

Teacher

Resources

In her Element

by Jamila Gavin and Jacinta Read



10 stories to make a difference

Dear Teachers,

We are delighted that you are interested in sharing ***In Her Element*** with your class. ***In Her Element*** is part of our **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection, which has ten inspiring stories for young readers that celebrate difference and individuality.

Inside these pages you'll find activities and prompts for KS3 teachers creating lesson plans inspired by ***In Her Element***, sharing ideas for making the most of the rich potential offered by this book.

A strong suggestion is to read the book aloud once for the story, then again to focus on particular aspects, passages or themes. The following activities are grouped by desired outcome and are aimed for a range of abilities and additional needs of a class. Some extension activities are included, but all the materials can be adapted beyond the target audience according to the interest and abilities of your class.

The following activities would be suitable for the allocated age group:

- Reading independently or as group **11+ years**
- Exploring through the creative learning activities in this pack **11-14 years / KS3**

All the books in our **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection are beautifully illustrated and perfect for children aged 5 and up. They reflect the need for greater inclusivity and more diversity in children's books with the stories including characters of colour, LGBTQ+ and disabled characters.

The **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection is available to buy from www.pop-up.org.uk/shop. Teacher and Parent/Carer Resource packs are available to download from www.pop-up.org.uk/shop.

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Artwork © Jacinta Read.

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There are seven sections:

1. About this resource pack (includes themes and curriculum links)
2. About this book (includes insights from the writer and illustrator): Page 4
3. Discussion Activities:
 - 3.1 Talking about communication and expressing ourselves: Page 5
 - 3.2 Talking about change/overcoming adversity: Page 6
 - 3.3 Talking about animals and elements being used to express ourselves: Page 7
4. Illustration Activities:
 - 4.1 Drawing activities to explore our dreams, emotions and wellbeing: Page 8
 - 4.2 'Overcoming fears and adversities with a 'secret superhero: Page 9
5. Writing Activities:
 - 5.1 Writing about the natural world: Page 11
 - 5.2 Using writing to express our thoughts and feelings: Page 11
6. Further resources/reading: Page 12
7. Glossary: Page 12

Themes and ideas include

- Overcoming adversity and change
- Navigating teenage friendships
- Accepting difference between internal/external appearances

Curriculum Links

Share and enjoy ***In Her Element*** as cross-curricular way in **Literacy** and **English**, and use it to explore points of view (3.2 and 5.2) or the key characters and their relationships (3.2). Build on your discussions with activities focusing on descriptive writing (5.1 and 5.2).

In Her Element makes a great starting point for discussions in **PSHE**. Explore teenage issues, relationships (both platonic and romantic) (3.1 and 3.2), and mental health (3.2). Extend with writing activities about how to overcome a life-changing experience (5.2).

Tasks and activities relating to the environmental differences between human and animal and how the human body works can also be linked to **Science: Biology** (3.3).

Links to other areas of the curriculum include **Art and Design** (4.1 and 4.2) and **Drama** and **Dance** (3.2).

The story also invites discussion about living with disability, and additional needs through a tale of magical realism.

2 About this book

Sent to a boarding school for disabled people, a young girl with cerebral palsy, Sophie finds herself floating independently for the first time like the life of a whale she dreams about.

But is she? When Sophie's parents drops her off at the boarding school, she initially is met with hostility from her spiky roommate Amber.

As the sea swirls deeper into Sophie's new life, Jamila Gavin shows Sophie finding peace where loneliness threatened to take over. The memory of the water and the beautiful sea animals helps her keep going.

Sophie soon discovers there is much more to Amber than initially meets the eye...

About the author and illustrator



Jamila Gavin is a writer of Anglo-Indian heritage who emigrated to Britain as a child. She's been publishing children's books for all ages since 1979, often inspired by the changing face of multicultural Britain, and driven by a desire to see children of all backgrounds reflected in the stories they read. Jamila's books include the *Grandpa Chatterji* series, *The Surya Trilogy* and *Blackberry Blue*. Her historical novel *Coram Boy*, set in 18th Century England, won the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year, is in development with BBC TV, and was adapted for stage, with a run at the National Theatre and also on Broadway.



