

“Hope” – A teacher’s guide

Dear teacher,

This guide to working with the book “Hope” gives ideas and suggestions that you may use as step by step guidelines for working with the book, or freely adapt for your class. Following some general ideas, I have given suggestions for each chapter. Personally, however, I would read some chapters without doing any additional vocabulary work or questions. Some chapters are very short, and some chapters lend themselves better to an inward, emotional response not easily catered for by cognitive exercises. The chapters for which I have suggested “close reading” tasks contain content that students will need to understand in order to follow the plot. This could, however, also be ensured by simply discussing the chapter or asking questions orally.

I hope you find these ideas helpful, and have fun developing your own!

Kavita Desai

A note on grief and bereavement:

In this story, Shanti’s family deal with grief and bereavement after the children’s mother died of cancer. Although it is not the constant focus of the book, please think carefully about choosing this reader if any of your students are closely impacted by a similar issue. Illness and death are part of life, and in most cases stories are a good way of engaging with such themes (indirectly) in class. I would not discuss the topic or connect it with specific exercises, but rather allow the story to carry the theme. This allows students to respond (or not) individually, on a personal level. However in some cases if an individual student is deeply and directly affected by a death or acute, serious illness in the family, this book may not be the best choice.

Section One: General ideas

Character profiles

Students can make a character profile for each character. This is a good writing exercise and also gives orientation within the story. The easiest way to do this is to collect sentences about the characters. This builds on the middle school entry point for character descriptions: “Write four things about so and so.” Of course, students should increasingly be encouraged to write their own formulations. Students can add to their character profiles as you move through the book. For some chapters this may mean just adding a sentence or a quote to illustrate a character trait. Alongside the characters listed in the overview on page 12, you could also make profiles for Shanti’s dad, Jasmin’s dad, Justin’s brother Dillon, Justin’s friend Mike and Jasmin’s boyfriend Owen.

- An idea: Students can be invited to do sketches or portraits of (some of) the characters.

Vocabulary work

For each chapter, choose useful phrases and expressions that should be understood and learnt. It is easier and more natural to understand and learn phrases rather than isolated words, as words derive meaning from context. Vary your approach! You can produce lists which you hand out, which allows you to make sure students know key words they will need in order to understand the story. But you can also get students to create their own lists for certain chapters, which allows differentiation. In this case, students can choose phrases and expressions according to their level and preferences.

Example for Chapter One

as fast as me
wanted for murder
I couldn't breathe
It was only a dream
smashed to pieces
an extra skin
I was old enough to understand
supporting each other
a big shock
It did him good
It wound the tension up a notch
They'll be sorry

Close reading and understanding the text

You can give comprehension questions to ensure that students understand essential aspects of the story, and for general writing practice. Similar questions can be used for oral practice before continuing with the next part of the story. I would not use comprehension questions for every chapter as this type of work can be less interesting, especially for more able students, since it is not very creative. Such questions can also give security and build confidence. For short chapters, two-three questions may be sufficient, or even just one central question.

Example for Chapter Four

Close reading:

1. Why do people ask Shanti if she has Indian heritage?
2. Where did Shanti live for three years when she was little?
3. What was Shanti's mum's job before she got sick?
4. What did Shanti's mum say about adopting things from other cultures?
5. What does Shanti think about how most teenagers find their parents?

6. What does Shanti hate about her dad's behaviour?
7. What didn't Shanti know at this point?

Regional/culture studies

You may discuss the UK school system (What is a comprehensive school? When do children start school?) or the legal system, but be alert to details which are also specific to the UK: What are Polo mints? Why does the Sunday paper come through the letterbox and land on the doormat?

Ideas for working with the poem by Zoe Button (p. 10)

- "Words I heard": Read the poem in chunks. Students listen. After each chunk you invite students to share words and expression they heard. Variation: Get strong readers to take over reading verses from the poem instead of doing it yourself.
- Reading in groups: Make groups of 2-3 and give students a couple of verses to read and understand in their group. As a next step, have the groups read and explain their verses to the class.
- Favourite lines: Get students to choose their favourite 4+ lines, learn these by heart and recite in small groups or to the class.

Personally I would not recite this poem all the way through as a class. It is a personal, inward expression of one fourteen-year-old's understanding of what hope is. I would also stay on the experience level rather than chewing over the meaning too much.

