

Varjak Paw by S.F. Said, illustrated by Dave McKean (Corgi)

Varjak Paw is descended from a proud line of Mesopotamian Blue cats. For generations they have been living in shelter and luxury in the Contessa's house. Now the Paws are in danger and only Varjak, mocked because he has different coloured eyes, understands enough to go Outside and seek help. Dreams help him to learn a martial art for cats known as the Way of Jalal, his ancestor, and so defeat his enemies. An attractively produced novel with black and white illustrations by an artist best known for his work in graphic novels.

Overall aims of this teaching sequence

- To engage children with a story with which they will empathise
- To explore themes and issues, and develop and sustain ideas through discussion
- To develop creative responses to the text through drama, storytelling and artwork
- To write in role in order to explore and develop empathy for characters
- To write with confidence for real purposes and audiences

This teaching sequence is designed for a Year 3 or Year 4 class.

Overview of this teaching sequence

The book supports teachers to teach about more complex narrative structures, writer's use of language, characterisation and themes in narrative. Settings and characters are well drawn, and the language of the text offers readers a good model for their own writing and there is opportunity to consider the power of visual images through closely examining the illustrations in the story. The sequence is 30 sessions.

National Curriculum objectives covered by this sequence

Reading: (Word reading / Comprehension)

- Maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what is read by:
 - continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction
 - reading books that are structured in different ways
 - increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books
 - identifying and discussing themes and conventions.
- Understand what they read by:
 - checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context

Writing: (Transcription / Composition)

- Plan writing by:
- noting and developing initial ideas, drawing on reading and research where necessary
 - considering how authors have developed characters and settings in what pupils have read.
- Draft and write by:
- selecting appropriate grammar and vocabulary, understanding how such choices can change and enhance meaning
 - in narratives, describing settings, characters and atmosphere and integrating dialogue to convey character and advance the action
 - using a wide range of devices to build cohesion within and across paragraphs.
- Evaluate and edit by:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence ▪ predicting what might happen from details stated and implied ▪ identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning ▪ discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader ▪ participate in discussions about books building on their own and others' ideas. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ assessing the effectiveness of their own and others' writing ▪ proposing changes to vocabulary, grammar and punctuation to enhance effects and clarify meaning ▪ ensuring correct subject and verb agreement when using singular and plural, distinguishing between the language of speech and writing and choosing the appropriate register ▪ proof read for spelling and punctuation errors. |
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Speaking and Listening:

- use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary
- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions
- give well-structured descriptions and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings
- maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments
- use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesizing, imagining and exploring ideas
- participate in discussions, role play and debates
- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others
- select and use appropriate registers for effective communication.

Cross Curricular Links:

Geography:

- This text could be part of a wider topic or theme on urban environments. The children could compare different cities to the one depicted in the book, considering the ways in which people live in cities and how this may be different depending on the city.
- The book would provide a good starting point for exploring the Geography of Ancient Mesopotamia as well as the current Geographical area comprising Iraq, Kuwait and Syria.

History:

- You could use the book as a stimulus to conduct a study of Ancient Mesopotamia. Supporting resources can be found here:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVf5kZA0HtQ>
 - <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/mesopotamia>
 - <https://www.ancient.eu/Mesopotamia/>
 - <http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/menu.html>

- <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/nov/10/ancient-world-mesopotamia>

PSHE:

- This book offers a range of opportunities to cover a diversity of themes in the PSHE programmes of study including the notions of bravery and risk taking, bereavement, friendship, bullying, self-esteem and empathy.

Art:

- Investigate Dave McKean’s illustrative techniques and style. You may want to allow the children to explore different media themselves, producing image of key characters, scenes and settings in the book. You can find out more about Dave McKean’s work here: <http://www.davemckean.com/portfolio/childrens/>

Teaching Approaches

- Reading Aloud
- Response to Illustration
- Book Talk
- Hot Seating
- Role on the wall
- Visualisation
- Text marking
- Story mapping
- Debate and discussion
- Drama and role-play
- Drawing and Annotating
- Reader’s Theatre
- Storytelling

Writing Outcomes

- Character summaries
- Advisory notes
- Writing in Role
- Missing Posters
- Poetry
- Persuasive Writing
- Newspaper report

Links to other texts

Other books by S.F. Said:

- *The Outlaw Varjak Paw*, illustrated by Dave McKean. Corgi
- *Phoenix*, illustrated by Dave McKean. Corgi

Other books illustrated by Dave McKean:

- *Mouse Bird Snake Wolf* by David Almond (Walker)
- *The Savage* by David Almond (Walker)
- *Slog’s Dad* by David Almond (Walker)
- *Joe Quinn’s Poltergeist* by David Almond (Walker)
- *The Wolves in the Walls* by Neil Gaiman (Bloomsbury)
- *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* by Neil Gaiman (Bloomsbury)

Adventure stories with animals as the principal characters:

- *The Legend of Podkin One Ear*, Kieran Larwood (Faber & Faber)
- *The Tale of Despereaux*, Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Timothy Basil Ering (Walker)

- *Stuart Little*, E.B. White, illustrated by Garth Williams (Puffin)
- *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents*, Terry Pratchett (Corgi)
- *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, Robert C. O'Brien (Puffin)

Modern adventure/quest stories leaning on myth and legend:

- *Percy Jackson* series, Rick Riordan (Puffin)
- *The Bromeliad*, Terry Pratchett (Corgi)
- *The Brownstone* series by Joe Todd-Stanton (Flying Eye)

Teaching Sessions

Before starting this book:

Before starting work on the book, create a space in the classroom for a Working Wall to enable you to pin examples of responses, reflections, notes and language generated from each session. If you do not have the space for a Working Wall you could create a class 'reading journal' using large pieces of paper and use the pages of the journal to capture responses. You may also wish to create a display of related texts as part of your class reading environment.

Throughout your reading, invite the children to record vocabulary with which they are unfamiliar on a word wall as well as language they think has an impact on their understanding or enjoyment as a reader. Provide time for children to talk about and research the new vocabulary, enabling them to use them in their discussions and writing.

Session 1: Reading Aloud and Response to Illustration

In order for the sequence to work effectively you will need to 'keep back' the text from the group initially. The story will need to unfold slowly and it is best for the group not to know the ending until you are at the culmination of the teaching sessions.

- Introduce the book by displaying the front cover on an interactive whiteboard or use an enlarged colour photocopy. Explain to the children that Varjak Paw is the name of a cat in the image. Ask the children to talk in mixed experience groups about their response to the image; *what can we tell about the character on the cover? What do you think they are doing? How do you think they are feeling? What might they be thinking? How do you know? What can we tell from their facial expression or body language? What might they be looking at? What might have happened just before this image? What might be about to happen? What meaning can you gain from the background picture? What do you think of the choice of colour? How does this make you feel? What do you notice about the two settings depicted? What might this suggest?* Encourage children to share their answers and use the image to justify their initial ideas.
- Draw the children's attention to the sentence: *'This cat must learn to fight.'* Encourage them to speculate what this might mean.

- Ask questions to draw out further responses such as: *what sort of story do you think this might be? What makes you think that? Do you think you would choose this book for yourself? Why? Why not? Does this remind you of other stories you have read, heard or seen? Have you read anything else written by S.F. Said or illustrated by Dave McKean?*
- Display the children's responses on the class Working Wall and return to their ideas as you read the book. Compare their opinions at the start of the book and then again at the end, noting the differences in their opinions and exploring why their opinions have changed.
- Now read aloud the quote from *The Wizard of Oz* that prefaces the story and share the image accompanying it. Re-read this several times before giving the group the opportunity to respond to what they have heard.
- Consider with the children the author's intentions: *why do they think he has placed the quote at the start of the book? What significance could the quote have? Why might it relate the story? What could the story be about now you have heard this? Does this challenge any of your initial assumptions about the story?*
- Place an enlarged copy of this quote onto the Working Wall and then return to this quote as the story progresses, asking the children to re-evaluate their understanding of its significance.
- Read aloud chapter one until page 12 '*it was the dullest life a cat could have*'. Reflect on the opening of the book and how this relates back to their initial ideas and discussions. *How does this compare to their initial ideas about the story? What do they think Varjak thinks about his home? Would he agree that there is 'no place like home'? Why? Why not?*
- Give the children time to look at the images on pages 8-9 that show Varjak at home staring at the cat flap; *what further details does this give the reader about his life? What do you notice about the house? Why do you think Varjak is shown staring at the cat flap? How do you think he feels in this moment?*
- Read aloud to end of the chapter one. Once the group have heard the first part of the book read aloud, the class can begin to explore their responses to it with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls the four 'Basic Questions'.
- These questions give a group accessible starting points for discussion: *Tell me...was there anything you liked about this text? Was there anything that you particularly disliked...? Was there anything that puzzled you? Were there any patterns...any connections that you noticed...?*

The openness of these questions unlike the more interrogative 'Why?' question encourages every child to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view without the fear of the 'wrong' answer.