Jacinta Read is a Eurasian illustrator and writer whose work is influenced by her love of dance and old musicals. As a neurodivergent child who struggled to read, it was illustration that opened up the wonderful world of literature to her; she hopes her pictures will do the same for others. Jacinta lives in Oxford with her husband, two children, and Louie the red Jack Russell. She's an illustration mentee on Pop Up's Pathways Into Children's Publishing programme (2019 - 2021). ***In Her Element*** is Jacinta's first published children's book.

3

Discussion Activities

3.1 Talking about communication and expressing ourselves

There are two main characters in this book - Sophie and Amber.

Sophie is a 'non-verbal' paraplegic, which means she expresses herself without using spoken words and is unable to move the lower half of her body.

Ask the class how Sophie communicates with others?

Can they identify the many different forms of communication used in the story? Think about the way different characters in the story express their thoughts and feelings.

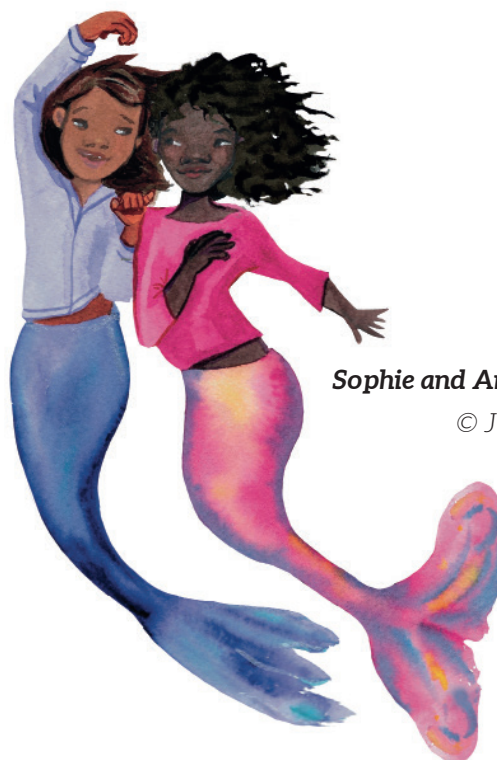
Take a look at the first paragraph on page 6, from **"Having no power to speak" to "focusing on the objects she required, or which helped to express her need."**

The narrator informs the method of which Sophie uses to communicate with others.

Pair up the class and get them to communicate something (a feeling and/or a need) to each other without words - just body language, facial expressions, and/or eye movement.

Ask the children how they found the exercise? Was it easy/hard? How could they tell what their pair was thinking/feeling just by looking at them?

Have a re-read of Jason's text to Amber on page 18. Do you think he was right to break up with her through a text? Was he being honest with his feelings? Why/why not?



Sophie and Amber, p. 23

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3.2 Talking about change/overcoming adversity

“It’s residential of course. And we’ve been reassured that they can meet all your needs with equipment, as well as trained staff.” page 7

Read this quote to your children and ask them why they think Sophie’s parents decided to send her to Allendale? How would it help her and her needs? How would it make things easier/more difficult for her?

Now read this passage:

“Amber is like two people: Amber by day, when she is joking with her friends, and planning what to wear to their next gig, and Amber by night, when she tosses and turns and weeps in her sleep.” page 15

Work together to find and consider Amber’s behaviour in this book? Has Amber’s accident affected her? If yes, in what way? Has it just changed her physically? Has it impacted her emotions and mental health?

Does the class think Amber’s accident has any connection with how she treats Sophie?

Now find examples of Amber’s treatment of Sophie. For example, ***“‘She can’t talk,’ shrugged Amber in a ‘not worth bothering with her,’ kind of voice, so they didn’t.”*** Are there any contradicting behaviours in the story? What happened to change Amber’s attitude and behaviour?

