

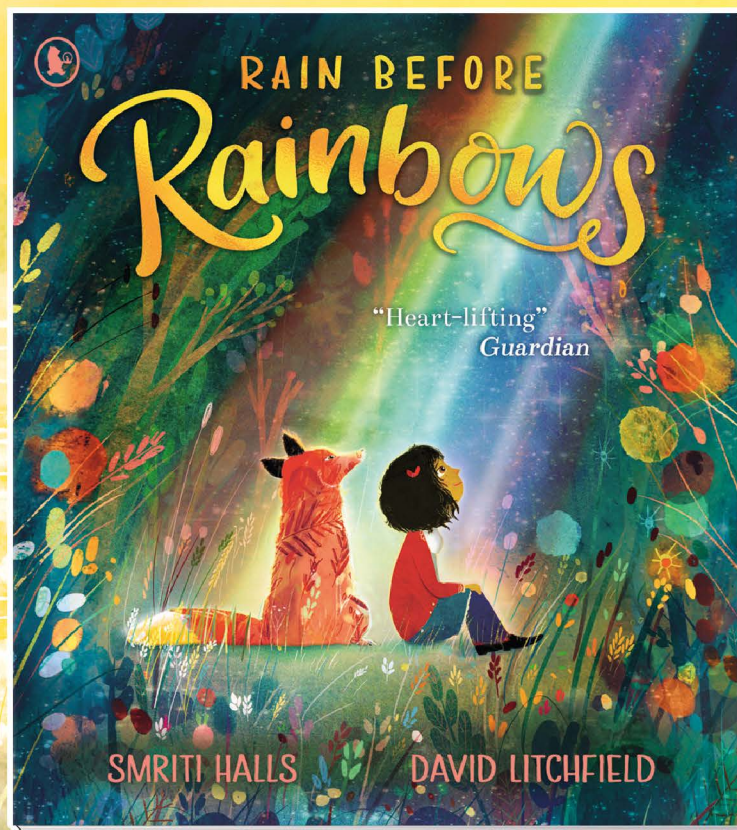


TEACHERS' NOTES

RAIN BEFORE
Rainbows

SMRITI HALLS

DAVID LITCHFIELD



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RAIN BEFORE RAINBOWS

By Smriti Halls Illustrated by David Litchfield

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

DEVELOPING INITIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BOOK:

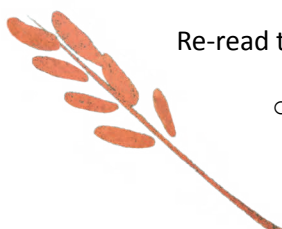


Begin by appreciating the book as an object. Pass it round to the children, so that they can feel its weight and size, appreciate its finish, see the colours and textures of the artwork and of the cover, holding it at an angle to see how the foil lettering contrasts with the matt illustration. *Do you like the look of this book, do you want to read it? Why?*



Support the children to look in detail at the cover illustration.

- *Why do you think this image was chosen for the cover? Who do you think these two characters are — friends, pet and owner? What do you think they are looking at? Can you make the same expression as them? How does it feel? Explore their body language, the girl on the right staring upwards, wide-eyed and with the suspicion of a smile, the fox on the left also looking up but its gaze perhaps also taking in the girl: does this tell us how they are feeling? What do you notice about the girl's clothing and appearance, do any details suggest anything to you?*
- *What do you think you can say about the fox? Have you ever seen, heard or even smelled a fox, or read any stories about foxes? What do you think you know about them? Invite the children to share any knowledge or ideas about foxes that they might already have, which might have come from wildlife books or documentaries, or from the very wide range of books that feature foxes as protagonists. What are the foxes like in the stories you know?*
- *Where and when do you think this story might be set, what time of day or year or season? How do you know? What do you notice about where they are sitting? What features of the background catch your eye? Why? Beside the light of the rainbow in which the pair are bathed, children might notice flowers and leaves and grasses; stars in a night sky. What associations do these elements have for you? How does the palette of the cover make you feel; why do you think the artist has chosen bright, light colours including yellows, oranges and reds, and contrasting deep dark colours including purples, greens and inky blue?*



Re-read the title of the book together, "**Rain before Rainbows**".

- *What do you notice about the layout of the cover, the fonts used, the size of the words in the title text, the contrast between the capitals and the fluid, flowing lettering of "Rainbows"; what does this make you think or feel about the word? Why do you think the book designer and illustrator might have chosen this style for this word? What does the title of the story suggest to you, why is it picked out in foil?*
- *Have you ever seen a full or part rainbow? What do you think might have caused or created the rainbow: when did it happen, what kind of a day was it, and what was it like — how did it make you feel? What else do you know or believe about rainbows?*





Invite children to share any knowledge about or experiences of rainbows they might already have. This may range from having seen one begin to form as the rain clears and the sun comes out; to having drawn and displayed one during the lockdown period; to knowing stories in which rainbows play a significant role, particularly in mythology and religious stories.

