self-esteem and self-worth.

It's also a good way to explore the "fall-out" from distance learning: how did it feel; what was good or bad; how did you stay connected; how easy is it to fake things on-line? These questions can also open up questions about online safety and how to spot misrepresentations.

You could also have some fun communicating remotely with class members and getting them to work out what's going on off-camera.

This is a moving story that explores relationships in a gentle way. It is neat little story and will resonate even more since the advent of zoom/MS Teams. Children will find it to be a lot closer to their experience than they might have previously. Fundamentally this book is about appreciating what you have and the people around you.

Title: The Small Things

Author: Lisa Thompson

Genre(s): Fiction



Anna's teacher introduces her to the new girl in her class, Ellie, and asks her to befriend her. However, due to illness Ellie is unable to come to school in person so she attends lesson through her robot. Anna is unsure at first as she thinks she is very boring compared with everyone else in her class. Keen for Ellie to like her Anna tells her a few lies to make her life sound exciting. However, Ellie discovers the truth and Anna must try and make things right.

Anna comes from a low-income family and feels like she has less worth than her peers because she cannot afford to attend after school clubs. She has low self-esteem and feels on the edge of her friendship group because of her perceived inadequacy. Anna tells lies to Ellie to sound more interesting but Ellie finds out she has lied. Ellie's illness improves allowing her to attend school part time. Ellie forgives the lie and the girls become friends. Anna realises she doesn't need to attend fancy clubs to be interesting and make friends.

Reading for Pleasure Empathy Narrative Struggling Readers Dyslexia

A range of different themes that could be discussed – being yourself/unique, different interests, acceptance of others, being home educated due to illness and different family financial situations. As a Barrington Stoke book the vocabulary and storyline are easy to read and to follow. There are also opportunities to link with grammar teaching in P4/5 with frequent use of direct speech.

Title: The Small Things

Author: Lisa Thompson

Genre(s): Fiction



A new girl starts in Anna's class. Unfortunately, the pupil is ill and communicates through a robot. Anna would like to be friends with Ellie but doesn't think she is interesting enough so decides to make herself sound more interesting.

Anna tells lots of lies about what she does after schools and her hobbies. However, she is found out and apologises.

Reading for Pleasure Empathy Struggling Readers Dyslexia

Barrington Stoke are great books for struggling readers and those with Dyslexia as the vocabulary is well paced for the pupil. This wasn't my personal favourite story-line but I can see how it would be great for a pupil with low self-esteem, thinks of themselves as boring, struggling to engage with peers. It carries a strong message about being liked for who you are.

Title: The Small Things

Author: Lisa Thompson

Genre(s): Fiction



Anna is asked to look after a new girl, Ellie who joins her class. It's not straightforward as Ellie communicates through a robot so they have no face-to-face contact.

Recently Anna has been comparing herself to other girls and thinks she is boring. Desperate to make a good impression on Ellie and become friends she tells a few untruths to make herself more interesting. Ellie discovers the truth and Anna has to work out how to sort things out.

Anna feels that everyone else has a more interesting life and that she is on the fringes of her friendship group because she has little to offer. Her self-esteem seems low and she has stopped doing things she enjoys/is good at. Anna worries that Ellie will think she's boring so tells lies about what she does after school to try to seem more interesting and 'fit in'.

Reading for Pleasure Empathy Narrative Struggling Readers Dyslexia

A lot of good discussions could come from this novel: about being yourself, accepting & liking others for who they are and not making assumptions – things are not always as they seem, being different – home educated due to illness not choice. Not the most exciting story line but the feelings will be familiar to readers and the idea of a classroom robot/use of technology will appeal to some. As you'd expect from Barrington Stoke the vocabulary and storyline are easy to read and understand. Lots of direct speech so opportunities to use to support teaching grammar.