Make a friend for life in

ALFIE

Teaching Notes by Prue Goodwin

Shirley Hughes
Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the wonderful world of Alfie!

No doubt many of you reading this will be very familiar with Shirley Hughes’s wonderful Alfie stories. You may have been reading them to your classes (and your own children) for years, or you may remember them from your own childhood. Alfie has been around for well over twenty years. If this is your first encounter with Alfie, you are in for a real treat.

Shirley Hughes is the doyenne of children’s books; her work is respected, admired and loved by generations of children. This is not surprising to any adults who have shared an Alfie story with children – especially parents, teachers and librarians; it is impossible not to get drawn into the lives of the boy and his family. Both the stories and the pictures are close to the hearts and experiences of little children and their ‘grown-ups’; the writing is impeccable, stories engaging and images beautifully observed. In other words, in or out of the classroom, these are the sort of books that speak directly to children, giving them early experiences of ‘finding themselves’ in literature; a first step towards becoming genuine readers.

It would be difficult to find a set of books which could be of more support to anyone involved in teaching or caring for young children. Although I know you will have lots of great ideas of your own, I hope you find these suggestions helpful as a starting point to make the most of the opportunities for learning. Each suggestion can be linked to statements from the EYFS document — but remember, Alfie books are primarily to be enjoyed; they should never be treated as functional teaching resources. It pleases me to think of the delight and learning that the children in your care will experience when you share these beautiful books with them.

Good luck and enjoy reading!

Prue Goodwin
The World of Alfie

Alfie lives in a loving family, with an ordinary homelife, surrounded by friends and places that he knows well. Many young children will recognise the people and events that are part of Alfie’s world, but every family is different in some way. It is true that not all children are as lucky as Alfie and his little sister Annie Rose, but sharing the stories will offer comfort for every child to know that such a world exists. The books provide opportunities to talk about the differences and similarities in ordinary households. All sorts of important aspects of life can be considered:

- families – mums, dads, sisters, brothers, grandparents and all the other relatives
- friends and neighbours – next door, across the street, in the community, at nursery school
- other people we meet – babysitters, window cleaners, milkmen, shop assistants, teachers

We soon get to recognise bad boy Bernard, shy Min and all the MacNally family. We see Annie Rose grow from being a baby in a buggy to being a toddler having her own adventures. Each story is set at a particular time of year or concentrates on a special event. There are two birthday parties (Bernard’s and Mr MacNally’s), a Harvest Fair (autumn) and burst pipes (winter). Within these seven stories, we can discover other less obvious parts of Alfie’s world; for example, his toys, including his favourite – Flumbo the elephant – who is with him throughout the series. We can also see Alfie gradually getting older, more confident and ready to start school. Not bad after twenty-eight years!

Adults enjoy Alfie books, too!

Remember to enjoy the Alfie books at your own level. Anyone who spends time with young children will appreciate the quality of Shirley Hughes’s depiction of them. She is able to capture in her drawings the smallest gestures of body language or nuances of emotion in a little child’s face. Take, for example, the book Alfie Gives a Hand. In the picture of Alfie having his face washed, look at the placing of the fingers and toes. As he waits on the stairs, Alfie’s whole body – facial expression, thumb in mouth, hugging his old blanket tightly – is a perfect depiction of party anxiety. Every book has these visual gems. (Perhaps they should be textbooks for anyone going into professional roles with small children.) It is fun to ask what has changed over the twenty-eight years since Alfie’s world was first created. Looking at the pictures it seems that homes, playgrounds, parks and schools are much the same. Teenagers still do homework in front of the TV and little boys like Bernard still get over-excited at their birthday parties.

Sharing Alfie’s World

For every book:

1. First share the whole book with the children with little or no comment on the story and pictures, letting the children wallow in the pleasure of the experience.

2. After the first read-through ask questions about the children’s immediate personal responses to the book: ‘Did you enjoy that story?’ ‘Tell your friend the bits you liked best.’ Be sensitive if talking about families or emotional events.

3. Share the story again, this time lingering to look closely at the pictures. Let the children tell you what they see and how the story relates to their lives. Ask open-ended questions.

4. When the children are really absorbed in the book, you can start to direct the discussion towards specific learning intentions. Retelling the story through role-play, puppets and toys and creating pictures in any form are all excellent ways of responding to books.
Alfie Gets in First
This book is ideal for EYFS requirement to ‘encourage children to show interest in illustrations and print in books’.