Taking a broader look

- Have you or any of your friends/family gone through a ‘life-changing experience’?
- How did you/they overcome the adversity?
- Did you/they learn anything about themselves?
- If you/they could give advice to past selves, what would you/they say?



Sophie, p. 10
© Jacinta Read

3.3 Talking about animals and elements being used to express ourselves

In the book, Sophie's element was water and experienced dreams of turning into a whale or a mermaid.

Share this assertion with your class. Why does Sophie dream about water and the sea/ocean so much?

Amber's element was also water, and it ***"had once been her life; had contained all her dreams, and given her happiest moments of triumph and success."*** page 29

If you could turn into any animal, what would it be?

Give each person in the class a piece of paper with an animal written on it. Instruct them not to tell anyone which animal they have been given. Tell the class that one other person has been given the same animal as them, and they have to figure out who it is by using physicality or sound effects to find their 'animal partner'.

Of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) what element do you think would you be? What do you think your friends/classmates would be?

Find someone in the class who chose the same element as you. Why did you both choose it? What similarities/differences are there in your answers? Play some music and get the class to move (however they wish) as if they were each of the four elements. How do their movement choices affect which element it is? Why do they think this is?

Take a broader look

- Zoo/aquarium: Go to a zoo or aquarium and choose three different animals. How do they move differently from each other? Do different humans also move differently to each other too?
- Find your "inner animal" - the animal that you think you are most like. How does it move differently to you? What purposes do different movements have to each other?

4

Illustration Activities

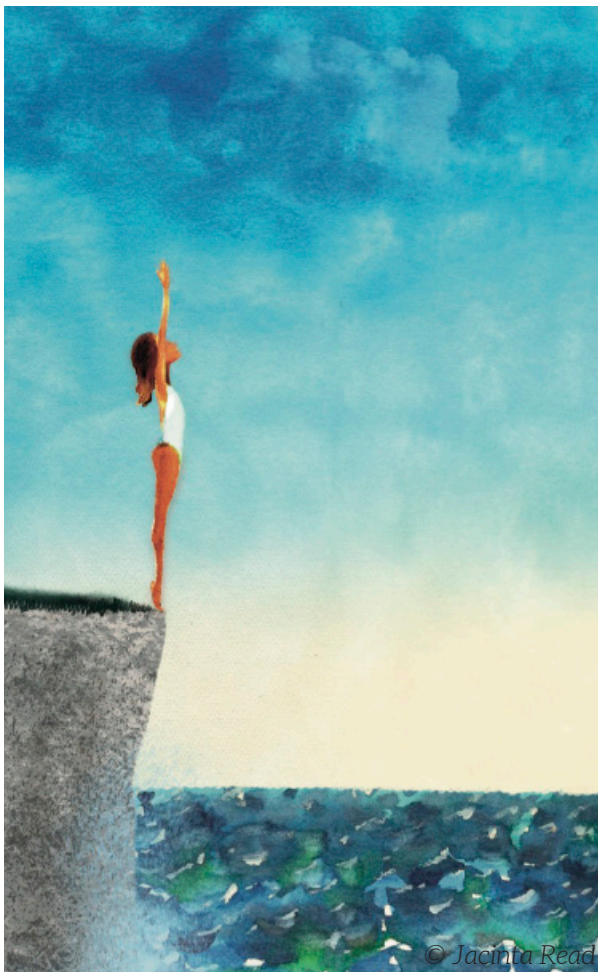
4.1 Drawing activities to explore our dreams, emotions and wellbeing

Look at the illustration on page 2 of *Sophie in her dream*.

Think of the dream you had recently and draw it.

Look at the illustration on page 20 of *Sophie and Amber in the water*.

Think back to the “happy place” you chose earlier and draw yourself and your best friend(s) in that place.



Sophie in her dream, p. 2



Sophie and Amber in the water, p. 21

4.2 Overcoming fears and adversities with a 'secret superhero'

Take a look at the illustration on page 21.

