

Birdlands

AGES 8+
DISCUSSION NOTES
AND ACTIVITIES





BIRDLANDS BY ANTHONY MCGOWAN

This resource pack provides discussion prompts, activities and creative tasks designed to support reading *Birdlands* in the classroom, school library or book group.

It is suitable for UKS2 and KS3 and supports cross-curricular links with English, Science, Art and PSHE.

READ THIS BOOK FOR THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

- Nature and the natural world – how animals survive in different environments
- Humans vs nature – how human activity affects wildlife
- Predators and survival – the dangers animals face in the wild
- Finding a home – what makes a place safe for animals to live
- Journeys and migration – why animals travel long distances
- Championing the underdog – small or weaker characters can still be brave
- Everyone has their own story – every animal has its own struggles and strengths

BEFORE READING...

BOOK COVER CLUES

Look closely at the cover and answer:

- What birds or animals can you see on the cover?
- Where do you think the story takes place?
- Does the cover look peaceful or dangerous? Why?
- What kind of journey might the birds be going on?
- What clues can you spot about the story?

QUICK ACTIVITIES

1. BIRD BRAINSTORM

In pairs, list as many birds as you can think of in two minutes.



2. BIRD HABITATS

Different birds live in different places.

Match any birds you know to the places they might live:

- Cities and rooftops
- Forests and woodland
- Fields and farmland
- Rivers and wetlands

Now think about the main characters:

- Where might a jackdaw live?
- Where might a crow live?
- Where might a pigeon live?
- Do you think these birds normally travel together?

Why or why not?

3. PREDICT THE STORY

The three main birds in the story are:

- **BEAKY** – a jackdaw with a twisted beak
- **HERMAN** – a crow with a broken wing
- **PIDGE** – a pigeon who is afraid of flying

Think about the challenges each bird might face.

Discuss or write your predictions:

- How might Beaky's twisted beak affect his life?
- How might Herman cope with a broken wing?
- Why might Pidge be afraid to fly?

Now make some predictions:

- Why might these three birds go on a journey together?
- What dangers might they face along the way?
- How might they help each other survive?



DURING READING...

Birdlands follows a group of birds on a dangerous journey through a world shaped by nature and humans. As you read, think about the challenges animals face and the choices they make.

1. JOURNEY LOG

In pairs, list as many birds as you can think of in two minutes.

As you read, keep track of the birds' journey with the Journey Log. You could also sketch a map showing how the birds travel from the train station to the Dump.

TABLE HEADERS: Where are the birds? | What danger do they face here? | How do they survive? | What do they learn?

2. READING QUESTIONS

Select 1–2 questions from each section to discuss or record notes from the story.

NATURE & SURVIVAL

- What challenges do the birds face in the natural world?
- How do the birds find food, shelter or safety along their journey?

PREDATORS & DANGER

- What predators or dangers threaten the birds?
- How do the birds escape or avoid these dangers?

THE JOURNEY

- Why are the birds travelling? What are they hoping to find?
- What obstacles make the journey difficult?

FRIENDSHIP & HELPING OTHERS

- How do the birds support or help each other during the journey?
- Which character shows bravery or kindness? Give an example.

HUMANS & THE ENVIRONMENT

- How do human actions affect the birds in the story?
- Do humans make life easier or harder for wildlife? Find examples.



CHAMPIONING THE UNDERDOG

- Which character might seem small or weak at first?
- How do they prove themselves during the story?

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

- How might different birds see the journey in different ways?
- What might another animal in the story think about the birds' journey (e.g. the cat, dog, fox, goshawk or stoat)?

AFTER READING...

Complete these creative classroom activities to explore the key themes of the book.

ACTIVITY 1: BIRD DETECTIVE CHALLENGE

BACKGROUND

Birdwatchers use careful observation skills to identify birds in the wild. By looking closely at colours, shapes, sounds and behaviour, they can tell one species from another.

TASK: Become a Bird Detective a bit like Jordie and track the birds that appear in *Birdlands*.

Step 1: Make a Bird Record Sheet for the story.

Step 2: List all the birds mentioned in the book.

Step 3: For each bird, record what you notice about it.

CHALLENGE:

- Include a fact about each bird's real-life habitat or behaviour.
- Add a sketch or labelled drawing of each bird.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Which bird surprised you the most? Why?
- Which bird would you most like to see in real life?
- Why do you think the author chose these birds for the story?



ROCK THE BOAT

ACTIVITY 2: HUMANS VS NATURE



BACKGROUND

In *Birdlands*, animals must survive in a world shaped not only by nature but also by human activity.

TASK: Investigate how humans and nature interact in the story.

Step 1: Find examples of moments when humans affect the birds' environment.

Step 2: Sort them into two categories.

HUMANS HELPING NATURE	HUMANS HURTING NATURE

CLASS DEBATE:

Divide into two groups.

Group 1: Humans can protect wildlife.

Group 2: Humans often damage wildlife habitats.

Each group must find evidence from the story to support their argument.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

- Are humans shown as helpful, harmful or both in the story?
- What could people do differently to protect wildlife?
- What responsibility do humans have toward animals?

CHALLENGE:

Create a poster or campaign slogan encouraging people to protect birds and their habitats.

ACTIVITY 3: SURVIVING THE WILD

BACKGROUND

Life in the wild can be dangerous. Birds must constantly watch for predators, find food and search for safe places to rest.

TASK: Choose one bird from the story and create a Wild Survival Profile.

Step 1: Research or imagine how the bird survives.

Step 2: Complete the profile.

HABITAT

- Where does the bird live?

FOOD & HUNTING

- What does it eat?
- How does it find food?

PREDATORS & THREATS

- What animals might hunt this bird?
- What environmental dangers exist?

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

- How does the bird escape predators or survive difficult conditions?



FINAL TASK:

Create a short guide titled:

"How This Bird Survives in the Wild"

DISCUSSION:

- Which birds have the hardest lives?
- What helps some birds survive better than others?

