

The Butterfly Lion

by Michael Morpurgo

1996 HarperCollins Children's books (128 pages)

NOVEL STUDY

The Butterfly Lion, by Michael Morpurgo

SUMMARY

This is truly a heart-warming tale of friendship, loyalty, overcoming adversities and perseverance. The story is based on the friendship between Bertie and his rescued orphan white lion cub from the African veld. Despite, Bertie being sent to a boarding school in England and the lion sold to a circus this friendship is one that will never be forgotten.

The book has 14 chapters, each between 4- 12 pages long.

CHARACTER REVIEW

Michael (The Runaway Boy)

Millie (The Old Lady)

Bertie Andrews

Bertie's mother

Bertie's father

The Orphan Lion Cub/ The Butterfly Lion/ The White Prince

The Frenchman – Monsieur Merlot

SEL THEMES IN THE BOOK

- Friendship
- Perseverance and Positive Mindset.
- Problem Solving
- Feelings review: lonely, sad, disappointed, anger, depressed, worried, scared/afraid, proud and curious.



STUDY QUESTIONS

Before Reading

- **Look carefully at the book cover, what do you think this book is going to be about? Why do you think the title is 'The Butterfly Lion'? Where might the story be set?**

Chapter 1 'Chilblains and Semolina Pudding'

- **The chapter opens by talking about the Butterfly Lion. Illustrate and write a few lines about how you imagine the Butterfly Lion.** (*This could be linked to the saying, 'don't judge a book by its cover' and the need to know all the information before you can comment – remembering Mrs McGregor's Pie Lesson from P4 – Look back on the pupils' responses from this when you have read the book.*)
- **The narrator is in boarding school in Wiltshire, in England. Boarding school is very different to the school you go to. Write about how different boarding school in England is to your own school experience.** (*Pupils own responses – draw out how perhaps the feelings may be different or similar to the runaway boy about school life*)
- **Give two reasons why the narrator is miserable at this time.** (*He is feeling homesick and is being bullied at school*)
- **Do you think the narrator is being brave in this chapter? Why? What other words would you use to describe him?** (*Nervous, scared, worried, hurt, embarrassed, humiliated...*)
- **The narrator is very scared of a boy at school. What is his name? Find the sentence that shows how the narrator feels about this boy. What would you do if you were facing a bully? Write about it.** (*Basher Beaumont, 'I lived every waking moment of my life in dread of him.'* Using the Control Signals Poster/ Problem Solving Poster to discuss what the runaway boy could do.
- **What was worse than getting a canning across the back of the legs? Being back at school and experiencing school life and his bully.**

Activity

- **Art Activity** - Draw a picture of, what you think, the narrator looks like. Write down words around the outside of your drawing which describe how the narrator feels in the first chapter.
- **Media Activity** - Design a poster/produce a short video that would help others know what to do if they were getting bullied at school using the Control Signals Poster/ Problem Solving Poster.

Chapter 2 'Strange Meeting'

- **Name three things the narrator notices about the old lady when he first meets her in the rain and why did he not want to make eye contact with her?** (*She was an old lady, not much bigger than himself, piercing dark eyes and was wearing a straw hat. He perhaps felt embarrassed or guilty as he was on private property and ran away from school. He also was nervous of the old lady's dog as it was growling at him.*)
- **How do you think the old lady knows what the school is like? P13 'Run away from that school, did you? Well if its anything like it use to be, I can't say I blame you.'**
- **'I don't know why, but I never for one moment thought of running off. I often wondered later why I went with her so readily.'** In the story we know this was a safe choice however, would this be an ok choice to make? Discuss stranger danger and how the runaway boy recognised he made the choice without thinking. How could SEL strategies help in this situation?
- **Who do you think Bertie is? P15 Son, grandchild or another runaway.**
- **Describe how you think the narrator feels as he sits in Millie's kitchen.** (*Hungry, distracted, warm, curious etc...*)
- **How do we know the old woman felt lonely? She didn't want the boy to go but knew he had too so not to get in trouble and said 'nice to have the company'**



Activity

- **Positive Mindset Activity**
 “There’s always sun behind the clouds and the clouds do go in the end. Honestly, you’ve got to stick it out, see things through, do what’s got to be done, no matter what.” Thinking on the feelings of the boy why do you think the old lady said this? Can you think of other positive statements that would encourage you or your friends to persevere? Pupils’ own responses could be used to create a wall display in the classroom, bookmarks, quotes for around the school etc...

