



Oxford Level 8

The Urgent Message

Written by Paul Shipton and illustrated by Nick Schon, based on the original characters created by Roderick Hunt and Alex Brychta.
Teaching notes written by Liz Miles.

Text type: fiction

Topic: communications through the ages

Synopsis

The children receive a postcard from their uncle in Australia. As Biff is adding the postcard to her collection, the magic key begins to glow. It takes them back in time to a period when messengers and carrier pigeons were the main methods of communication. The children help to deliver a message to Queen Hilda from her brother, the King. The Queen tears up the letter and then misreads it. Just as she is sending a rude reply to her brother, Nadim finds a missing line from the letter. Queen Hilda changes her response before sending the message to her brother via carrier pigeon. The children return home to find Uncle Max trying to video call them, but they discover that modern methods of communication aren't always reliable either.

There is a topic-linked non-fiction book to partner this title, which is called *Smoke Signals to Smartphones*.

Group/Guided reading

Introducing the story

- ➔ Look at the cover and read the title together. Ask: *What does 'urgent' mean?* Ask the children to share examples of a time when they have felt that something is urgent or been told that something is urgent.
- ➔ Say: *If you had an urgent message for someone, how would you deliver it?* Encourage the children to talk about different methods of communication that we use today.
- ➔ (*Predicting*) Read the blurb together and ask the children to make predictions about who the message to the Queen could be from.

Vocabulary check

- ➔ As they read, encourage the children to sound out and blend new words, for example *a-dd-r-e-ss*, *c-a-st-le*.
- ➔ This book includes some more challenging words that do not conform to phonics teaching, as well as subject-specific vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to children. Explain to the children that these words may be challenging but they are important for the story. Read these words for the children if necessary, to help build familiarity before they read the story independently.

Australia building opinion furiously pigeon

Reading the story

- ➔ Ask the children to read the story aloud and help where necessary. Praise and encourage them as they read. Where necessary, encourage children to re-read sentences to focus on meaning.
- ➔ *(Predicting)* After reading p5, say: *I wonder if the key will take the children to Australia.* Encourage the children to make predictions.
- ➔ After reading p9, say: *I wonder what a royal messenger is. Why couldn't the King put the letter in the post?* Ask the children to talk about the way the letter is being delivered.
- ➔ On p12, ask: *When do you think this story is set? What clues tell you this?*
- ➔ On p14–15, point out the speech verbs: 'demanded', 'cried'. Encourage the children to read the Queen's speech with intonation and expression.
- ➔ *(Questioning)* After reading p16, ask the children to think of some questions that Biff, Chip and Nadim could ask Queen Hilda at this point in the story. Prompt them by saying: *I wonder why Queen Hilda ripped up the letter.*
- ➔ *(Predicting)* After reading p21, say: *I wonder what is on the piece of paper.* Encourage the children to make predictions about what the piece of paper says.
- ➔ On p29, ask: *Why does Dad say that he thinks it would just be easier to use carrier pigeons? Do you agree? Why?*

Returning to the story

- ➔ *(Clarifying)* Re-read p12–13 and ask: *How do you think the children feel when the guard tells them to give the letter to the Queen themselves?*
- ➔ *(Questioning)* Ask the children to think of some questions they would like to ask Biff, Chip and Nadim about what it was like inside the castle.
- ➔ *(Summarizing)* Ask the children to talk about the characters in the story. Ask: *Which character did you like the most? Which did you like the least? Why?*
- ➔ *(Clarifying)* Turn back to the front cover and discuss the title. Ask: *What was the 'urgent message'? Why was it urgent? Do you think royal messengers and carrier pigeons are good ways to deliver urgent messages? Why?*
- ➔ Look together at the story map on p30 and ask children to explain what is happening in each picture. Ask the children to talk about how the characters might be feeling in each picture.

Independent reading

- ➔ Introduce the story as in the Introducing the story section above.
- ➔ Encourage the children to read the story as independently as possible. Remember to give them lots of encouragement and praise.
- ➔ As they read, encourage the children to sound out and blend new words, for example *n-e-r-v-ou-s*, *i-n-v-i-t-a-t-i-on*.
- ➔ This book also contains a number of more challenging words, which children may need more support with at this stage, but which enrich the story. You can look together at the inside front cover for a list of challenging words. Read them together and talk about what each word means.
- ➔ Remind children to use the pictures to support them when reading the text.
- ➔ For suggestions of questions to ask the children after they have read the story to check comprehension, please refer to the Look Back, Explorers page in the book.

Speaking, listening and drama activities

- ➔ Ask the children to work in pairs to prepare and act out a new scene from the story, in which the Queen and King meet at the party.
- ➔ Ask them to discuss what might happen. Ask: *Will they get on? Will the Queen explain her mistake? What might they talk about? Will they be polite or rude to each other?* Remind the children what they already know about their relationship, i.e. they are always falling out.
- ➔ Give the children time to practise their role plays and remind them to use lots of expression and intonation in their speech.
- ➔ Invite pairs to perform their role plays to the rest of the group. The rest of the group can then comment on whether they think the characters are as they had imagined them.

Writing activities

- ➔ Challenge the children to write two sentences of dialogue between the King and Queen.
- ➔ Begin by modelling this on the board, working with the children to write one sentence. Tell them they should include instructions on how the words are said. Discuss possibilities from the book, for example crossly, wearily, politely.
- ➔ Then ask the children to write their own pieces of dialogue.
- ➔ Ask the children to swap their work with a partner to check that each other's sentences make sense, and that the spelling and punctuation are correct.