- As the group responds it can be useful to write down what they say under the headings 'likes', 'dislikes', 'puzzles', 'patterns'. This written record helps to map out the class's view of the important meaning and is a way of holding on to ideas for later. Asking these questions will lead the group inevitably into a fuller discussion than using more general questions.
- If the children have not already considered the family dynamic, ask them to reflect on what they notice about the family dynamics and the relationships between the different cats, especially Varjak's position in the family. *How might this description relate to the quote they looked at earlier? Why might he have to learn to fight? What do you predict could happen next?*

- Consider the introduction of ‘the Gentleman’ and the two black cats at the end of this chapter. *Who do you think this is? Why could this character be significant? What impression are you given of this character? What do you notice about the description of the cats? Is there anything unusual about them? Do they remind you of characters that you may have met in other books or seen in films or television series? Which room do you think they have gone into? Why?*
- Reveal the illustration of the Gentleman and the cats on page 13; *what do they notice about the way in which the image has been drawn? From whose perspective is this image seen? What impression does it give you of the man? Do you think he seems friendly? Why? Why not? How do you think Varjak feels about him? What might happen next?*

Session 2: Reading Aloud, Response to Illustration and Looking at Language

- Read chapter two aloud and return to the ‘Tell Me’ questions you considered when reading the first chapter and, using a different colour, scribe the children’s responses, considering if they still like or dislike the writing, or if their opinions have changed.
- Consider if they have answered any questions they posed previously or if they have further questions. Finally reflect on whether they can make any further connections to the text, either to other books they have read, to films, popular culture or to their own life experiences. You may also want to give time to clarify any language the children may be unfamiliar with such as caviar.
- Encourage the children to spend time looking closely at the illustrations which accompany the story and to think about what impact the images have on their understanding of the narrative, setting and the different characters. For example, the image of Varjak and his family on page 16-17 and how the text creates the literal distance between the characters that emphasises the metaphorical distance between Varjak and his family. As well as the image of his father on page 23, which seems much more violent than the text might imply; *what impression of his father are we given by the way in which the text and the illustration work together? How do you think Varjak feels about his family?*
- Ask the children to consider what they know so far about Varjak’s family and their different attitudes towards him. Encourage the children to look back over the parts of the text read so far to justify their responses, such as the paragraph on page 17 in which Varjak watches his family; *‘He felt like a stranger, watching from a distance. They looked so grand, with their perfectly groomed silver blue fur, their green eyes, their tidy little collars around their necks.’*
- Discuss the children’s ideas considering the ways Varjak’s family’s attitude to him contributes to his feeling of isolation and difference. As well as his different relationship with Elder Paw. Consider why this may be significant to the way in which the story could unfold.
- Consider further with the children the significance of the Gentleman, what could have happened to the countess, and the strange description of the cat’s responses to the mouse. *What could this all suggest? How might this link to our initial observations and predictions? What do you expect to happen next? Why doesn’t Varjak trust the man in the same way his family do? Why is Varjak so different from his family do you think? Why might this be significant to the plot?*

- At this point you may want to encourage the children to make story predictions in writing, perhaps writing the start of the next chapter as they imagine it, based on their initial responses and discussions of the text so far.

Session 3: Role on the Wall and Exploration of Characterisation

- Have prepared several templates or outlines of a cat as well as a person in order to create a 'Role on the Wall' for some of the key characters in the book so far. This can be pinned to the Working Wall and added to as the story progresses.
- You may want to have roles on the wall for the following characters:
 - Varjak Paw
 - Elder Paw
 - Julius
 - The Gentleman
- Return to the parts of the story read so far and ask the children to text mark and highlight the different ways in which the characters are introduced and described, it may be helpful to do this using different colours.
- Ask the group to write on post-it notes words or phrases they would use to describe the character's feelings and personality, which can be stuck on the inside of the outline and what the group know about their outward appearance or facts and other information about them to be stuck on the outside.
- Use the following prompts to support the children's considerations:
 - *How are the character descriptions similar or different?*
 - *Are they literal or are you inferring meaning?*
 - *Which helped you to imagine the character?*
 - *Which did you find more difficult to imagine and why?*
 - *How do you think the author has helped you to get to know the character?*
 - *How has this been achieved by the author?*
 - *What devices or techniques have they used to help you paint a picture of their character?*
 - *Which characters do you prefer? Why?*
- Reflect on the different ways in which we are given an impression of a character without being told this directly. This will enable you to explore further authorial techniques in creating a character for the reader. This would provide valuable opportunity to further explore and use meta-language meaningfully through reader response and for teaching grammar in context.
- For example, Julius is described as 'flexing his muscles' Varjak is described as 'stealthy', the gentleman is described as having 'huge white hands, huge enough to hold his whole body, strong enough to break his neck'.
- Consider with the children what they think so far of the main character, Varjak Paw. Then reflect on why this might be different to the way in which his family view him; *how do you think he is seen by others?* Write the words they say around the outside of the template of him in a different colour. *Why do you think we might all have different opinions of Varjak compared with the*

family? Why do you think his isolation and difference are significant? What do you think could happen in the family council?

Session 4: Hot Seating

- To explore Varjak's character further and particularly his isolation within his family conduct hot seating. This activity involves children closely examining a character's motivation and responses. Before the hot seating, they need to discuss what it is they want to know and identify questions they want answering. In this instance it might work best if the teacher takes on the role of Varjak.
- Tell the children to imagine that Varjak will be visiting us and support them in composing comments or questions that they would like to put to him. Initially, model the kind of questions the children might like to ask. Use shared writing to demonstrate and elicit effective ways of asking questions. *How will they ensure their questions are open, so that they find out more information, rather than closed questions which provided a limited answer?* As they compose their questions, reflect on language use, sentence structure and punctuation. Take the opportunity to share a range of question tags that vary the form of questions and explore different sentence openers.
- If necessary, you may wish to scribe for a small or large group to create questions together, enabling the children to concentrate on their ideas and composition, releasing the transcriptional load. The teacher and children should work as active partners, talking together to share ideas and while the teacher guides the children through all the decisions that writers need to make and help them shape their thoughts on paper.
- An important part of hot seating is for children to consider how they think Varjak will respond, devising revelatory open questions, preparing follow-up questions as necessary. Encourage the children to try their questions out in this way, before finalising them.
- The teacher, TA or another appropriate adult should take on the role of Varjak and respond to the children, using the opportunity to extend their ideas and support the development of deeper empathy and reading comprehension. It is useful to wear a signifier, such as cat ears, to help the children to understand when you are taking on the role of Varjak and when you are back to being teacher again. Confident children could try this for themselves in small groups, once this has been modelled.
- Display some of the answers that Varjak provides on the Working Wall and reflect on what further insight they have gained from 'meeting' Varjak. Add any additional information to the Role on the Wall you have created for him.

Session 5: Drama and Role-Play – Gossip Circles

- Read aloud chapter three until page 28 '*the flames roared louder and higher in the fireplace*'.
- Reflect on the events in the chapter so far and the ways in which the family react and respond to Elder Paw's warning about the Gentleman and his ulterior motives.
- In order to further explore the family's reaction to the event and to Elder Paw's warning, create a freeze frame in small groups. Assign different roles to the different children such as Jasmine,

Julius, Mother, Father, Elder Paw and Varjak. You can refer to the illustration on pages 24-25 to guide this.

- Create a raised area for 'Elder Paw' to stand on (you may wish to take this role yourself) and ask the pupils to gather around as they listen to his speech in front of the fire.
- The pupil/adult in role as Elder Paw should read aloud the text below, then – on a given cue - all pupils in role as the family should vocalise their reaction to his ideas, either using the words they have heard in the book or making up their own responses. It might be a question for Elder Paw, an exclamation, a comment, an argument, an affirmation.
- It can be helpful to repeat this activity 3 or 4 times, raising the volume each time so that pupils have time to reflect on what they might say. The first time pupils could silently mouth their reaction, then whisper, then speak, and finally shout.
- Elder Paw's speech:

'The family tales tell us that when our ancestor Jalal came out of Mesopotamia, he wandered the earth for many years, before finding a home with the Contessa. Generations of Paws have lived in this house since Jalal's time. But those days may be coming to an end. I believe the Contessa is dead. She has seldom left her room of late, only to feed us and tend the fire. Our youngest litter – Varjak, Jay, Jethro and Jerome – have hardly seen her. They barely even know what she looks like. She would only let that happen if she was ill, very ill. And now this Gentleman. What we saw today confirms my fears. The Contessa is gone.'
- To finish, ask a selection of pupils to individually shout out their comments so that they can be shared with the class. Record these in order that they might be utilised in other sessions.
- Reflect on the events again now that the children have stepped into the roles of the different characters; *Why won't they listen to Varjak or his grandfather? Why don't they want to believe what seems so clear to us? Why does Varjak trust his grandfather? How do you think the family dynamic is shifting? Who holds power in the family? Do you think Varjak and his Grandfather might have to do something radical to get the family to listen to their warnings? What might this be?*
- Return to Roles on the Wall developed for the characters and add to these in another colour based on the role-play and re-reading of this section of the book.
- Following this, read to end of chapter, considering the illustrations in the chapter as well, and consider the way in which the family dynamic has shifted again with Father now in charge, *what could happen next? Based on your understanding of Varjak's character, what do you think he will do next?*