Have a discussion with the class about the end of *In Her Element* on whether Amber saved Sophie, did Sophie save Amber - or were they both each other's secret superheroes?

As a class, re-read Amber and Sophie's behaviour and attitude towards water on pages 20-23.

Then, ask the pupils to think about something they've fearful of, or something they wish they could do and create a superhero that would help them overcome this obstacle.

Scan the QR code to see a video tutorial on how to make your own Modroc Superhero or use the step-by-step guide below.



Materials:

- Modroc plaster wrap
- Pipe cleaners
- Cup of water
- Paint
- Paintbrush



Sophie and Amber in the water, p. 21

4.2 continued



1. Take a pipe cleaner and twist it into a circle to make your superhero's head and arms. Use 2 more pipe cleaners to make the body and legs.



2. Take your final pipe cleaner and twist it into a triangle shape and attached it to the neck of your superhero to make a cloak.



3. Dip a strip of Modroc into a cup of water and gently lay it around the pipe cleaner frame.



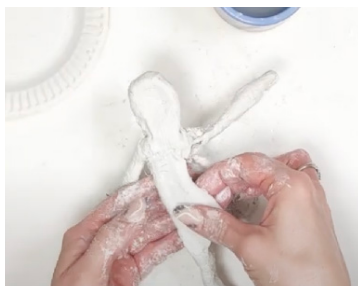
4. Keep rubbing the Modroc so all the holes disappear.



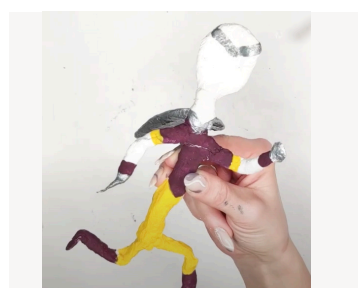
5. Layer up the whole pipe cleaner frame to make the Modroc Superhero model. Make sure you do lots of layers to make it nice and strong.



6. Once your Modroc Superhero is dry you can paint it.



7. Think about your element and fear to help come up with ideas of the colours and design to give the superhero a theme.



8. Once completed, the pupils can present the superhero to the class and why the character is important to them.



5

Writing Activities

5.1 Writing about the natural world

Read this passage:

"She was sure she could hear the roar of the sea, the sucking rattle of pebbles on the shore, the scream of seagulls, and a whale singing." page 6

Here Sophie is thinking about her "happy place" (the sea) and imagining all the different sounds from there. Think about what your "happy place" be and write a passage about it. Use the sensory qualities (the sights/smells/sounds/tastes/feel) of the place to really describe it in detail as if you were right there.

5.2 Writing about the natural world

Write about a time you had a "life-changing experience". Write about how it made you feel and what advice you would give someone else going through the same experience.

Think about a dream you had recently and write about it. Do you think the dream meant anything? Did it express anything you may have been feeling at the time you had it?



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Endpaper

6

Possible further resources/reading

Modroc Superhero Video Tutorial

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5RZZFm6MY4>

Modroc Superhero Video Tutorial (with BSL)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URhqAyzABG8>

7

Glossary

Adversity: a condition of trouble or difficulty.

Communication: the sharing or exchange of messages, information, or ideas.

Paraplegia: paralysis of the legs and lower torso because of spinal cord injury or disease.

10 stories to make a difference

In her Element is part of a collection of ten inspiring stories for young readers that celebrate difference and individuality.

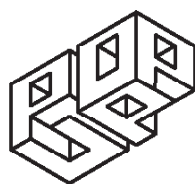
All the books in our **10 Stories to Make a Difference** collection are beautifully illustrated and perfect for children, aged 5 and up.



Each of the books is an exciting collaboration between well-known and emerging writers and illustrators, giving a platform to bold new voices.

We believe that all children should be able to find themselves, and discover others, through the stories they read. We therefore hope that these amazing stories will entertain and inspire the young readers in your lives.

Enjoy and feel free to get in touch with us at info@pop-up.org.uk.
We always love to hear from our readers!



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