Cross-curricular activity

History

- ➔ Ask the children to use books and child-friendly sites on the Internet to research other methods of communication that were used in the past. Some are discussed in the non-fiction book that partners this title, *Smoke Signals to Smartphones*.

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Curriculum links and assessment

Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale

- Can apply phonic skills and knowledge to recognize an increasing number of complex words. (READ) (ORCS Standard 3, 3)
- Can make predictions about a text using a range of clues, e.g. experience of books written by the same author, experience of books already read on a similar theme, or book title, cover and blurb. (D) (ORCS Standard 3, 7)
- Can provide simple explanations about events or information, e.g. why a character acted in a particular way. (D) (ORCS Standard 3, 9)
- Can apply their phonic knowledge automatically enabling an increasing capacity to attend to meaning rather than decoding. (READ) (ORCS Standard 3, 12)

ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: English Programme of Study, Year 2

	National Curriculum objectives	Book-related assessment pointers
Spoken language	participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates (SpokLang.9) select and use appropriate registers for effective communication (SpokLang.12)	Check the children use expression and intonation in their role plays, and consider how the King and Queen might speak to each other.
Reading: Word reading	read aloud books closely matched to their improving phonic knowledge, sounding out unfamiliar words accurately, automatically and without undue hesitation (Y2 ReadWord.7)	Check the children blend the sounds in words to read any new or unfamiliar words, e.g. address, castle, nervous, invitation.
Reading: Comprehension	making inferences on the basis of what is being said and done (Y2 ReadComp.2iii)	Check the children can make suggestions about what a royal messenger is and why the King couldn't put the letter in the post.
Writing: Composition	proof-reading to check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation (e.g. ends of sentences punctuated correctly) (Y2 WritComp.3iii)	Check the children proofread each other's sentences to check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes, First Level

	Experiences and outcomes	Book-related assessment pointers
Listening and talking	When I engage with others, I know when and how to listen, when to talk, how much to say, when to ask questions and how to respond with respect. (LIT 1-02a) I am exploring how pace, gesture, expression, emphasis and choice of words are used to engage others, and I can use what I learn. (ENG 1-03a)	Check the children use expression and intonation in their role plays, and consider how the King and Queen might speak to each other.
Reading	I can use my knowledge of sight vocabulary, phonics, context clues, punctuation and grammar to read with understanding and expression. (ENG 1-12a)	Check the children blend the sounds in words to read any new or unfamiliar words, e.g. address, castle, nervous, invitation.
	To show my understanding, I can respond to different kinds of questions and other close reading tasks and I am learning to create some questions of my own. (ENG 1-17a)	Check the children can make suggestions about what a royal messenger is and why the King couldn't put the letter in the post.
Writing	Throughout the writing process, I can check that my writing makes sense. (LIT 1-23a)	Check the children proofread each other's sentences to check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

WALES Curriculum for Wales: Foundation Phase Framework, Year 2

	Framework objectives	Book-related assessment pointers
Oracy	adopt a specific role, using appropriate language in structured situations (Y2_OracSpea.7)	Check the children use expression and intonation in their role plays, and consider how the King and Queen might speak to each other.
Reading	apply the following reading strategies with increasing frequency to a range of familiar and unfamiliar texts: - phonic strategies (Y2_ReadStrat.4i)	Check the children blend the sounds in words to read any new or unfamiliar words, e.g. address, castle, nervous, invitation.
	show understanding and express opinions about language, information and events in texts (Y2_ReadResp.2)	Check the children can make suggestions about what a royal messenger is and why the King couldn't put the letter in the post.
Writing	re-read and improve their writing to ensure that it makes sense (Y2_WritMean.5)	Check the children proofread each other's sentences to check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

NORTHERN IRELAND Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 1/2

	Levels of progression	Book-related assessment pointers
Talking and listening	follow discussions, make contributions and observe conventions of conversation (L2_com_talk.2i)	Check the children use expression and intonation in their role plays, and consider how the King and Queen might speak to each other.
Reading	use a range of reading strategies (L2_com_read.2)	Check the children blend the sounds in words to read any new or unfamiliar words, e.g. address, castle, nervous, invitation.
	express opinions and make predictions (L2_com_read.5ii)	Check the children can make suggestions about what a royal messenger is and why the King couldn't put the letter in the post.
Writing	use basic punctuation (L2_com_write.4i)	Check the children proofread each other's sentences to check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL Primary English Curriculum Framework: Level 2

	Framework objectives	Book-related assessment pointers
Speaking and listening	Extend experiences and ideas through role-play. (2SL9)	Check the children use expression and intonation in their role plays, and consider how the King and Queen might speak to each other.
Reading	Use phonics as the main method of tackling unfamiliar words. (2R02)	Check the children blend the sounds in words to read any new or unfamiliar words, e.g. address, castle, nervous, invitation.
	Make simple inferences from the words on the page, e.g. about feelings. (2Ri3)	Check the children can make suggestions about what a royal messenger is and why the King couldn't put the letter in the post.
Writing	Write in clear sentences using capital letters, full stops and question marks. (2Wp1)	Check the children proofread each other's sentences to check for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.