Chapter 3 ‘Timbavati’

- **The characters have changed as well as a different story unfolds. Who is the main character of this chapter?** *Bertie as told by the Old Lady narrating the story.*
- **How is Bertie’s mother described in this chapter? Why is Bertie’s mother often sad?** *She was often sick with Malaria, homesick for England and felt lonely.*
- **What is Bertie’s favourite place to look at? What does he see? Describe it:** *The Waterhole became Bertie’s whole world – He could feel the lions before he saw them as he was so in tuned to the life at the waterhole. (This could also make a lovely art activity to illustrate what Bertie saw from up in the tree.)*
- **What was Bertie’s favourite moment when watching the waterhole?** *When the Lions came.*
- **Bertie was never lonely as a child even when he didn’t have any friends, Why?** *He read books and he loved watching the animals at the waterhole. What do you do when you feel lonely? (Pupils’ own responses)*
- **Why does no-one believe Bertie when he tells them about the white lion cub?** *They didn’t believe it existed as they had never seen one.*
- **What happens to the lioness? How does Bertie feel after that? Think of some interesting words to describe his feelings.** *Devastated, sad, angry, repulsed ...*
- **Why does Bertie’s father shoot the lioness?** *The lioness had been killing the cows, the father’s livestock.*
- **Why do you think Bertie feels so bad for the lion cub? Perhaps find any similarities between the lion cub and Bertie.** *It would have to survive on its own like days when Bertie had to when his dad away and his mum unwell.*
- **What did Bertie plan to do if he saw the lion cub looking for his mother? Do you think it is a good idea? Explain why?** *He would rescue it and bring it into the compound.*
- **What do you think is going to happen in the next chapter?** *(Pupils’ own responses)*

Activity

- **Feelings Activity** – Make a list of all the feelings mentioned in chapter 3. Divide these feelings according to the person who felt them – Bertie, Bertie’s Mother and Bertie’s Father.
- **Conscience Alley or Hot Seat** Active drama techniques used to share the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the story on the Lioness being shot.

Chapter 4 ‘Bertie and the Lion’

- **What makes the hyenas run away?** *The gun shot makes them flee.*
- **Give one reason why Bertie’s father says he can’t keep the lion cub.** *He says that he will grow up and that keeping a grown lion would be dangerous.*
- **Give one reason why Bertie’s mother says they should keep the lion cub.** *She wanted to protect the lion cub and that her and Bertie needed the companionship of the lion.*
- **There is a change in Mum’s character in this chapter and we find out a bit more about her. What difference is there in her behaviour?** *She spoke up in a determined voice, she had run to Bertie and rescued him and the cub and she was the one to fire the rifle. She was also hardly ill*

and laughed more. **Why has this happened?** *Out of love for her son and protecting both Bertie and the cub. She could see how the cub would bring joy and company to them in the compound.*

- **Do you agree with Bertie, that lions don't need names?** *Pupil's responses which may split the room and so will be a good opportunity to look at different points of views and showing respect.*

Activity

- **Comic Strip – Bertie and the Lion** – Create a comic strip showing the adventures of Bertie and the Lion in the compound. Look at P 39 and 40 for ideas to the kinds of things that perhaps might happen e.g. ripping cushions, smashing crockery or jumping into the bath.

Chapter 5 'Running Free'

- **There were clues for Bertie that something was happening. Can you find these clues from the text?** *Bertie's mum had been sad, wouldn't look him in the eye and winced in trying to smile. Bertie's dad cleared his throat before speaking.*
- **Bertie's dad wants the Lion to go to the circus but Bertie wants to set him free. Can you give reasons for both and see both points of view? After, creating your list, explain which reason you think is best and why?** *Pupils' own responses.*
- **How do you think Bertie felt when the lion would not go away? Sad, desperate, upset, sick etc... What did he do? He shot over the lion's head to scare him in to leaving.**

Activity

- **Debate or use drama techniques (e.g. conscience alley)** Discuss why Bertie's family should / shouldn't sell the lion to the circus owner.
- **Literacy Diary Writing** - In this chapter Bertie finds out that he is going to be sent away to England to a boarding school. You need to put yourself in his shoes and imagine that you have just been told that you will be sent away to South Africa to boarding school. Think about how you will feel, what you are looking forward to, what you might miss, etc... Think very carefully about and write it in first person as a diary entry.