Main themes
Introducing Alfie, solving a problem

Look out for …
the perfect placing of the front door between the inside and outside.

Suggestions for initial discussion
Alfie Gets in First is the first book in which we meet Alfie, his mum and his little sister, Annie Rose. Alfie runs across the opening page in a race to get home first – and he does. Then what happens? Oh dear, Alfie has locked his mum out and himself inside. Trying to solve the problem involves all sorts of different people and readers can gradually build a picture of Alfie’s world – the street, the neighbours and the folk who work nearby. Share this story for the sheer pleasure it brings. Let the children make comments and point out that, despite all the adults, it is Alfie himself who works it out in the end.

Response activities
• List all the people who try to help Alfie’s mum to get into the house.

• Look at all the pictures of Alfie from when he runs inside to when he opens the door. Sometimes he is smiling, sometimes crying. For each picture look at his face and describe how Alfie feels. Can you see him looking:
  - happy, cheerful?
  - worried, anxious?
  - miserable, unhappy?
  - thoughtful, busy?
  - pleased, proud?

• Alfie’s front door has a lock with a key: some doors do not. How else can a door be locked?

• Collect a bunch of different types of keys:
  - look at the shapes
  - draw around them to make a pattern
  - sort them into a line starting with the smallest and getting bigger
  - count how many there are
Alfie’s Feet
This book is ideal for EYFS requirement to ‘encourage children to add to their first-hand experience of the world through the use of books’.

Main themes
Buying new boots, left and right, enjoying wet weather

Look out for…
the scene in the kitchen (so many things to spot).

Suggestions for initial discussion
Getting new shoes is a very important event, especially when you are very young. Alfie is getting new boots because his feet got wet when he went splashing in puddles. This story is all about feet so it is an ideal opportunity to talk about everything to do with them. What do they look like? Annie Rose has feet that are small, pink and soft. What do we wear on our feet? Socks and shoes.

Response activities
• Make a display of different sorts of footwear – shoes, trainers, sandals, football boots, slippers, wellies, flip-flops etc.

• Shoes and socks come in pairs – two at a time – one for a left foot and one for a right foot. Can you count in twos? Make a washing line with pairs of socks hanging on it.

  • List and try ways of moving on your feet - walk, run, tiptoe, stamp, shuffle, skip etc.

• If it is wet, wrap up warm and dry, put on some boots and go outside to splash in puddles.

• Alfie’s mum paints an L and an R on his new boots. Do you know which foot is your left foot and which your right foot? Work out some ways to remember left and right.

• Can you name all the different parts of your foot – toe, heel, sole etc. Learn and say the rhyme ‘This Little Piggy’.
Alfie Gives a Hand
This book is ideal for EYFS requirement to ‘provide stories and pictures which allow children to experience and talk about how characters feel’.

Main themes
Going to a party, being kind and thoughtful

Look out for...
all Alfie’s little friends who we are meeting for the first time.

Suggestions for initial discussion
Bernard is having a party. Many people are nervous about going to parties - not just children. Have any of the children been to a party without their mums? What was it like? This story tells us about Alfie’s first party without his mum. How can we tell that he is a bit worried? The children all behave very differently - Alfie is quite shy. Min is unhappy and Bernard is being rather silly. Ask the children why they think Bernard is being so naughty.

Response activities
• At the beginning of the book Alfie is getting ready for a party. It is very exciting. He gets ready by:
  o washing his face
  o brushing his hair
  o putting on smart clothes
  o wrapping a present

Can you do actions for all of these things?

• Everyone enjoyed ‘Ring-a-ring-o’-roses’ at Bernard’s party. Play ‘Ring-a-ring-o’-roses’ with your friends. What other games are played at parties?

• What things do you like to eat and drink at parties? Draw and write your list of food and drinks for a party.

• Make a card to say thank you for a party. You can decorate it with your crayons or paints.
An Evening at Alfie’s
This book is ideal for EYFS requirement to ‘help children to identify the main events in a story and to enact stories as the basis for further imaginative play’.

Main themes
Having a babysitter, coping with a minor disaster, good neighbours

Look out for . . .
Alfie’s toy Noah’s Ark.

Suggestions for initial discussion
There is so much to talk about in this story that you may need to decide which theme to concentrate on. Some ideas for discussion include:

- when parents go out and having babysitters
- plumbing systems, especially the pipes in the loft
- good neighbours
- how Alfie enjoyed himself and why Annie Rose did not

Discuss what Maureen does when she babysits Alfie and Annie Rose. Let the children tell of their own experiences of having babysitters, household disasters or good neighbours.