Session 6: Re-reading, Response to Illustration and Writing in Role

- Re-read aloud the story so far and on until page 33 *'but it was as if something inside him was rising up, something old and strong and buried deep.'*
- Stop to consider again the way in which Varjak is isolated in the family and bullied by his brother Julius, also consider why the cats might make comments on the colour of his eyes, which are amber, compared to their own, which are green. *Why might this be significant?* Look at the image on page 32, which reveals the physical power of Julius and how much larger and dominating he

is, compared to Varjak who is still only a kitten. *What impression do we gain of the family from this section of the text? How do you think Varjak might react?*

- Read on until ‘*Never forget this. Keep the Way alive, Varjak Paw*’ on page 39, stopping at different points, to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up.
- Ask the children to reflect on the family secret that Elder Paw has told Varjak and to imagine what the ‘Way’ might be. Give the children time to discuss this in small groups or pairs and to share ideas and suggestions as a whole class. Reflect on how this might become more significant as the story unfolds.
- Re-read the section in which Elder Paw explains the ‘Way’ to Varjak on pages 38-39 several times to ensure further clarity and share the image of Varjak and his Grandfather talking. *Why do you think Elder Paw has shared this information with Varjak and not Julius? What do you think Varjak can do with this information? Does it make sense to you? What sense do you think Varjak makes of it? What questions do you think Varjak has for his grandfather?*
- Explain that the children will now be writing in role as Varjak, to reflect his experiences and viewpoint at this point in the story. Before this, reflect on the children’s responses to the story so far as well as the ‘Tell Me’ grid, the Roles on the Wall and the drama completed in the previous session.
- If possible, hand out small journals/exercise books for children to use and regularly update as Varjak’s journal throughout his adventures/quest. They could use them to write in role reflecting on his adventures or the decisions that he has to make, they could draw and write what he discovers about the ‘Way’ or to simply make notes.
- Give sustained writing time for the children to plan, draft and write, this may need to be supported in group writing sessions or through modelled writing first.
- After the children have had a chance to write, allow those that feel confident to, to read their work in role as the Varjak, thinking about how he might be feeling at this moment.

Session 7: Reading Aloud, Response to Illustration and Debate and Discussion

- Read aloud the end of chapter four and the beginning of chapter four until ‘*Who are you?’ called the Elder Paw.*’ on page 41. Reflect on the actions of the Gentleman; *why has he touched the cats’ collars? What do you think he whispered to the cats? Do you think you can tame and control cats in this way? Why? Why not? Do you think they are like the other cats in the story? Who or what might they be? Do you think Varjak and Elder Paw are in danger? What might happen next?*
- Spend time looking closely at the illustration that accompanies this section, considering how small Varjak and his Grandfather seem in comparison to the black cats as well as how high the wall is behind them; *what impression does this give you?*
- Read on until ‘*he was being torn apart by a thousand different feelings*’ on page 43.
- Pause and consider Varjak’s dilemma at this point in the story: *What do you think he should do? Should he leave his Grandfather to the mercy of the black cats or should he stand by him? Should he follow his Grandfather’s instructions and run away to try to get help for the family? Given how high the wall is, do you think Varjak has a realistic means of escape?*
- Ask the children to work in groups and give each group a large sheet of sugar paper or flip chart paper divided into two columns – reasons he should stay and help his Grandfather and reasons

against – and some post-it notes in two different colours – one colour ‘for’ and the other ‘against’.

- Ask the children to complete as many post-it notes as possible with different reasons for him staying and fighting or leaving and getting help.
- As they add them to their large sheet of paper, the children should check if there has already been an idea added that is similar to their own. If there is, they should group them together.
- After sufficient time has been given for children to add their ideas, ask them to discuss as a group and decide which are the three most important reasons for and the three most important reasons against.
- Share the ideas as a class and create a class list combining all of the three reasons ‘for and against’ that children have come up with.
- You might also want to give time and space for them to discuss the children’s personal response to Varjak’s dilemma, *what do they think he should do? Is there an alternative he hasn’t thought of?*
- Following this, support the class in using conscience alley to further refine their ideas. Ask the class to create two equal lines and then turn to face one another, leaving a narrow alley between the two lines. Select one pupil who, in role as Varjak, will walk between the two lines.
- As they walk between the lines, pupils on one side give reasons to persuade Varjak to risk leaving his Grandfather, while pupils on the opposite side give their reasons why Varjak should stay and fight the black cats.
- As one child walks along the line in role as Varjak children call out their advice for example: *‘go and get help!’ ‘How can you leave him; he’ll die... he’s your grandfather; protect him!’*
- When the pupil in role reaches the end of the ‘alley’, they can explain the decision they have made and why. You might repeat the task, so that each side of the ‘alley’ has had the opportunity to argue both ‘for’ and ‘against’.
- Having had the opportunity to reflect on Varjak’s different options, ask children to decide for themselves what they think he should do.
- The children could then write a note to Varjak advising him of what to do next. At this point the children will probably begin to use modal verbs in order to persuade the Varjak of their opinion, such as *should*, *must* and *will*. This would therefore be an opportunity to use metalanguage in context. You could draw attention to this, identifying the modal verbs and discussing the difference between using *might* or *could* in comparison to *must* and *should*.
- When all children have finished their writing, ask them to screw up their note into a ball and throw them across the room. The receiver of the note then writes in role as Varjak in reply to the children’s note telling them what he is going to do.
- Ask the children to consider the language and style used, including emotive language and repetition, and which was the most persuasive note and why.
- These can then be placed on the class Working Wall, in the children’s literacy books or in the class reading journal.
- Read on until the end of chapter five, revealing Varjak’s choice, stopping at different points, to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Reflect on the final events

of the chapter and what they think might happen now that Varjak stands on ‘the edge of the world’.

Session 8: Reading Aloud, Book Talk, Looking at Language and Visualisation

- Read aloud the start of chapter six until, ‘*he was standing in space, and it was a long way to fall*’ but do not reveal the accompanying image yet. Project the previous image of Varjak on top of the wall on page 46 onto the interactive whiteboard. Invite the children to close their eyes and try to visualise what Varjak could see and how he might be feeling.
- You may want to support this visualisation by playing the sounds of a city at night, supporting resources can be found here:
 - ‘City Ambience’: <http://soundbible.com/tags-city.html>
- Then read aloud the following description of the city from the book several times:

‘Ahead of him was a sea of lights, stretching far and away into the darkness. Varjak couldn’t tell what they were or where they led. He looked up. Another sea of lights: the moon and stars, cold and distant. They made him giddy in the pit of his stomach, so dizzy that he could almost feel the wall slip out from under him.’
- Ask children for their immediate responses to the text, and then to share language that is memorable to them. *What kinds of pictures did the description help you to imagine?*
- Give the children pieces of paper and appropriate and available art materials such as charcoal and then ask the children to sketch the scene they imagine as if they were Varjak looking out into the night, re-read the text above as they do this. Remind the children that Varjak is only a kitten and so the perspective would look different to him than it would to them, everything will therefore seem much larger.
- After they have completed their drawings the children could annotate the pictures with key vocabulary or phrases which support their understanding or interpretation.
- Give the children time to share their work with one another and to compare and contrast their images. Invite children to comment on what is similar and what is different about the way they have illustrated the scene and why they think this is.
- Ask the children to consider how the way in which they have drawn the pictures expresses the atmosphere of the scene they had in mind. *How do you think Varjak feels in this moment? What do you think he will do next? What dangers will he face in the city? Do you think he will be able to find help for his family?*
- Display the children’s artwork on the Working Wall and compare their own images with the images from the book, stressing that Dave McKean’s drawing is a response to the author’s text just as theirs is, and there is no right or wrong way to do this - just a range of individual interpretations. *What details of your own and Dave McKean’s illustrations do you think are most effective? Why do you think he chose to illustrate in the way he did? What do you think he is trying to convey in his interpretation? What were the similarities and differences with your own sketches? What features of the writing do you think he has picked out to illustrate? Are they the same as yours? Are there things you have included that Dave McKean has omitted? Why do you think he might have chosen to do this?*
- Re-read the opening of chapter six and on until the end, following this return to the ‘Tell Me’ grid adding in any further responses from the children. Consider the way the chapter ends on a

cliffhanger, *what impact does this have on them as readers? What could happen next?* Encourage the children to also make personal connections to the events in the chapter; *have they ever felt small and vulnerable in the world like Varjak does? Has there been a time when they have had to brave something alone? Or have they ever made a mistake, realising it just a moment too late to prevent it?*

