

A trip to Friendship Forest

Animals are always a big draw for young people and what could be more exciting than magical animals that talk and inhabit their own secret world?! The Magical Animal Friends series is written by Daisy Meadows, the most borrowed children's author in the 2013/14 and creator of the ever popular Rainbow Magic series. The enchanting mix of friendship, magic and adventures into hidden lands will draw in pupils and start them on a reading journey that could lead anywhere.

The first book in the series introduces best friends Lily and Jess who are drawn together by their love of animals. Whilst helping out at Lily's parent's animal hospital over the summer they encounter a golden cat who leads them into the Friendship Forest. Here the animals can talk and live in their own houses, surrounded by beautiful trees and flowers. Lily and Jess meet the residents of the forest including the small rabbit Lucy Longwhiskers. However, Friendship Forest is in danger from the wicked witch Grizelda and her servants, the stinking Boggits, who she has tasked with destroying the magical Blossom Briar plant and driving the animals out of Friendship Forest. Lucy is snatched by the Boggits and it's up to Lily, Jess and their new friend Goldie to rescue her and save the forest from Grizelda.

The friends succeed with a little help from one of the forest's other residents, the old owl and inventor Mr Cleverfeather and one of his creations. However, the stage is set for further encounters with Grizelda and the Boggits and Lily and Jess vow to protect their new friends.

Join us on a trip into Friendship Forest, immersing your pupils in the world of Magic Animal Friends. We begin with book one, which sets the scene, introduces our characters and gives us the template for a plot pattern that we revisit in the subsequent books across the series. With a rich rainbow of reading and writing activities across the curriculum you can use the following activities as a whole unit or just dip in and out to encourage and to enthuse your pupils as they embark on our Spring Reading Adventure.

Going the extra mile to immerse pupils in experiential learning at the outset also has the knack of drawing in all types of learners. Animals are fascinating for young people, particularly the more magical and mythical ones. Why not explore some magical creatures such as unicorns and dragons? You could research some of the world's stranger animals which sometimes look like something out of science fiction <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/picturegalleries/6581422/Life-the-worlds-most-amazing-animals.html> Show pupils clips from the fantastic Planet Earth narrated by David Attenborough <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006mywy>, such as the bizarre creatures found in the depths of the ocean (episode 11 Ocean Deep) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0038vkm> or the striking birds of paradise in Papua New Guinea (episode 8 Jungles) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0036vcg> Closer to home you can talk about animals they know that can do amazing things such as guide dogs

that support blind people or birds that can talk. Check your school policy and see if you can organise some special animal visitors or a trip to a local farm or wildlife park.

Working towards our own magical adventure

There is much we can draw from the books, both in terms of literacy and across the curriculum, so working towards an overarching outcome, embellished and explored along the way through a myriad of enrichment activities, makes for a super unit of work. Each book follows a familiar plot pattern, which gives an easily replicated structure and allows pupils to use this structure while putting their imaginative efforts into exploring and creating their own exciting magical characters, settings and problems. Knowing from the outset that they will have the opportunity to write their own adventure means that all the activities immersing the children in the world of Friendship Forest can also be used to feed their imaginations and give a richness and purpose to their reading and writing.

The Power of a Map

Use the map of Friendship Forest to explore the forest as you start to read *Lucy Longwhiskers Gets Lost* so that pupils can begin to build a vivid picture of forest in their minds. Have any of the pupils been on a walk through a wood or forest either in the UK or overseas? Get them to share their experience – how did they feel to be amongst trees and plants and exploring a new place? Did they see any animals? Use clips from films such as *Brave*, *Into the Woods* or Disney's *Robin Hood* to capture the moment of entering a forest for the first time and record words and phrases to describe the excitement and trepidation, comparing their experience to that of Lily and Jess as they enter Friendship Forest for the first time. Take them through a guided visualisation using senses with closed eyes. What can they hear? The sound of birds overhead, wind rustling through the trees, animals scurrying in the undergrowth. What do they feel? The cool breeze of the wind, the warmth of the sun on their face, etc.

Continue to use the map to follow Lily and Jess' journey through Friendship Forest. If children recreate and illustrate their own map of the forest, as you progress through the series encourage them to annotate and add details and observations, mapping the animals they meet on the way and where they live. Story-mapping in this way helps pupils read a text more closely, looking for those smaller details and description whilst creating a vivid image of the setting and bringing the whole story alive. Add in time for illustration and artwork and the pupils will create treasured resources to take home and share with parents and carers.