Section Two: Ideas for each chapter

The following are suggestions for each chapter, which should be adapted to your class and situation.

Chapter One

- Start character profiles for Shanti and for Mo
- Vocabulary work (see example in section one)
- Close reading – make sure students understand the set-up with two neighbouring schools, and which key event happens in chapter one (frogspawn on the hardcourt).

Chapter Two

- What can you see in Mo's drawings?
- Why do you think Mo signed his picture with "Professor Mohan Williams, world famous amphibian expert"?

Chapter Three

- Start character profile for Brenda

Chapter Four

- Add to character profile for Shanti
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading (see example in section one)

Chapter Five

- Start character profile for Justin
- Close reading

TOPIC: Youth sentencing

"It was a repeat offense, and now Dillon was 18. He got a grown-up's sentence and went to real prison." (p. 23)

Compare youth sentencing in your country and in the UK. The topic is in general interesting and relevant to students of this age.

Chapter Six

- Start character profile for Jasmin
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

TOPIC: Education

"Our school is a free school where we decide everything democratically, and we don't go to lessons unless we want to. In fact, lessons only happen at all if students and teachers get together and decide on projects and study plans. Is that wow or is it crazy?" (p. 24)

Discuss democratic education, home schooling and the school system in your country. Think of relatable, low-level entry questions to engage students:

- Do you think homework should be voluntary?
- Do you agree that going to school should be compulsory?
- Would you like it if you had no organised lessons at your school?
- What opportunities are there for student participation in the running of your school?
- Would you like to be more involved in the running of your school? In what way?

Creative writing: Describe your dream school.

Chapter Seven

- Start character profile for River
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Eight

- Add to character profiles for Shanti, Jasmin and Mo
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Nine

- Describe Mo's drawings
- What do you think Mo might be "saying" with these pictures? What do they show us about how he feels?
- Invitation (!) : Draw a picture/sketch/comic that expresses a thought or feeling without words.

Chapter Ten

- Start character profile for Mr Evans
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Eleven

- Add to character profile for Jasmin
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Twelve

- Add to character profile for Shanti
- Vocabular work
- Close reading

Chapter Thirteen

- Add to character profile for River
- Vocabulary work

TOPIC: Cyberbullying/online harassment

"On my screen I read the words: "If Justin dies, Mo dies." (p. 39)

This chapter is an opportunity to discuss this topic with your class, possibly also in their native language. At what point should you go to the police?

Every child should have trusted adults they can go to with their problems. Does your school have a school social worker and/or teachers elected by the students to whom they can talk in confidence?

Here is an interesting link about what helps to stop cyberbullying according to students' own experience: <https://cyberbullying.org/teens-talk-works-stop-cyberbullying>

If you have a media pedagogue at your school, you might connect this issue to the wider topics of social media and digital citizenship.

Chapter Fourteen

- Add to profile for Justin
- Vocabulary work

TOPIC: David Hopkins and personal collages

"I'm fascinated by David Hopkins' work. The contrast, the layering, the surreal perspective." (p. 43)

Look at some of David Hopkins' work with your class. Possibly look at another artist's work according to your experience and interest.

Invite students to make individual collages to express a topic such as their family, their dreams, or their relationship to another important aspect of their lives. Students may present their collages in class. Be alert to sensitive or personal issues.

Chapter Fifteen

- Add to character profile for Shanti
- Vocabulary work

Chapter Sixteen

- What can you see in Mo's drawings? What is happening?

TOPIC: Speaking through pictures

At this point in the story, Mo expresses himself through pictures rather than through words. When do you express yourself through pictures? Emojis? Posting and sharing photos? Artwork?

Invite students to design a storyboard or short comic sequence that tells a story.

Use emojis to learn vocabulary:



Chapter Seventeen

- Add to character profiles for Shanti and Mo
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Eighteen

- Add to character profiles for River and Mo
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Nineteen

Personally, I would simply read this chapter, make sure students understand the story with the two birds, and let the images resonate, without doing any further tasks.