- Following this, return to the Role on the Wall prepared earlier for both Elder Paw and Varjak, *what more do we know about their personalities and characteristics from what has happened?*

Session 9: Reading Aloud, Drawing and Annotating

- Read aloud chapter seven which is the first chapter in which Varjak dreams of the seven skills in the 'Way of Jalal'. In this chapter it is revealed that the first skill is an Open Mind.
- As you read the chapter, ask the children to consider what they notice about the colour used on these pages. *How does this add to the sense that this section is a dream or a vision that Varjak is having?*
- After reading the chapter ask the children to consider what they have found out about the 'Way'; *What do you notice about the way in which Jalal the Paw tests Varjak? What does he encourage him to do? In what way does Varjak react initially? Why do you think he is ashamed and embarrassed to begin with? In what way does he change? How has he demonstrated that he has an 'open mind' by the end of the chapter?*
- Consider the fact that Jalal the Paw is revealed to have amber eyes like the rising sun, *why might this be significant?*
- At this point you may want to dedicate part of your Working Wall to building up a display of the different skills, adding to this each time a skill is revealed by Varjak's dreams. This part of the Working Wall can then be annotated and added to as you continue to read the story and more skills are revealed.
- The Seven Skills are an Open Mind, Awareness, Hunting, Slow-Time, Moving Circles, Shadow-Walking, Trust Yourself.
- Each time a new skill is revealed, give time for the children to talk about what they understand it to mean. It would be helpful to re-read short sections from the dream sequences to draw out key language and definitions. For example, with an open mind you might record the following quote from the chapter: *'For only when you admit you know nothing, can you truly know everything.'*
- Ensure the children have time to define and annotate the first skill an 'Open Mind' and to discuss what this would look like in practice. For example, with illustrations from their own life when they have asked for help, asked a brave question or admitted that they were unsure of something or did not have the answers.
- Later on in the sequence, you may also want to invite the children to work in pairs to create movements representing the Seven Skills. If possible, photograph or film the children to create a record of their movements.
- You could also ask the children to make their own chart in their journals illustrating the Seven Skills in the Way of Jalal as each are introduced.

Session 10: Re-reading, Freeze Frame and Graph of Emotion

- Read aloud chapter eight until *'but down in the city it looked noisy and bustling, a place that never went to sleep.'* on page 61. Compare the way in which the city is sketched and described in the book with how the children imagined it in the previous session. *What do you notice about the city in the daytime? Do you think Varjak will enjoy being here? What might be dangerous about being in the city by himself?*
- Read on until *'leaving the sky the colour of cold ashes.'* on page 63. Reflect on Varjak's emotions and response to being outside of the Contessa's house and in the city; *now that it is daylight, how does Varjak feel differently about being outside and on his own? Why do you think he feels happier to be outside than inside with his family? Do you think this feeling of freedom will continue? What challenges might the city pose him?*
- Read on until the end of the chapter, considering how his emotions change so much during a relatively short space of time; *why do you think his mood changes so much by the end of the chapter? Why does he confuse the cars for dogs? What danger might he place himself in if he doesn't work out the difference? What might happen to him next?*
- Revisit the text and illustrations from the chapter, then divide the class into 3 groups and ask each of them as individuals to create a freeze frame to represent Varjak at different moments during the events of the chapter. One group should freeze frame Varjak waking up and enjoying his new found freedom in the city, another group will show Varjak attempting to make sense of the cars and confusing them for dogs and the final group should show Varjak despairing in the rain calling for help.
- Thought track members of each of the groups, keeping a record of how Varjak felt at these different moments. Consider photographing each of the freeze frames and allowing children to access these on a computer/tablet. Speech and thought bubbles could be added and completed to reflect and capture the voices from the freeze frame/thought tracking activity.
- Following this, complete a Graph of Emotion to explore how Varjak's feelings have changed over the course of the eight chapters. Completing a graph of emotion allows children to show and see how story characters feel throughout a story. The graph can be reflected upon to help children to make judgements about how story events may have affected the central characters.
- To create the graph, use small illustrations from the book to sequence key events along the bottom axis of a large scale class 'Graph of Emotion'. Start by working with the children to establish what the key events in the story are so far.
- Once these key moments are established and images are placed along the horizontal axis, move to the scale of emotion which is written alongside the vertical axis. Draw on the children's repertoire of vocabulary to describe Varjak's feelings throughout the story. Some children may benefit from having a wider choice of words depicting emotional states from which to choose rather than a sliding scale, for example: devastated, despairing, anxious, worried, confident, hopeful, happy, contented.
- Revisit the first few events as a class, supporting the children to negotiate and agree on how he might have felt at that point in the story, placing a small image of Varjak above the illustration of the event to correspond with the appropriate word used to describe the emotion.

- You could also provide small groups with their own Graph of Emotion on which to place an image of Varjak. The act of negotiating and agreeing on the emotion felt for each of the events will enable the children to retell the story on a number of levels.
- Once children have negotiated where they would place Varjak for each event on the graph, pin them up and allow time for groups to give feedback and offer their responses. *How do the emotional journeys each group has created compare and contrast? How well can they justify where they have placed Varjak at each point, articulating the placement with evidence from the story?*
- A large-scale version of a graph of emotion could be displayed on the Working Wall and referred to periodically as the story and the teaching sequence progress.

Session 11: Revisiting the text, Text Marking and Story Mapping

- Begin by reflecting on the previous sessions and the events in the story so far. Following their discussions, ask the children to work with a partner and draw a map of the story so far with the Contessa's house, the garden, the park and the city. This will help them form a clearer picture of Varjak's experience and the contrast between his secluded life with his family and life in the city.
- The children could make a large wall frieze of the settings in the story perhaps using collage. This would make an attractive backdrop for their work and would also provide a useful support for their visualisation of the narrative.
- Encourage the children to contrast the locations in the narrative. Support children in using the text to find language which creates the moods of these places and encourage them to annotate their story maps with phrases and effective vocabulary. For example, the house is described as *'full of dust and musty smells. The windows were always closed, the doors locked. There was a garden but it was surrounded by a high stone wall.'* In contrast his first experience of the city is described as follows *'A splash of sunshine lit the horizon. He'd never seen a sunrise before, and the sky Outside was alive with streaks of amber light'*.
- Continue to add to these storymaps as you read on in the story, considering how different his life in the house was from his new life on the streets. This will support the children to understand how brave Varjak is to risk everything but also why his family are so frightened to go outside and to risk leaving the Contessa's house.

Session 12: Reading Aloud, Book Talk and Double Bubble

- Read aloud chapter nine until *'There was nothing strange or scary about her – though you wouldn't want her for an enemy.'* on page 71. This opening marks the introduction of another central character, Holly. Ask the children to complete a Role on the Wall for this character in the same way as in the previous sessions, considering the impression given to the reader of this character.
- For example, noting the way in which she is described as having a gravelly voice, spiky fur, looking as if *'she had seen too much of the world already'*. Also note the way in which she *'commands'* Varjak and how her growl *'rips'* the air.

- *What impression are you given of Holly? Why do you think Varjak doesn't find her scary despite this description? How is she different from Julius and his family? Do you think she will help Varjak?*
- Read on until the end of the chapter, stopping at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up.
- After this, complete 'double bubble' where the children compare the two characters of the Holly and Varjak. Place the characters in the centre of a piece of paper, next to each other; you could use images to support this. The image from chapter 9 would work particularly well as the cats are separated by the page gutter, as well as being separated emotionally at this point.
- Then establish in the centre of the two characters the similarities that the characters share – this could be as simple as 'they are both alone in the city.'
- Then to the left of both the characters the children can establish the differences between the characters, such as Varjak was a pet cat whereas Holly is feral.
- As the sequence continues revisit the 'double bubble' to see if the similarities have grown.