Chapter 6 'The Frenchman'

- **Why was Bertie's father angry? Which words and phrases show this?** *Blazing with fury, threatened to hit Bertie, he shouted at Bertie and sent him to his room.*
- **Which 3 clues in the text tell you that the lion was starving?** *Yowling pitifully, panting with hunger, so thin that you could see his rib cage.*
- **What did the Frenchman call the lion? Le Prince Blanc Why did he call him this?** *French for The White Prince – The White Lion Cub as the lion being known as the king in the animal kingdom.*
- **How did Bertie know that the lion couldn't survive in the wild? Why?** *He had come home hungry and to survive he would need to kill but this lion was tamed.*
- **What did Bertie promise the lion?** *He promised he would find him again.*
- **Why wasn't Bertie unhappy when he left Africa?** *Recall the solitude life Bertie had and without the Lion cub this would be worse, his mum was constantly sick and she often talked fondly of England and therefore Bertie may have an imagine this as being a better life.*
- **The narrator tells us Bertie had his mother with him, for the time being at least, What do you think this implies is going to happen? Bertie's mum will leave him to return to South Africa again when he is settled/ something happens to Bertie's mum.**

Activity

- **Literacy – Diary Entry:** Write a diary entry as if you are Bertie for the day the Frenchman comes to the house. Bertie will have lots of different emotions on that day. Try to explain how he is feeling and why.
- **Debate/ Persuasive Writing-** Find out about the use of animals in circuses and write a balanced argument showing the arguments for and against this practice.

Chapter 7 Strawbridge

- **In this chapter we find out how Bertie and the lady met. It says they get on well as they have a lot in common. Make a list to show everything they have in common.** *Only child, fathers rarely there, mum absent because of sickness for Bertie and Old Woman's mum died, lived in the confinement of home, didn't start school until later, enjoyed reading and playing outside.*
- **Why was Miss Tulips nickname "Nolips"?** *She had very thin lips and severe (strict).*
- **What two questions did the Oldy Lady as a girl ask Bertie? Who are you? What do you want? Do you remember reading these in an earlier chapter? The Old Lady asks Bertie these when she first met him in Chapter 2. Why do you think these questions are used again by the author?** *To show the similarity between Bertie and the runaway boy.*
- **Why does Bertie think his Mum died from a broken heart?** *Because she was happy with life in Africa when it was the Lion Cub and Bertie but in England she had neither.*

Activity

- **Literacy Friendship Recount Writing** - Think about one of your best friends. How did you meet them? Do you have anything in common with them? Write a paragraph about how you met and why you are friends.

Chapter 8 'And All's Well'

- **Do you think the title of this chapter matches the story? Give reasons for your answer.**
- **Why did she believe Bertie more and more as she got to know him?** *The story was always the same and so she believed in what he said as she got to know him and that he wasn't lying*
- **What is the old lady's real name?** *Millie*
- **Why does she think her walks are boring?** *They were boring to Millie due to not being as adventurous as the world at the waterhole that Bertie described. It was the same animals and no sense of danger from these.*
- **Why was she always careful with her kite?** *It was a gift made by Bertie so she treasured it and didn't want it be broken. If it got lost it would be like losing Bertie for ever.*
- **Why did they both hate the sound of bells? Bells cut his days into thin slices, what does this mean?** *Life was controlled by the bells when to get up, eat and sleep so no freedom just like they both experienced at home.*

Activity

- **Literacy - Letter Writing** – Write a letter as either Bertie or Millie to the other describing school life and the signs of the war approaching.

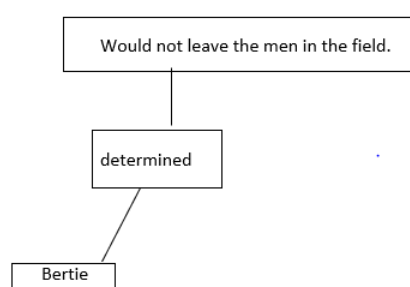
Chapter 9 'A Load of Codswallop'

- **Why is the narrator disappointed when he sees the kite Bertie has made?** *It wasn't as colourful and as flamboyant as he knew kites to be.*
- **Who is narrating in this chapter?** *The runaway boy and the old lady, Millie.*

- **What do you think the old lady means by ‘They’re the same, the lion out there on the hillside and the lion in the story’?** *Pupils’ own thoughts.*
- **Do you think Bertie’s attempt to save his friends in no-man’s-land is very brave?** *Yes but would everyone do this? Why? He risked his own life for an injured soldier. Why does Bertie not think that what he did was brave? One of his own men was lying out in no man’s land and he was bringing him in no matter what – He felt that it was his duty to look after his own just as he did the lion cub.*
- **Explain why you think both sides, German and British, stop to cheer Bertie on in the end?** *Both sides respected the risk Bertie took to saving his fallen men.*
- **How did Millie feel when she hadn’t heard from Bertie? What did she do with her uncomfortable feeling?** *Link to how Millie made a plan to help cope and change her uncomfortable feelings of worrying about Bertie and so decided to turn this into a positive in helping other wounded soldiers during the War times. Use the Control Signals Poster or the Problem-solving poster to identify the plan Millie had decided on.*

Activity

- **Character Profile** - Choose either Bertie or Millie and create a character profile for them. Use adjectives to describe them then give evidence from the books to explain why you have chosen this adjective.



