



ENGLISH

Introduction by Slow Mo, our English expert!

The Animates: River of Life provides opportunities for pupils to develop their English skills by engaging with the language and imagery connected to Merseyside's maritime heritage. Its use of rhythm, rhyme, and metaphor offers a foundation for discussing different writing techniques and encourages pupils to reflect on how language can convey emotions.

Objectives

- Discuss writing similar to that which they are planning to understand structure, vocabulary, and grammar.
- Discuss and record ideas before writing.
- Use simple organisational devices in non-narrative writing, e.g. headings and subheadings.
- Read aloud their writing with appropriate intonation and tone to make meaning clear.

Activities

Rhythm, Rhyme and Metre

At the start of River of Life, the Animates whistle a "sea-faring tune." What does this mean? Introduce the term 'sea shanty' and listen to the shanty on the Animates website. You might also play extracts of other well-known sea shanties. Discuss what the shanty makes them think of and explore the strong beat by clapping along. Explain that shanties were sung to keep time when hauling ropes, rowing, or working together.

Why do you think sailors used songs like this?

Read River of Life out loud, modelling fluency and expression. Ask the pupils to read with you using the same intonation. What words in the story stand out? Why?

Read the extract again, clapping the beat together. Explore the rhyme pattern together and identify that the rhyming word lands on the final beat of the line. Count the syllables per line to explore how the rhythm matches a shanty-like pattern. Talk about how the rhythm of the book is reminiscent of a sea shanty.

Pupils work in pairs or groups to create their own lines inspired by the Animates, keeping to: a steady beat, a rhyming couplet and a theme of travel and maritime. Invite groups to perform their verses adding clapping, drumming, or body percussion to keep the rhythm strong.





Travel Brochures

You will need copies of travel leaflets for children to explore. Revisit the part of the book where the Animates visit Liverpool Cruise Port on page 24. Look at the images of the cruise ship and the port.

What happens at Liverpool Cruise Port? Why do the cruise ships stop here?

Focus on the image of the travel brochures. In small groups, invite the pupils to explore a range of leaflets and identify common features such as photographs, maps, titles, sub-headings, bullet points, important information such as prices or opening times.

What examples of persuasive language can you find in the brochures?

Choose a local attraction that the pupils know well to create a travel leaflet for. As a class, agree on a success criteria for leaflet writing.

Take time to reflect on the leaflet and ensure that they include all parts of the success criteria.

This River of Life Runs Straight Through Our Heart

Throughout the book, Natalie Reeves Billing uses the line “this river of life runs straight through our heart.” Re-read the book and count how many times this line features in the story.

What is the effect of this repeated line?

Read the line out loud and ask the pupils to draw a picture to accompany it, showing what this line makes them think of. Discuss together and record any key vocabulary arising.

Break down the line and explore further, discussing why the Mersey might be a river of life and how the river isn't just a physical feature but also a part of the region's identity and pride.

Mind map what else the Mersey might provide and be for the people living on its banks. Develop into a list poem:

*River of Life,
River of Dreams,
River of...*

EXTENSION: Can the pupils extend the line to show how the river impacts the people around it...

“This River of Dreams carries our hopes.”