Session 13: Reading Aloud, Text Marking and Annotating

- Read chapter ten, another dream sequence in which Varjak is introduced to the second skill, Awareness. Use this as an opportunity to add to the display you have begun, giving time for the children to define and annotate this with their own understandings of what this means.
- Give the children extracts from the chapter or a copy of the chapter to annotate and text mark, deciding on what they consider to be the definition of Awareness. For example, they might highlight '*Open your senses. Spread them wide like a net. Observe the world: what it looks like, what it sounds like. Even what it tastes like.*'
- Again, give the children time and space to share their own examples of when they have shown Awareness, or when they didn't but perhaps should have.
- Read chapter eleven, until '*He grinned with them, and just for a moment, he felt an invisible barrier between them drop.*' On page 83. Another central character Tam is introduced here, so again create an additional Role on the Wall for her to contrast with Holly and Varjak. For example, noting how she is described as a 'comfortable-looking-cat with shaggy, chocolate-brown fur' creating a much gentler first impression than the one we had for Holly.
- Arrange each completed set of 'Role on the Wall' notes on the Working Wall in close proximity to one another, along with the double bubble. This will to allow you to continue noting observations about each individual cat as well as note connections and pertinent points about the individual within the context of the group. Use this to frame future discussions about how the different members of the friendship group evolve and to reflect on group dynamics, as well as noting observations about the characters.
- Read on until the end of the chapter. Reflect on the events in this chapter and the new information that Varjak learns from Holly and Tam; *what do you think about these cats? Do you think they will end up friends with Varjak? Why? Why not? What do you think about the gangs of cats they refer to? What could the vanishings be? How do you think Varjak will survive in the city without help?*

You may also want to explore the notions of bravery, friendship and risk taking that run through the book in additional PSHE lessons which would support this sequence. You may want to encourage the children to adopt some of the skills Jalal teaches Varjak, such as an ‘Open Mind’, ‘Trust Yourself’ and ‘Awareness’ for the duration of the sequence to see how it can help the children take risks in their leaning and to build resilience.

Session 14: Reading Aloud, Book Talk and Readers Theatre

- Read chapter twelve, stopping at different points, to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up.
- Re-read the section of the chapter in which Varjak attempts to talk to the cars, mistaking them for dogs, from the top of page 90 until the end of the chapter and explore the accompanying illustrations of cars, particularly noticing the way in which the cars are drawn to look like monsters or beasts, as well as the way in which they get bigger and bigger until they take up an entire page; *what impression do you have of this moment? In what way has Varjak shown real bravery? In what way has he placed himself in real danger? Where might you place him on the graph of emotion in this chapter?*
- Following this, put the children in smaller groups and ask the children to complete Readers Theatre using the suggested extract below.
- Readers Theatre is a valuable way for children to work in a group to perform the text. Children can begin marking or highlighting parts of the text, indicating the phrases or sections to be read by individuals or by several members of the group. This enables them to bring out the meanings, pattern and characterisation and to support developing reading fluency.
- The children can then work together to decide how to perform the text creatively:
 - *Which parts might be read in unison?*
 - *Which bits might be read with one voice/two voices?*
 - *Which bits might be read loudly/softly/echoed?*
 - *Might you include sound effects?*
- Give the children the text divided into sections as suggested:

Section 1:

The eyes grew bigger. And bigger. The monster was coming closer, and closer. And behind it, he could see others of its kind: a whole pack of them.

Section 2:

Good. He was smack in front of them. They couldn’t get past without going through him. Jalal could do this. I can do it too.

Section 3:

The monsters kept coming. And still he stood his ground, though he had to dig his claws into tarmac to stop himself running. I need your help. Please! Please! Please!

Section 4:

But the monsters weren’t slowing. They were speeding. They were shrieking, roaring, bearing down on him. Huge, deadly. Stand your ground, stand your ground...

Section 5:

BRAAAAAP! Fur fluttered fur flattened. Monsters roared over his head – to his left – to his right - to his left - and were gone.

- Following their group work the children could now perform the work to the whole class, putting their separate sections together.
- After this, ask the children what language was highlighted during the Readers Theatre activity and how did this activity support their learning of author intent and purpose.
- You might support the children with prompts, such as:
 - *How did you feel as you listened to the performance?*
 - *What words or phrases stood out? Why?*
 - *I wonder what the impact of the different sentence structures employed have on you as a reader?*
 - *How does it feel to have this experience told from Varjak’s point of view, rather than by someone else?*
- This will enable you to explore authorial techniques and will provide valuable opportunity to explore and use meta-language meaningfully through reader response and will allow you to teach grammar in context.
- Following this, revisit the Role on the Wall for Varjak, adding in the children’s responses in another colour as well as reflecting on his thoughts and feelings at this point in the story.
- Reflect on the fact that Varjak feels that he has failed at the end of this chapter and ask the children what advice or ideas he could take from the skills he has learned so far from Jalal to make himself feel better and to keep going with his quest.

Session 15: Reading Aloud, Text Marking and Annotating

- Read aloud chapter thirteen, until *‘the alley was narrow, and dark with the shadows of the night.’* On page 97 and look closely at the illustrations accompanying this passage.
- Consider what impression of Varjak the reader is given here, how small and alone he seems in the dangerous city. You might also reflect on the sense of foreboding in the opening of the chapter; *what do you think could happen next? Why do you get that impression? What words or phrases suggest this to you? Do you think he is using the skills that Jalal has taught him? What skill might be useful here?*
- Read to the end of the chapter where it is revealed that Varjak has been knocked unconscious. Consider the events in the chapter and how Holly has returned to help him. Also discuss the way in which the cats mention the vanishings again and reflect with the children on why the cats are so interested in this and worried about it, even someone as tough and dangerous as Ginger. *Who do you think is responsible for the vanishings? Are there any clues in the text so far that give you a sense of who may be guilty? What do you think happens to the cats that vanish? Do you think Sally Bones could be responsible? Why? Why not? What do you predict will happen now that Varjak is unconscious again? What skill do you think Jalal might teach him next?*
- Read aloud chapter fourteen in which Hunting, the third skill, is explained to Varjak and add to the display generated earlier with information from the text, definitions and annotations,

considering especially the idea that a hunter can take enough and no more; *what does this mean to the children?*

- You may also want to reflect upon the definition of a cat that Jalal puts to Varjak: *A cat is an idea of freedom made flesh... It cannot be tied down. To be truly alive it must be free, and a free cat hunts. It never scavenges or depends on the kindness of people. It depends only on itself.*
- Consider how this notion might resonate with Varjak and how this idea of a cat compares to how Varjak's family lived in the Contessa's house, *do they think Jalal would approve of Julius and the other cats? Why? Why not?*

Session 16: Reading Aloud, Book Talk, Role on the Wall and Personal Writing

- Show the children the image of Varjak, Holly and Tam on page 111 before reading aloud the next chapter to them. Ask the children to use the illustration to make predictions about what they think will happen in the chapter and to reflect on the friendship that is developing between the three cats.
- Read aloud chapter fifteen stopping at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Continue to reflect on Varjak, Holly and Tam and how their relationship has changed since the first time that they met. Return to the double bubble created earlier and add further similarities and difference between Varjak and Holly.
- Pause to think about the character Sally Bones and why she is so feared by all the cats in the city. Return to Tam's description of her on pages 114-115 – *what do you notice about the way in which she describes her? For example, suggesting 'she is everywhere' and that she can 'do things no cat can do' and that she can 'become invisible'. What does this make you think of? Do you think this is true? What does this remind you of? Why might Sally Bones be significant?*
- Read chapter sixteen, stopping at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up.
- Continue to consider the vanishings and why they might be significant to the plot; *what could be happening to the cats in the city? Why could the smell of caviar be significant? Why does Tam want to find this smell? Why does Holly warn it is dangerous? Does she know this? Could she be using the skill of Awareness? Do you think they should find the origin of the smell? Or do you agree with Holly that it would be too risky? What could the illustration on page 118 suggest? Do you think the shadows of the people are significant? Who might they be?*
- Following this, return to the Roles on the Wall created for Varjak, Tam and Holly and consider the new home he has made with them.
- The children may reflect back on the original quote at the start of the book you explored with the children, *what could 'there's no place like home' mean now that we have read a significant amount of the book? Do you think it refers to the Contessa's house? Or could it mean that home is really about the people who care about you and keep you safe?*
- Following this, you may want to give the children time and space to create their own definitions of the word home based on what 'home' means to them and why.

Session 17: Writing in Role

- Explain that the children will now be writing in role as one of the characters, to reflect their experiences and viewpoint so far in the story.
- Explore what the different perspectives of the different cats might be at the end of chapter sixteen. For example, Holly seems most worried about the vanishings and is trying to protect Tam and Varjak so therefore feels a sense of responsibility for the other younger cats. Tam is glad that she has Holly and now Varjak but she is really hungry and desperate for food. Varjak is grateful to Holly and Tam, but still preoccupied with worry about his family and finding a dog, as well as excited that he is learning the 'Way'.
- You may want to assign different children the different characters or you could allow the children to choose the character that they would like to inhabit, either writing as Varjak, Holly or Tam.
- Before the children write in role, give them time to look over all the different work completed in the sessions, such as the Roles on the Wall to gain a sense of the character that they will be writing in role as. Also spend time re-reading and text marking in order to compare and contrast the characters' different feelings and perspectives.
- After you have spent time considering the different characters' perspectives, ask the children to think about retelling part of the story in role as one of these central characters, considering how their version of the event would start and what details and observations they would include based on the textual analysis you have completed.
- Give sustained writing time for the children to plan, draft and write, this may need to be supported in group writing sessions or through shared and modelled writing first.
- You may want to share this article on the British Library's website in which S.F. Said discusses his own drafting and re-writing process which could be supportive for the children as they re-write and edit their own work: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/varjak-paw-by-sf-said-illustrated-by-dave-mckean-manuscript-drafts-and-printed-book>
- At the end of the session allow time for the children to read aloud their writing, so that they can hear the different ways in which each character experienced the same events.