Response activities
- Tell or read the story of ‘Noah’s Ark’. Get out toy animals to line them up two by two. Count in twos. Learn the song ‘One More River’ (available on the Internet).
- What is plumbing? Where are the pipes in a building? Have a discovery walk around the building to see if you can find different sorts of plumbing.
- Asking the question ‘Why do pipes burst in the winter?’ could lead to some interesting science work.
Suggestions for initial discussion

Despite the cheerful title, this is perhaps the saddest of all the Alfie books. It tells of the death of a beloved pet – not Alfie’s cat, but Smokey who belonged to Alfie’s neighbours, the MacNallys. This tale provides a helpful way to introduce the idea of coming to terms with loss. However, the main theme is caring about someone else’s feelings - discovering empathy and sympathy. Obviously the topic of death must be handled very sensitively, but literature has always offered a secure way to tackle uncomfortable issues. If appropriate, take the opportunity to talk about how, in different ways, we all:

- feel grief and unhappiness
- have rituals to help us say goodbye
- have ways to remember loved ones
- offer help and comfort to each other

Another theme in this story is new life, hope and springtime. This is represented by the new kitten, which cheers everyone up – especially Bob MacNally – while they all still have happy memories of old Smokey.

Response activities

- Alfie suggests a party for Mr MacNally’s birthday. They all keep it a secret so that it will be a surprise. How many surprises are there on Bob MacNally’s birthday?
  - a cake?
  - presents?
  - a birthday tea?
  - balloons?
  - a very special present in a basket?

- The story takes place in the spring. Look out for signs of spring in the pictures. Make a cheerful springtime picture.

- Can you sing a special birthday song? Use toys to enact the party scene when everyone waited in the dark, then sang ‘Happy Birthday to You’.

Alfie and the Birthday Surprise

This book is ideal for EYFS requirement to ‘provide stories and pictures which allow children to experience and talk about how characters feel’.

Main themes

The death of a pet, being sympathetic and kind

Look out for . . .

the way each character reacts to the events – both sad and happy.
Alfie Wins a Prize

This book is ideal for EYFS requirement to ‘encourage children to add to their firsthand experience of the world through the use of books’.

Main themes

Entering a competition, winning and losing

Look out for...

an illustration of the illustrator – a prize is presented to Alfie by Shirley Hughes herself!

Suggestions for initial discussion

This book continues Alfie’s experiences in the wider world. This time the family is going to visit the Big School for a Harvest Fair. Could this trip be intended to help prepare Alfie for school? The story introduces the complicated subject of entering a competition. Children may not have been involved in competitions, so you may need to discuss and explain: what a competition is; what it means to be a winner or a loser; and, what prizes are - especially consolation prizes. Also discuss why some children find competitions difficult when they don’t get what they want, like Bernard being mean about the prizes and Louise not being happy with the prize she wins.

Response activities

• Make a list of all the things happening at the Harvest Fair (e.g. guessing the weight of the cake, display of fruit and vegetables).

• How many different sorts of pets can you find at the Pet Show? Can you see:

  - a rabbit?
  - dogs?
  - a hamster?
  - a tortoise?
  - a fish?

Does anyone have a pet at home?

• What did Alfie have to do to take part in a competition? Have a painting competition with your friends. What will you need to paint a picture? Who will be the judges? Who will present the prizes?

• Look at all the paintings on display. Which one would you choose as winner of the competition? Which prize from the story would you choose?
**Alfie and the Big Boys**

This book is ideal for EYFS requirement to ‘use language as a powerful means of widening contacts, sharing feelings, experiences or thoughts’.

**Main themes**
Growing up, moving on, keeping old friends, and making new ones

**Look out for...**
all the children that have featured in Alfie’s life – Bernard, Min, Sara and Sam.

**Suggestions for initial discussion**

This is an ideal story to share with children before they leave EYFS to go to Big School. Alfie’s world is expanding and he is learning more about other people’s worlds as well as his own. When at school, Alfie loves to watch the big boys engaged in their rough-and-tumble games, but he is a bit intimidated by the leader of the boys, lan Barger. But lan isn’t as big and boisterous as he seems, as Alfie realises when he comes across lan in a completely different situation. Ask the children if they are trusted to play while ‘grown-ups’ are away for a short while? Do they know who to trust if they are worried?