Introduce to the children the idea of writing their own adventure story and, as you discover more about Friendship Forest and the animals that live there, challenge pupils to develop their own new stories with similar themes and structure.

Writing opportunities galore!

The series provides opportunities for a whole host of writing activities.

Poetry

*“Can you keep a secret? I thought you could!
Then I’ll tell you about an enchanted wood.
It lies through the door in the old oak tree,
Let’s go there now – just follow me!
We’ll find adventure that never ends,
And meet the Magic Animal Friends”*

The book starts with a poem by Goldie the Cat which invites the reader into her world. Immerse pupils in reading and writing poems with Friendship Forest as their theme. A wonderful starter to inspire writing would be the short BBC video with David Attenborough *What a Wonderful World* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/david-attenborough-what-a-wonderful-world/13983.html> 🎵 “I see trees of green, red roses too ...” 🎵

List poems

Other simple **list poems** help develop imagination and ideas for writing. Lily and Jess enter Friendship Forest through a small door in the trunk of a magical tree. Simple list poems where each line begins with “*I entered Friendship Forest...*” are fun short activities.

Jolly Pies

The old owl Mr Cleverfeather has a habit of mixing his words up, saying “jolly pies” instead of “apologise” and “wit and fell” instead of “fit and well”. The BFG also famously muddles his words up. Get pupils to look at some examples and then have them write their own mixed up words.

Inventions

Mr Cleverfeather is also famous for his inventions, including his secret path and leaf blaster which Lily and Jess use to defeat the Boggits. Ask pupils what inventions they would find useful in their every day lives. Is there a new gadget that Lily and Jess could take with them on their next trip to Friendship Forest to protect the animals there? Get pupils to draw and annotate their inventions.

Build Your Own Animal

Character descriptions of pupils’ own magic animal provide opportunities to develop vocabulary and think about key elements of character, both of appearance and personality. Create a description of Goldie together from what pupils discover from the first book, capturing all those small details; golden fur, eyes as green as spring leaves, a glittery scarf looped around her neck...not forgetting what kind of personality she has; brave and loyal.

Themes across the curriculum

With magic, animals and adventure at our finger tips, opportunities to explore science, art and geography abound.

Science

Friendship Forest provides the perfect opportunity for further study of trees and plants. Identify what trees you have growing in or around the schools grounds and give pupils the opportunity to explore these close up using magnifying glasses. Get them to draw and label diagrams of what they have discovered. If possible provide students the opportunity to grow their own plants which they can observe and measure over time. What do plants need to grow successfully?

Art

Have a look at some famous works of art featuring animals

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2014/jun/27/top-10-animal-portraits-in-art> Ask students which pictures they prefer and why and then get them

to draw or paint their favourite animal in the same style.

Explore some of the incredible photographs in the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit/wpy/gallery/2015/index.html> What story is the photographer trying to tell about the animals or landscapes they have chosen to capture? If you have the equipment you could hold your own exhibition of photographs taken by the students.

Geography

This is an ideal moment to explore some of the great forests of the world and the animals that live there. Compare the rainforests of the tropics with the seasonal forests of the UK. Planet Earth provides some great footage of each. What types of animals can you find in each habitat and how are they adapted to live there?

History

Research the role of animals in ancient myths and legends such as their place in Norse mythology or the legendary creatures in Greek mythology. With the centenary of the Battle of the Somme approaching you could explore the role of horses in World War One and other great battles.

Food technology

At the end of Lucy Longwhiskers Gets Lost, Lily and Jess celebrate defeating Grizelda alongside the other animals with a feast prepared by Mr and Mrs Longwhiskers. At the end of the competition why not have a celebratory picnic with food prepared together in class or brought in by the children. The food could have an animal theme – see

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/rachelysanders/easy-adorable-animal-snacks-to-make-with-kids#.cdL3V15W0> for some simple, fun ideas.

With their trip to Friendship Forest complete, pupils should be bursting with ideas, racing through the books and developing as readers and writers with every step. Their own animal adventures and forest maps will hopefully be something they remember with pride and excitement, and there are many other animals and adventures awaiting them in the world of Magic Animal Friends.