Before the next session read aloud chapter seventeen in which Slow-Time, the fourth skill, is explained to Varjak and add to the display generated earlier with information from the text, definitions and annotations. Such as, 'slow time begins with breathing... once you are in slow time, everything will seem to slow down around you but you will be fast, faster than anything.' You might also want to add examples of the different animals featured in the chapters focused on the 'Way', discussing their significance. For example, considering why the crickets featured in earlier sections dedicated to hunting and having awareness and why fish might be associated with Slow-Time.

Session 18: Reading Aloud, Close Reading and Story Mapping

- Read aloud chapter eighteen pausing at the description of Sally Bones' gang on page 133 including Razor, described as her lieutenant. *What do the children think of this description of cats who patrol, swagger and strut around as if they own the world? How does this compare with Ginger and his gang? How does this compare with Varjak, Tam and Holly? What do you think*

would happen if Varjak encountered this gang? Why do you think they use a term such as a lieutenant to describe Razor? What does this mean? What does this suggest about the gang and their power in the city? Do you think they might be responsible for the vanishings?

- Read on until ‘Varjak looked again.’ on page 134. Consider the description of the square that the cats have come to and read this section aloud several times to see if the children can make personal connections with the place described. Some might be able to identify that this is Trafalgar Square in London.
- Show an image of the square to the children, especially the statues of the lions and reflect on the sense of awe and wonder felt by the cats when they came across these statues. Think about the language used to describe the lions; proud, free and fearless as well as powerful, magnificent and sure of themselves. *Why do you think the cats spend time just staring at the statues? Why do they aspire to be like this? Do you think they will be by the end of the book? Why? Why not?*
- Read on until ‘Varjak Sprung’ stopping at different points, to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. *What do the children predict will happen next? Do you think he will be successful at catching a pigeon? Do you think he will be able to put the different skills that he has learned about to use? Do you think he needs more practice? What image do you expect to see on the following page?*
- Read on until the end of the chapter, revealing Varjak’s failure. Consider the way in which Varjak and Holly try to hunt the pigeons; *why have they found it so difficult? What tells you Varjak is still an inexperienced hunter? What could they do differently? Do you think hunting together is a good plan? Why do you think Tam decided to go to sleep? What does this suggest about her personality?*
- Read aloud chapter nineteen, stopping at different points, to clarify the children’s understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Reflect on the fact that at the end of the chapter Tam has decided to find ‘that fishy smell’ separating herself from the others. *What do they think will happen next? Why might this have been a bad idea? What do you think the fishy smell could be? What might happen to Tam? Should Varjak and Holly have tried to stop her?*
- Return to the story maps generated earlier in the sessions and give the children time to add in the further geographical locations and details, such as the alleys and the square visited by the cats. You may also want to give the children time to look at a real map of London, comparing and contrasting this to their own maps, *could they work out where in London they think the book might be set?*
- Also continue to return to the Roles on the Wall created for Varjak, Holly and Tam, considering further the similarities and differences between the different characters.

Session 19: Missing Posters

- Read aloud chapter twenty and look at the image of Razor and Sally’s gang on page 149. Consider how Razor is further introduced to the reader; *what impression of him are you given in this chapter? How is he described? What do his actions suggest about his character? Do you think Holly is right to keep out of the gang’s way? Do you think Varjak will beat him one day? Who do you think gave Razor his scars?*

- Read aloud chapter twenty-one, revealing that Tam still has not returned and the discovery of the toy cats in the alley. *What do you notice about the way the toys in the shop window are described? Do they sound like the type of toy you would like? Why? Why not? What do you think about the toy cat in the alley? In what way could it be a 'cruel joke' about Tam? In what way is the toy 'horribly wrong'? Why might the fur be perfect but nothing else? Do you agree that people prefer toy cats to real cats? Do you think the toy cats could have related to the 'vanishings'? What else could the 'vanishings' mean? What do you think might have happened to Tam? How do we know at the end of the chapter that Holly and Varjak are even closer?*
- Explain to the children that you would like them to make a missing poster for Tam to support Varjak and Holly's search for her. Discuss with the children what this might look like, you might want to share some examples of missing posters that people have displayed when looking for a pet cat.
- Following this, model how to create a missing poster for Tam applying in practice a description of the character, ways in which the information can be made to be eye catching and appealing to the reader, such as reducing the information and making judicious language choices, the use of the present tense, and short sentences for impact.
- Encourage the children to create their own posters for Tam, drawing on the previous work they have engaged in such as the Role on the Wall as well as returning to the book to text mark any effective descriptions of Tam from the story, to create an effective description of Tam for their posters. Once they have created their posters these can be displayed on the Working Wall or on the large story map they have created of the setting, adding these to the places she may have been seen.

Before the next session read aloud chapter twenty-two in which Moving Circles, the fifth skill is explained to Varjak and add to the display generated earlier with information from the text, definitions and annotations. This 'skill' is a bodily skill associated with movement so you may want to capture the children moving as if they are embodying 'Moving Circles' in photographs or the children might like to sketch Varjak as if he is using Moving Circles to demonstrate what the skill entails.

Session 20: Looking at Language, Response to Illustration and Visualisation

- Re-read the end of chapter twenty-two which reveals that Varjak's life is in danger and ask the children to predict why this might be. *Who or what might be endangering him?*
- Read Aloud chapter twenty-three until *'They looked like soft little kittens beside her'* on page 166 and ask the children to imagine what the infamous Sally Bones looks like. Re-read the text again but this time ask the pupils to close their eyes and invite them to try to visualise the scene.
- Give the children pieces of paper and appropriate and available art materials and then ask the children to sketch the scene they pictured. You could read the text again several times while the children draw their pictures.
- After the class have completed their drawings the pupils could annotate the pictures with key vocabulary or phrases from the text which support their understanding or interpretation such as *'she was licking her claws'* or *'around her was the smell of darkness, of dank and deadly things and places.'* Display these on the working wall alongside the roles on the wall created for the

other cats, suggesting how different Sally Bones is to the central characters and heroes of the story.

- Following this, share the two accompanying images of Sally Bones from the book. Reflect on the introduction of this character Varjak has heard so much about; *is this what they imagined? Do you think she seems as dangerous as suggested? Do you think she is responsible for the Vanishings? Why? Why not? What do you think she will do to Varjak?*
- Read on until the end of chapter twenty-four, stopping at different points, to clarify the children's understanding and allow for discussion around what the children like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up as well as giving time to respond to the illustrations.
- Consider the way in which Sally Bones is so keen to know how Varjak knows about the 'Way' and Jalal. *Why do you think she ask Varjak 'Is it you?' - what could this mean? How do you think Sally Bones knows about the 'Way'? Do you think this dog might be significant to the rest of the story? Why? Why not? What do you notice about the way in which the dog is drawn? What does this suggest about his strength and size? What do you predict will happen next?*

Session 21: Responding to Poetry and Ideation

- In order to explore the way in which S.F. Said creates a world inhabited with cats and distinctive characters within this story-world, as well as to create intertextual connections; in this session the children will explore poetry that focuses on cats in order to draw comparisons and explore language.
- There are many examples on the CLPE website: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetry>
- A particularly effective example to share is the poem, 'The Language of Cat' by Rachel Rooney (below) especially as it contrasts cats and dogs.
- Read the poem aloud and give time for the children to share their initial responses to the poem. *What do you think the poem is about? How does the poem make you feel? What makes you feel like this? Why do you think the poet has chosen to write about this topic?*
- Now read the poem aloud to the children again and ask them to think about the poem again. *What words or phrases has the poet used that make an impact on you as a reader; that help evoke emotion? Which words or phrases do you like or that add meaning or feeling, what questions do you have about the poem and what connections can you make with shared or real life experiences?*
- Now give the children a copy of the poem as it is laid out on the page and allow them to read it for themselves, ask the children what they notice. *What pictures form in your minds as you read? What is it in the poem that makes you visualise this?* Allow the children to text mark and annotate the poem, if this is helpful.
- Watch Rachel Rooney's performance of the poem available on the CLPE website, asking the class to consider how this adds to their experience of the poem: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetry/poems/language-cat>
- Consider the poem alongside the descriptions of the cats in the book – *what connections can you make with the way in which the 'language of cat' is described with the cats in the book?*

The Language of Cat

Teach me the language of Cat;
the slow-motion blink, that crystal stare,
a tight-lipped purr and a wide-mouthed hiss.
Let me walk with a saunter, nose in the air.

Teach my ears the way to ignore
names that I'm called. May they only twitch
to the distant shake of a boxful of biscuits,
the clink of a fork on a china dish.

Teach me that vanishing trick
where dents in cushions appear, and I'm missed.
Show me the high-wire trip along fences
To hideaway places, that no-one but me know exist.