**Response activities**

- What sorts of games do you like to play on the playground? How many games can you spot being played on the school playgrounds in the book? Can you see:
  - football?
  - skipping?
  - cartwheels?

- List all the things that the children do in Nursery School. Do you do them in your school?

- Can you remember another Alfie story where he is a good and caring friend to someone who is upset? Find Alfie Gives a Hand on the bookshelf and reread that story.

- Sometimes lan likes to play rough games and sometimes he like playing quietly. Look at the picture of when lan helps Annie Rose with her toys. Do you recognise any toys? Can you see Flumbo the elephant? Can you see the prize that Alfie won for his painting at the Harvest Fair (read Alfie Wins a Prize)?

- Look at the Brueghel’s painting: ‘Children’s Games’ (put the title into a Google Image Search). If everyone does a picture of a game, you can cut them out and stick them together to make one big picture of the games played on the playground in your school.
Using books for teaching and learning

All teachers who value good books know that texts to support teaching can sometimes be misused. Remember, even the liveliest writing can be made uninspiring by a boring teacher. It is a good idea to have a few guiding principles about sharing books with children.

1. Good picture books are first and foremost to be enjoyed.
   Reading is about pleasure. Teachers should always share the whole book with children, exploring the pictures and relishing the language.

2. Each book is a work of literature in its own right.
   They happen to be superb teaching resources, but each Alfie book should be treated as a valuable literary and artistic experience.

3. Any learning should focus on children’s curiosity about, engagement with and enthusiasm for the books.
   There is so much you can do for any book – retelling, role-play, artwork etc. – but children will not gain anything from being made to respond. Offer activities which invite response and let the children decide what they will do.

4. Children should be encouraged to behave like readers.
   Children will want to return to gaze at the pictures and talk about their pleasure in the story just as any reader would.

Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

The stories about Alfie are ideal to support good practice in early years settings. All the ideas suggested here are directly relevant to the Practice Guidance for EYFS.

Every time a book is shared with children there are opportunities to observe whether they are ‘showing interest in illustrations and print in books’ or ‘listening to stories with increasing attention and recall’.

Just by talking about each story, the adults working with children will be ‘listening to children and taking account of what they say’. In addition to discussion there are many ways in which EYFS professionals can:

- encourage children to use the stories they hear in play.
- provide stories and pictures which allow children to experience and talk about how characters feel.
- encourage children to add to their firsthand experience of the world through the use of books.
- help children to identify the main events in a story and to enact stories as the basis for further imaginative play.
Shirley Hughes...

is one of the most highly-respected children's authors and illustrators working today. She has written over fifty books, including Dogger and the Alfie series, and illustrated many more by other writers. She has been published across the world and generations of children have grown up enthralled and comforted by her work.

Shirley was born in West Kirby, near Liverpool, and studied fashion and dress design at Liverpool Art School, before continuing her studies at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford. She then embarked on a career as a freelance illustrator in London, where she still lives today. She illustrated other writers' work, including Noel Streatfeild, Alison Uttley, Ian Seraillier, Margaret Mahy and notably Dorothy Edwards's My Naughty Little Sister series.

Shirley began to write and draw her own picture books when her children were young. Her first book - Lucy and Tom's Day - was published in 1960, and she has continued to delight and innovate right up to the present day, with wordless picture books and strip cartoons among others, but always with her characteristic attention to detail and effortless evocation of the everyday life and concerns of small children.

Shirley Hughes has won the Other Award, the Eleanor Farjeon Award, and the Kate Greenaway Medal for Illustration twice, for Dogger in 1977 and for Ella's Big Chance in 2003. In 2007 Dogger was voted the public's favourite Greenaway winner of all time. Shirley received an OBE in 1999 for services to Children's Literature.

Prue Goodwin...

taught in primary and middle schools for over twenty years and was then an advisory teacher for language development before taking up a post as lecturer at the University of Reading. She went part-time at the University in 2002 in order to work freelance. Her freelance work includes running courses, speaking at conferences, acting as a consultant to publishers of children's books and researching literacy development in schools. Prue regularly returns to the classroom to introduce children to a range of literature and to encourage wide, voracious reading. She is the Director of INSET, Reading and Language Information Centre, the University of Reading.

Other books about Alfie and Annie Rose:

* Rhymes for Annie Rose
* Annie Rose is my Little Sister
* The Big Alfie and Annie Rose Storybook
* The Big Alfie Out of Doors Storybook
* Alfie's World
* Alfie Weather

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