Chapter Twenty

- Add to character profiles for Shanti and Brenda
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Twenty-One

- Add to character profiles for River and Brenda
- Vocabulary work

- Close reading

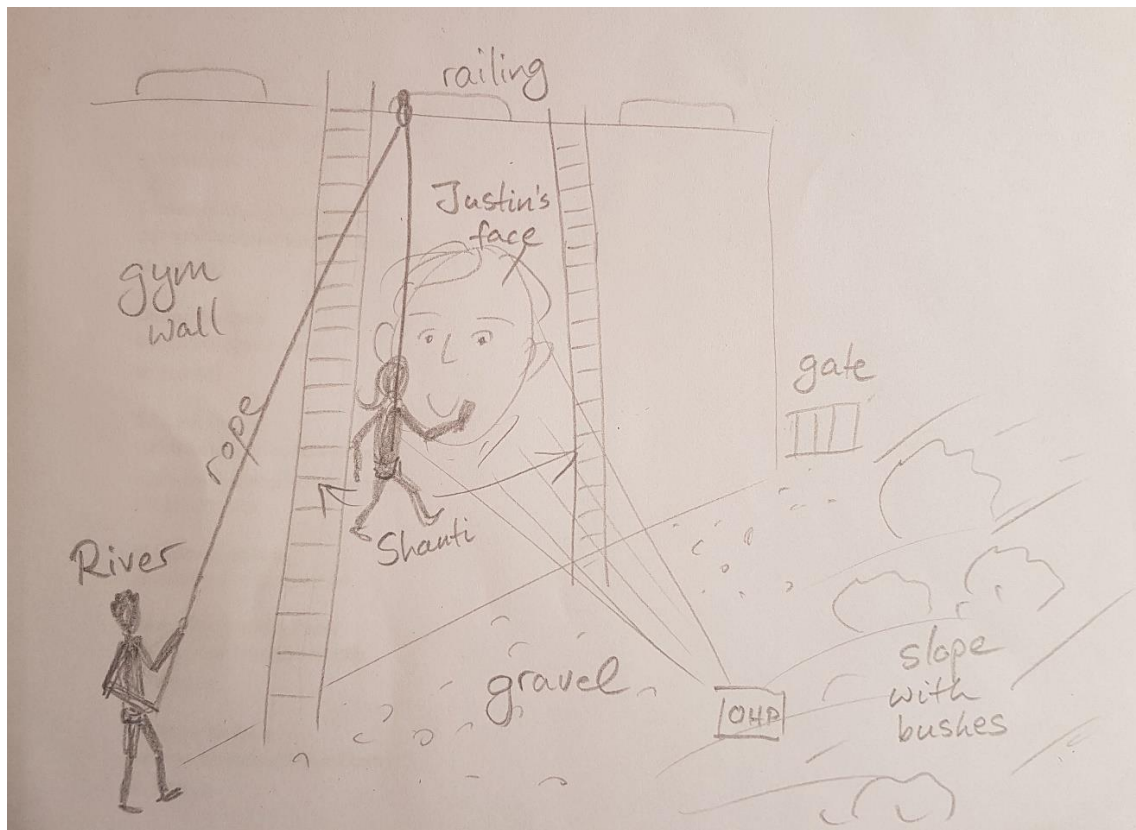
Chapter Twenty-Two

- Add to character profiles for Mr Evans and Brenda
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Twenty-Three

- Add to character profile for River
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Note: For this chapter it is a good idea to draw a sketch on the board to show the planned set-up with the two ladders, Shanti on a rope in a climbing harness belayed by River, and the OHP projecting Justin's face onto the wall between the ladders. This will greatly help students to follow the next chapter:



Chapter Twenty-Four

- Add to character profile for Shanti
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Twenty-Five

- Add to character profile for Brenda
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Note: It may be a good idea to just read some of the chapters between 19 and 25, without any further tasks, as the story gathers momentum here. Too many additional tasks would slow things down.

Chapter Twenty-Six

- Add to character profile for Jasmin
- Vocabulary work

TOPIC: Healthy relationships

"I didn't like him as much when he was with his mates, though. He behaved differently, especially around Mike. The other day he even made fun of me in front of Mike and the others, calling me a little goody-goody when I had to leave the park to be home by 10. It had really hurt my feelings. But then he was really caring again, and I told myself I was overreacting." (p. 71)

Does the relationship between Jasmin and Owen seem like a healthy relationship? What about the relationship between Mike and his friends?