Don't teach me Dog.
All eager to please; that slobbers, yaps and begs for a pat,
that sits when told by its owner, that's led on a lead.
No, not that. Teach me the language of Cat.

From *The Language of Cat*, by Rachel Rooney (Frances Lincoln)

- In order to support the children to create their own poetry based on their responses to the characters in the book and to reflect on the ways in which S.F Said has supported readers to imagine these creatures, encourage the children to go back through the book read so far and to take different words, phrases and sentences used to describe the cats that they think are particularly effective.
- For example, '*Back legs uncoiled. Front paws reached out for a grip. Found it. Back legs pushed, pumped, powered up, up and flew like the wind*' (page 45) or '*a comfortable-looking cat with shaggy, chocolate-brown fur sat there.*' (page 81) or '*a massive, muscly ginger tom, towered over him. It ripped his check with claws as sharp and white as lightning.*' (page 100).
- You might also refer back to Jalal's definition: '*A cat is an idea of freedom made flesh... It cannot be tied down*'.
- Ask the children to note these and to record them on sentence strips. They might also return to the Roles on the Wall you have created to aid their ideas.
- You might also support the ideation phase by allowing the children to gather vocabulary from responding to image of cats or from watching videos. Supporting resources can be found here:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YH7uhgPD0gY>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBm153A8kS8>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u26gpLmKe4>
- Once the children have looked at images or watched the videos, invite them to discuss in groups and note words and phrases that they feel would best describe the cats.

- Take the time to value their suggestions, say them out loud, pause and reflect on their effect and discuss how the reflection and range of ideas can support the refinement of the contributions.
- Consider what synonyms could be used to refine the quality of the language. Reflect on how the use of personification might intensify the language for example.
- Display the language generated on the Working Wall in preparation for the following session.

Session 22: Poetry Composition and Performance

- Allow the children the opportunity to write their own poems in response to the ideas explored in the previous session, imitating Rachel Rooney's poem if this is supportive or writing free verse. The children might want to write a poem based on an individual cat of their choosing from the story or they might want to write a poem about the cats more generally.
- Once the pupils have an initial draft or drafts, allow them to read aloud their poetry to a response partner to lift the words off the page, hearing how they sound when performed.
- Give time for response partners to ask the writers questions, discuss parts they aren't sure are working or make suggestions to improve the writing. For example, writers can tell response partners what they are pleased with in their writing, particular devices or parts of the poem they may be struggling with and gaining a picture from the reader of how their writing impacts on them.
- Response partners should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of the poem on them as a reader. Pupils can then re-draft parts of their work, based on these conversations.
- Ask the pupils to think together about how the poem could be presented on the page to enhance the meaning and the reader's understanding. *How will it look on the page? What form will it take? How will you use line breaks, spacing on the page to enhance the meaning or emotions behind your poem? Will you hand write it? Will you publish using ICT? What script or font will you choose? Will you make any specific decisions about the way certain words look or are placed on the page? Will you illustrate the poem? If so, how will the words and illustration sit and work together?*
- You may want to encourage the children to draw images of the cats in the style of Dave McKean to accompany their poetry.
- Give further time for pupils to redraft any parts of their poems that they discussed with their response partner, or to work on their poems further if they need time to do this.
- When the pupils are happy with the way their poem/poems look on the page, they can begin to think about how they could be lifted off the page and be performed to an audience.
- Give each child a photocopy of their poem and allow them to mark this up with performance ideas. Ask the pupils to consider: *will you perform on your own? Do you need others to support you? How will you use voice, body movements and facial expression to enhance the listener's engagement and understanding?*
- Allow the children time to consider how the theme, ideas and content of the poem could shape the performances they create.
- To prepare the children for this and to support their performances you may want to show them performances by different poets which reflect a difference in performance style. Examples can be found on the CLPE website: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetry/poets>

- Once the children have prepared their performances, allow them to share these, reflecting on the difference in performance and the impact this has on the audience. Reflect on the understanding they have of the characters presented in the poetry and the ways in which they can make connections across the poems explored and within the story.
- Display the pupils' own poems prominently on the Working Wall once finished.

After this session, read aloud chapter twenty-five in which Shadow Walking, is explained to Varjak and add to the display generated earlier with information from the text, definitions and annotations. For example, Jalal tells Varjak, *'believe something is impossible...and you will surely fail. But believe in yourself and you can do anything.'* The children could reflect on whether or not they think this is true; *are there some things that no matter how much you believe in yourself, just can't or won't happen? When does this saying make sense to you? Are there examples from your own life when you have believed in yourself and therefore you have achieved something? What about the ability to become invisible? Do you think Varjak will master this skill? When would it have been useful to him earlier in the story?*

Session 23: Graph of Emotion and Storytelling

- Read aloud chapter twenty-six until *'You talked to a dog.'* On page 184. Considering how our impression of Cludge has changed since his first introduction; *what do we notice about Cludge? How are Varjak and Cludge similar? What do you notice about this the second illustration of Cludge? Does he seem as vicious? In what way are he and Varjak made to look similar in this image? Thinking back to earlier in the story, what does Varjak think dogs are? Will he be surprised he spoke to a dog do you think? How might this relate to the skills he has learnt in the time he has been outside in the world?*
- Read to the end of chapter twenty-six, allowing time for children to share their responses, what they liked and disliked so far, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Ask the children to think about and make predictions on what they think will happen when the three friends return to the Contessa's house.
- Read chapter twenty-seven, as well as exploring the illustration on pages 188-189, considering how different Varjak's impression of the house and garden are now that he has returned; *why does the wall and the house seem so different? In what does this relate to the way in which he has changed since he left?* Read on until the end of chapter twenty-eight, then allow time for children to share their responses, what they liked and disliked so far, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up.
- Return to the Role on the Wall for Varjak; *what can we tell about the emotional journey Varjak has undergone from what we have observed about his character along the way? Where have the high points and low points been for him? What do you think he will tell his family?*
- Encourage the children to retell the story so far orally and add to the graph of emotion created earlier plotting new events and emotions on the graphs.
- Once they have completed their graphs, tell the children that they are going to use them to tell the whole story orally from Varjak's point of view as if he were telling his family what has happened to him.

- After this, invite the children to write in role and to draw as Varjak as if he were telling his family his adventures so far, but without revealing what he knows about the 'Way'. Once the children have prepared their writing, they could then read these aloud to one another again, perhaps in front of small groups in role as the family members listening to the story. They can then respond with questions to move the story on or to clarify key information and events.
- Following this, the children could go back to their writing and add in further detail based on the audience's response and questions they were asked, as well as having the opportunity to illustrate their writing in the style of Dave McKean.
- Finally, display these stories on the class Working Wall.

Session 24: Persuasive Writing

- Read aloud until the end of twenty-nine, pausing at 'He'd done it at last. He was a Mesopotamian Blue.' allowing time for children to share their responses, what they liked and disliked so far, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up. Consider the way in which Varjak is now able to defeat Julius and how his family see him in a new light, celebrating his conquest of his brother; *what did you notice about the way in which Varjak fought his brother? Do you think he put the teachings of Jalal to good use? Why do you think he remembered 'enough and no more'? What do you think of the rest of his family? Do you think their celebration of him will last? In what ways have they been fickle before?*
- Read the end of the chapter and read on until the end of chapter thirty, looking closely at the image on pages 212-213 of the Gentleman and the black cats which suggests the physical dominance of the man and the power of the cats.
- Consider the way in which Varjak has abandoned Holly and put her in danger; *why doesn't he listen to Holly? Why does he want his family to like him, even though they haven't looked for him or seemed to have worried about him? Have Varjak's actions shocked you? Do you think he is following the 'Way'? What would you add to Role on the Wall we have created for him now? Why do you think the chapter ends with the phrase 'sour milk'? What do you think he should do next?*
- You might also encourage the children to make personal connections with this moment in the text. *Have they ever made a decision they later knew was wrong? Why might you do this? Have they ever had to admit to being wrong about something?*
- At this point, ask the children to write a letter to Varjak persuading him that he should help Holly, save the other cats and not to worry about what his family think of him anymore.
- Give the children time and space to draft their letter, whilst you as the teacher-writer draft your own alongside. This could be done with a focus group who may need support in getting going with their own writing.
- Once they have drafted, give them time to read their letter aloud to themselves, before sharing their draft with a response partner. Model this process with your own draft first and the children as your response partner.
- Ask them to listen to your letter, imagining that they are Varjak at this point in the story. *How does the letter make them feel? What does it make them think?* Ask them to respond to what that thought was that was effective in the letter and any parts that could be improved before Varjak reads it.

