

UNIT/S: INTRODUCTION
FOCUS: INSPIRING
INTEREST & INTRODUCING
THE PLAY

Notes: we like to start the unit with a lesson that is exciting and inspiring, before even picking up the play to read. Once students have gotten excited by the play, you may have time to do a group reading of it, or you may set up your schedule so that they can read independently - perhaps over a half term or holiday. It depends what you have time for and what your students are capable of. It is tempting to watch the Bridge Theatre version on National Theatre Live, but we always resist this as a first introduction, especially when there is only one main production of a play as it can feel like that is the definitive version and we like to encourage independent creativity before seeing a production that might feel like it's *the* way to do it.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

**ADDITIONAL NOTES /
RESOURCES**

PRE- READING

LESSON OPENING: INSPIRING INTEREST

(10 mins)

Setup: Darken the room. Students enter to the sound of distant thunder and rain (sound effects). Blue lighting if available. You can play the first youtube video on the screen for lightning effects if you choose to.

Activity: Direct the students to move around the space as if wading through rising flood water. Start ankle-deep, gradually increasing to waist-deep. No talking - only physical expression of:

- Growing concern
- Protective instincts awakening
- The weight of water against their bodies

Teacher narration: Read selected atmospheric passages from the opening of the play as students move, focusing on the building storm and Malcolm's growing awareness of danger.

*"The rain never stops. That river is just rising and rising and rising and... It's the things in the water getting stirred up. You don't want to get that river angry. It's something messing with the sky... No... It's something stirring up the water. We inhabit a world of doubt. It is very perplexing to know who to trust. So for the time being, Malcolm, we trust no one. Not your mother, none of your friends. Not one word. Do you understand?"**

Debrief: Quick circle - one word each describing how the flood made them feel.

[Extreme thunder and lightning storm sounds with howling wind](#)

(This one is really good to play on a screen but has less rain.)

[Epic Thunderstorm + Huge Ocean Waves + Rain Sounds for Sleeping](#)

(This one has more of a sense of rain and river rising.)

**These are excerpts from various moments in Act One.*

PRACTICAL INVESTIGATION 1: RIVERS & FLOODS

(30 minutes)

- Depending on how many students in the group, you can divide into groups or they can work as one company.
- Each group is a special effects / scenic design company who have been tasked with the job of 'creating a river

on stage'. How would they go about doing this? Each group must create a pitch where they explain and demonstrate as best they can with the resources available how they would use set, lighting and sound to create a rising river on stage. Each group is trying to convince the producer (the teacher) that their ideas will have the best theatrical effect without being untenable or unsafe.

- Specifically, it would be the River Thames flowing through Oxford to London that needs to flood - and it is used regularly through the play so needs to be a sustainable option.
- They also need to consider how they would create a canoe on stage and have it appear to travel through the river.
- They should demonstrate their ideas through a three minute scene that includes:
 - **Preparation:** Loading the canoe, checking supplies, saying goodbye
 - **The Journey:** Paddling against current, navigating obstacles
 - **Danger:** A specific threat (secret agents, flood debris, wild animals)
 - **Protection:** Shielding a baby from harm
 - **Resolution:** Finding temporary safety

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION 2: DÆMONS

(20 mins)

- Read the slide giving information about dæmons in The Book of Dust.
- Each student should consider what their dæmon would be:
 - What are the different forms it would have taken during their childhood?
 - Has it settled at their age now?
 - What has it settled as? Why?
- Working in pairs, they should improvise a little scene where one of them is the human and the other takes on the form of their dæmon.
 - Move around the space maintaining an invisible connection
 - The dæmon reacts to and reflects the human's emotions
 - Practice scenarios: fear, protectiveness, curiosity, determination
- They can swap over and share any work that they like.
- Discuss the concept of dæmons and why they are dramatically interesting.
- How might they portray these daemons on stage? (They may know / you might tell them in the original production)

HOMEWORK

- Create a design for your own personal dæmon to be portrayed on stage. It could be a costume design / a puppet design / a mask design / make-up - any way that you would think to portray these dæaemons on stage.
- Read further slides and make own notes to prepare for reading the play.

REFLECTION / PLENARY

- What excites you about studying this play? What are you intrigued by?