Creative writing task: Write a fictive scene (as a dialogue or as a normal text) about people with a challenging relationship issue. This could be lovers, friends, or parents and children. To make it easier, you may give your students scenarios to write about, such as a teenager who comes home too late, or someone who is jealous about their partner's friendship with someone else. You may even suggest opening sentences.

This task allows students to reflect on and engage with relationship issues without making it too personal.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

- Add to character profiles for Mo and Shanti
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Twenty-Eight

- Add to character profile for Justin
- Vocabulary work

Chapter Twenty-Nine

- Add to character profile for River
- Vocabulary

- Close reading

Chapter Thirty

- Add to character profile for Justin
- Vocabulary
- Close reading

Note: Again, you may decide to read through some of these chapters (27-30) without any further tasks in order to keep the momentum going towards the end of the book.

Chapter Thirty-One

- Add to character profiles for Shanti, Mo, River, Brenda, Mr Evans and Jasmin
- Vocabulary work

TOPIC: Restorative justice

Discuss the concept of restorative justice with your class.

According to the European Forum for Restorative Justice:

Restorative justice is an approach of addressing harm or the risk of harm through engaging all those affected in coming to a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired and justice achieved.

<https://www.euforumrj.org/restorative-justice-nutshell>

A case study:

A Robbery: Restorative Justice Case Study

Jamie hid in a female toilet and assaulted and robbed Ruth as she went into the cubicle. He was caught and sentenced to 54 months in prison.

A few years later, Ruth decided to take part in Restorative Justice with Jamie and Jamie accepted. Before the conference, Ruth and her husband were visited by trained police officers and properly prepared for the process.

The conference went well with the Restorative Justice facilitators describing it as "an emotional, impactful and productive meeting demonstrating the real benefits this kind of intervention can bring to both the victim and offender for long term resolution."

There were a lot of tears, frank explanations, and real insight into why Jamie attacked Ruth: to feed his drug habit.

Ruth and her husband even offered to give Jamie and his partner a lift home afterward and the facilitator received a text from Jamie later that day thanking the team for allowing him to participate in the impactful Restorative Justice conference!

Restorative Solutions: <https://www.restorativesolutions.org.uk/why-we-do-it/case-studies/a-robbery-restorative-justice-case-study>

Here is a link for further compelling case studies:

<https://www.restorativesolutions.org.uk/why-we-do-it/case-studies?page=2>

Chapter Thirty-Two

- Add to character profile for Justin
- Vocabulary work

TOPIC: The life cycle of frogs

Ask students to write down what they know about the life cycle of frogs in English (give them key vocabulary).

Possibly make them a simple quiz.

Visit a pond or bring a frog to school (appropriately transported).

Possibly connect amphibians to wider ecology issues.

Chapter Thirty-Three

- Add to character profiles for Justin and Mo
- Vocabulary work
- Close reading

Chapter Thirty-Four

- What can you see in Mo's drawing (p. 87)? What is Mo "saying" with this drawing?

TOPIC: Artwork

Invite students to do some artwork, for example nature sketches (amphibians, birds) or landscapes (ponds, swamps, forests, skies with birds).

This final task should definitely be an invitation (possibly with an alternative writing task so students are nudged into doing something rather than nothing). Some students may reject it as having nothing to do with English. But for others it can be a space to connect and resonate emotionally with the themes in the book. You could also ask students to describe/present their pictures in English, but this changes the task and makes it more outward and functional. See what makes sense in your setting.

TOPIC: Poetry

The lines on hope at the beginning of each chapter were written by ninth graders in response to a poem on hope:

**Hope has holes
in its pockets.
It leaves little
crumb trails
so that we,
when anxious,
can follow it.
Hope's secret:
it doesn't know
the destination—
it knows only
that all roads
begin with one
foot in front
of the other.**

— **Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer**

Ask students to write a few lines on their understanding of hope, starting with "Hope is..." This can be understood as short and accessible poetry. When I did this task with students, I first shared a couple of my own examples and told them that it took me a certain amount of courage to share my personal ideas because I felt a bit shy about it. In this way, I modelled the process I hoped they would engage in.

Hope is not a feeling, it is a decision.

- Kavita Desai

I was so moved by my students' contributions that I had the idea of connecting them, with student permission, to this story, which I had already almost finished writing. This is how the book got its title. All students were happy for their quotes to be included, but some chose to use a pseudonym.