- Give time for the children to go through this process themselves, with their own response partner, making amendments as necessary. When they are happy with the content, move them on to polishing the letter ready for publication, checking spelling and punctuation.
- Provide the children with appropriate writing materials and notepaper to write up their letters, ready for Varjak.
- Display these prominently and give the chance for children to read and evaluate their own and others' work, looking at what made different letters effective. You could provide some questions to support them to respond to each other about their writing such as; *Was it written in the right voice? Not too formal or too informal? Was there a good introduction to explain who was writing to him and why? Did the writer empathise with Varjak's situation? Did they show they understood by drawing on examples of their own or of others? Did the writer offer sound advice that didn't sound too forceful or uncaring? Did the writer sign off appropriately at the end of the letter? Do you think Varjak will come to the right decision in the end?*

Before the next session read aloud chapter thirty-one in which Trust Yourself, the final skill is explained to Varjak and add to the display generated earlier with information from the text, definitions and annotations. Consider why Jalal tells Varjak that he needs to look inwards; *in what way does this relate to the events of the previous chapter? Why do you think this is described as the hardest skill of all? What do you think it means when Jalal says 'The only thing that counts is what you do'? What does Varjak need to do in your opinion?* Consider the way this chapter ends with the two cats looking at themselves in the water; *in what way does this show how Varjak must look inside himself? Why is it significant that both he and Jalal have amber and not green eyes?*

Session 25: Book Talk

- Read to the end of the novel, stop at different points, clarifying their understanding and allow for discussion around what the group like, dislike, any patterns that they notice or any questions that it brings up.
- Discuss children's responses to the ending of the book.
 - *What are the children's initial responses to the way the story ends?*
 - *Are they satisfied with the ending? Why? Why not?*
 - *Does it remind them of other stories they know?*
 - *What kind of story is this?*
 - *Do the children have any questions?*
 - *Does anything continue to puzzle them?*
 - *To which character do they relate to most? Why?*
 - *If you had to say what this story is about, what would you say?*
- Discuss how the children felt about the book compared to their original expectations:
 - *When you first saw this book, even before you read it, what kind of book did you think it was going to be?*
 - *What made you think this?*
 - *Now you've read it, is it as you expected?*
 - *Have you read other books like it? How is this one the same? How is it different?*
 - *If the writer asked you what could be improved in the book, how would you have made it better? [Alternatively] If you had written this book, how would you have made it better?*

- *Would you recommend this book to a friend?*
- *Would you read the next book in the series?*
- Discuss how the children felt about the book overall and their personal responses to the story:
 - *Has anything that happens in the book ever happened to you?*
 - *In what ways was it the same or different for you?*
 - *Which parts in the book seem to you to be most true to life?*
 - *Did the book make you think differently about your own similar experience?*
 - *When you were reading, did you ‘see’ the story happening in your imagination?*
 - *Which details –which passages- helped you ‘see’ it best?*
 - *Which passages stay in your mind most vividly?*
- Finally, discuss their responses to the illustrations:
 - *Which illustrations particularly stood out for you?*
 - *Which added further meaning or aided your understanding of the story?*
 - *Which provided viewpoint that you wouldn’t have had otherwise?*
 - *What did you notice about the relationship between the text and illustration?*
- You may want to encourage the children to illustrate and write about their favourite scenes in the book.
- This may also be a good opportunity to recommend further reading to the children so that they can continue to explore the themes of the book.

Sessions 26: Explanation Writing

- Explain that in this session you would like the children to summarise what they have learnt about ‘the way of Jalal’ and imagine that they are Varjak Paw who is going to teach Holly and Tam the skills.
- Begin by engaging the children in creative approaches by setting up imagined scenarios such as role-playing as Varjak showing the other cats how to use his new skills. This will strengthen the children’s understanding, possession of new language and depth of knowledge as well as their ability to write in role using their experience of adopting voice.
- Ensure the children draw on the Working Wall and the display that you have created throughout the sessions that explain the seven skills to support their role-play and then their writing.
- Once the children are ready to write a written version of their explanations, provide ideas for formats through looking at a wide variety of ways that information texts can be presented using words and pictures. Model the process of thinking about how to present and organise information and the style, language and formality of non-fiction writing through Shared Writing.
- Allow the children choice of form based on the sources on which they are drawing. If they want to incorporate moving image, it makes sense to present information through digital media. Children could look at a range of sources, making drawings and notes before deciding how to collate and lay out the information to share with their chosen audience.
- Ensure you also read aloud explanatory texts so that the children can hear, absorb and take on the tunes and voice in their own explanations and writing. Model how to write in a chosen form, including demonstrating the drafting process of shaping an explanatory text from notes and sentences to considering which organisation features will support the reader experience.

- Give plenty of time for the children to draft their writing before reading aloud to check for sense and meaning, editing for spelling and punctuation and then write up for presentation in their chosen format.
- Provide opportunity for the children to then share their explanations of how to use the Seven Skills of Jalal perhaps in a class assembly or sharing these with peers in another class.

Sessions 27: Drama and role-play, shared writing

In preparation for these writing sessions, ensure the children have ample opportunity to tune in to the appropriate voice and writing style through reading aloud a range of newspapers as well as giving time for independent reading and revisiting. If children have little or no experience of newspapers, it would be beneficial for the school to subscribe to a children’s newspaper such as First News as well as engaging them in current affairs programmes, such as BBC Newsround online or on television: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround> The Guardian’s Newswise project also (<https://www.theguardian.com/newswise>) provides excellent resources that support children to understand and engage with news; critically navigate news; and report news.

- Explain to the children that you are going to write a newspaper report about what has happened in the story, focused on ‘the vanishings’.
- Explain that in the next sessions the children are going to spend time working as journalists preparing and writing a special edition of a newspaper, about the vanishings.
- The class could then be split into groups with clear responsibilities to prepare different reports for the paper including:
 - Interviews with local people
 - An interview with Varjak
 - An interview with Holly and Tam
 - An interview with Varjak’s mother
 - An interview with Cludge
- Divide the class into journalists or news reporters and key witnesses taken from the central characters in the book.
- Give the class time to prepare in their different roles. The journalists will need time to prepare the questions that they will need to ask to establish the key facts about the incident. The key witnesses will need time to prepare their statements and consider their perspectives. Try to ensure that the class take on a range of characters that will allow for a range of quotes and opinions.
- During the session give the group time to go around interviewing the key witnesses in role as journalists. If possible set the witnesses up in different places around the school so that the class can really inhabit the different roles they have taken on.
- Come back together and share notes and feedback, the different quotes and stories that they have gathered. Those that have been working as key witnesses could have a copy of another child’s work or they could work with one of the ‘journalists’ to take their own notes after the session.

Sessions 28-29: Drafting

In these sessions the children will need time to draft their reports. You may want to allow the children to draft their writing initially without focusing on the genre features. This will allow the children to write without feeling constrained by the format of the genre. Then you can revisit the features that they will need to use in their writing in the editing and publishing process.

- Once the class have collected the quotes and information required, model writing the article, making explicit your thought process as a writer. For example, *asking what type of sentences do we want to use at the opening?* (Summarising the article but also hooking the reader in.)
- As you work through the article summarising what has happened, bring in other voices using quotes from the role-play. Use this as an opportunity to re-cap the use of indirect and direct speech. Ask the class to consider: *What will you quote directly and what will you summarise as indirect speech?*
- *How will you close the article, and does it reflect the original purpose you decided upon?*
- Allow time for the class to write their own articles in draft. In the next session give the groups time to re-draft their reports. Those not working with adult support could work with a response partner who supports the editing process by giving them time to read their work aloud.

Sessions 30: Newspaper Article Writing:

- Once the groups have completed a draft article, pair them up with their 'newspaper editor'.
- Prior to this, spend time considering what the editor will be looking for in the article.
- Ask the class to consider the following questions: *Does the article meet the purpose that was agreed upon? Does it communicate the event and the outcome clearly?*
- Ask each child to read their partner's work from an editor's point of view. They should have sufficient time to work together on each article, one at a time, rather than editing somebody else's work in isolation. If the class has not edited work before in this manner, it may need to be modelled for them.
- You may want to model authentic processes here and appoint sub-editors to write the headlines for another pupil's article based on what they have read.
- This would also be a good opportunity to consider the active and passive voice, as headlines commonly adopt the passive voice as a device to hook a reader in to wanting to find out more.
- Look at some examples the class will have gathered previously – *what do they notice? Why do they think the sub-editors don't write who did the action? What impact does this have? What would the difference be if this was re-written into the active voice? How could they use the passive voice in their headlines?* Explore some and model some examples.
- Now the class can write their own.
- Finally, the writing can be published. If they type their newspaper articles using a word processor or publishing program, the newspaper layout can easily be achieved. Alternatively, templates for newspaper articles can be provided. Remember that considerations of layout too early in the writing process can stifle rather than stimulate the content.
- Allow the children to also choose an image from the book or to draw their own image to accompany the article that is most pertinent and best sums up the events in their opinion, creating a caption to go alongside this.

- Allow more sessions if necessary to allow pupils sufficient time to respond adequately to each other's work, edit and improve their writing and produce their published articles.