Chapter 10 ‘The White Prince’

- **In this chapter Bertie goes through a number of different emotions. He feels excitement, frustration, fear, determination, joy and contentment. Choose 3 of these emotions and explain why/when he feels these. Give quotes from the book.** *Pupils’ own responses depending on feelings chosen.*
- **What reasons does Bertie give Millie for not writing to her for several years?** *Bertie thought each day at the front would be his last so he didn’t want Millie to be hurt when she would find out he’d been killed as that felt inevitable.*
- **Why did Monsieur Merlot have to close his circus?** *No one was interested in the circus for entertainment and the hay was taken for the army horses so the animals didn’t have enough food and he had to close the circus and kill off many of the animals.*
- **How do we know that the lion recognised Bertie?** *He moaned, yowled and rubbed himself up against Bertie.*
- **Describe and compare how Bertie and Millie felt when the White Prince rose to greet them?** *Bertie – Love, relief, excited, safe, emotional ... Millie- scared, frightened, curious, wary.*

Chapter 11 ‘A Miracle, A Miracle’

- **How does Monsieur Merlot react to meeting Bertie again?** *Disappointed, ashamed, sad, despondent...*
- **How did the Victoria Cross help to save the day for the White Prince?** *Bertie’s reward was highly recognised by people high up in the army and so he could persuade these officials to allow the lion to come back to England.*

Activity

- **Art/Media Design** - Britain is known to use the symbol of the lion to represent itself. Imagine you are designing a victory poster for after the War. Use the White Prince and Bertie in your poster.

What would you say about them? Why would they be good images to use? Think of a good slogan for your poster.

- **Literacy - Newspaper Headlines/Article Writing** - When Bertie, Millie and the lion return to England, newspaper headlines include 'The British Lion Comes Home'. Write down some other headlines that newspapers could have used for this event.

Chapter 12 'The Butterfly Lion'

- **Why could the lion not have escaped from Strawbridge even if he had wanted to?** *He was too old to jump the high walls surrounding the park.*
- **Where was The White Prince buried?** *At the bottom of the hill. Why does Bertie choose that spot to bury the lion?* *So that they can see where he is buried from the kitchen window and remember him.*
- **Why do the blue butterflies come to cover the chalk lion?** *The butterflies come to drink on the chalk face.*

Activity

- **Chalk Drawings** - What design would you carve into a chalk hillside, if you could? Why? Use chalk pastels to create your design or to recreate the White Prince.

Chapter 13 'And the Lion Shall Lie down with the Lamb'

- **Why do you think the author gave this chapter this title? Who was the lamb?** *Bertie was the lamb and because it was in the chapel of the boarding school they used a verse from scripture.*
- **Where is Bertie buried?** *Beside the White Prince at the bottom of the hill.*
- **What does the old lady say to the narrator that she had also said to Bertie years before?** *Time to go back to school so that he wouldn't get into trouble as we wouldn't want that.*
- **Mr Cook calls the narrator by his surname. What is his surname? Have you heard that name before? Where?** *Morpurgo and this is the author's surname.*
- **The boy gets a shock at the end of the chapter. What startling information does he find out?** *That Millie died only a few months after Bertie and so couldn't possibly have been speaking with him at the house.*
- **Millie died of a broken heart just like Bertie's mum, was it for the same reason? Yes, because Millie had also lost both Bertie and the White Lion like Bertie's mum.**

Activity

- **Talking and Listening** - Have you seen plaques which remember people or events? Where did you see them? Who or what were they remembering? See *Alternative biographies and alternative biographies on the www.patheducation.co.uk website Teacher Login Area on commemorating and honouring others P6/Yr5 Lessons 37 and 38.*

Chapter 14 'Adonis Blues'

- **Why is this chapter called 'Adonis Blues', do you think? Named after the type of butterflies that drank off the chalk lion. What would you call this last chapter?** *Pupils' own responses.*
- **How does the first paragraph in this chapter remind you of the first chapter of the book? Go back to ch. 1 and have a look.** *Both are focused on the butterflies breathing life into the Butterfly Lion. It also says that the boy promises to look after the Lion and never forget him.*
- **What does the narrator notice about the house when he sits up on the hill?** *He noticed how empty and unkept the house was.*



- **What does the narrator promise to do for Millie?** *To look after the Butterfly Lion in keeping him white and promises to remember them.*
- **Describe some of the emotions that you think the narrator would have felt on the hill.** *Shocked, questioning, confused, alarmed, disappointed, comforted etc... How would you have felt in that situation?*
- **Do you think the book has a good ending? Why? How does the ending make you feel?** *Pupils' own responses*

Activity

- **Book Review:** Write a detailed book review. It should include: Why you liked/disliked the book; Relationships between characters; And, finally, would you recommend this book to a friend? Why/why not?