Now open the book to the front endpapers and share them with the children. Allow time and space for them to reflect on what they see, then discuss:



- *How do the endpapers make you feel? What aspects of the illustration make you feel that way? Children might mention the shades of grey, the white and silver sheets of rain, the suspicion of a landscape, small plants in the foreground that might also hint at patterns of drops. What do you think it would feel like to be here? How do the colours that David Litchfield has chosen to use make you feel?*



Turn to the title page, sharing the whole of the spread, inviting children to discuss what they see and make sense of the scene they are shown and any text they find relevant.

- *What do you think is happening here? Can you describe what you see in one or two sentences? How would you describe the mood created in this illustration?*
- *What do you think has happened to cause the scene that we are witnessing? Where do you think this is? Who do you think lives or lived here? What makes you think this?*
- *How do you think this illustration relates to the endpapers that you have just looked at, what details from the previous spread are echoed here? Is anything different in this spread?*
- *What do you predict might be on the next page as the story begins?*

READING ALOUD AND KEY TALKING POINTS:



Share the opening spread, reading aloud the text, **“Rain before rainbows. Clouds before sun.”** Allow time and space for children to reflect on what they have heard and seen, then discuss:

- *What do you think is happening in this spread? How do you think it relates to everything you have seen so far in the book?*
- *How does this representation of the castle compare to the one on the previous page? What do these differences tell you? Do you think this is happening directly afterwards, or do you think time has passed? If so, how much, and what makes you think this?*
- *What do you think you can say about the two characters? How do they look now compared to the way you saw them on the cover? What do their appearance and body language tell you about their mood or their situation? The children might comment on the girl’s backward glance, the curve of her mouth, the cloak clutched around her; and on the fox pushing on with its head down, its tail lowered.*
- *What do you think the words mean, and how do you think they relate to this illustration? Do they remind you of any other sayings you know? You could follow this up with further investigations on common sayings, proverbs or idioms, what these mean and how they came into our language.*



Turn the page to share and read aloud the next spread, perhaps repeating the page-turn to allow children to observe the shift from light to shade. Again, allow the children time and space to reflect on what has been shared:



- *How does the drama of the page-turn affect you? What do you think is happening here; how does this spread make you feel?*
- *Have you ever been out in the countryside at night? What was it like? What features of this landscape stand out for you? The children might be struck by the bare hills, the silhouetted or moonlit trees, the twinkling stars. What do you think it might be like to be here? How do you think the girl and the fox might be feeling? How do you know? What do you think each of them might be looking at? The children might comment on the girl staring open-mouthed at the stars, or the fox looking back at the girl. What do you think this means? Do you think the fox might be looking for reassurance or companionship? Or do you think they are leading the way and looking back in their role as a protector?*
- *Re-read from the start, asking the children to focus on how the words make them feel. Read in such a way that the children can pick up on the rhythm of the lines, the repetition of “before”, and the rhyme of “sun/done”. How do the rhythm and rhyme of these lines make you feel? Why do you think Smriti Halls has chosen to write in rhyme? What does this add to the story?*



Share and read aloud the next spread, allowing time and space for reflection before considering:

- *What do you think this spread is showing? What does the illustration tell us about their journey? The children might observe the scale and height of the mountains and the size of the girl and the fox in relation to these. Careful observers may also note that they are shown in three different settings with leaves, stars and snowflakes indicating the changes in weather the journey brings and the time it takes; they might be familiar with this sophisticated device from comics or graphic novels.*
- *Where do you think the girl and the fox might be going? Why do you think they are making this difficult and hazardous journey?*



Share and read aloud the next spread, **“Dreams that are hopeful. Decisions to make.”**

- *What do you think this spread is showing? What mood is created by the combination of the words and illustration on the page?*
- *Compare and contrast the two images of the girl and the fox on this spread. What do you think connects the small huddled pair with the fox shielding the girl and the pair flying across the night sky? What do you think the illustrator is showing us here?*
- *What is the impact of the colours used and the background scenery chosen, with black silhouetted bare trees and a sky of dark greys, pastel stars and planets picked out against it? Does it remind you of anything you have seen elsewhere? If they have seen these before, the children may be reminded of constellation maps and astrological zodiacs.*



Share and read aloud the next two spreads, from **“Dark days may shake us”** to **“tall waves will crash”**. Give the children time and space to reflect on what they have heard and seen, and discuss:

- *What do you think is happening in these spreads? Can you summarise them?*
- *How does the spread of the girl and the fox back-to-back make you feel? What makes you feel this way? What do you notice about their body language? Children could freeze-frame this scene, copying their bared teeth and aggressive stance, to experience the pair’s emotions. Does anything about this scene remind you of anything else you have seen in other books, or films?*
- *How does the spread showing the pair at sea make you feel? Once again, encourage the children to look at the finer details in the illustration, including*



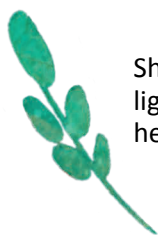
the body language and facial expressions of the characters. *What do you notice about the waves? Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to do this? How does it make you think or feel about the characters and their situation? Have you ever been out in a storm on land or even at sea, as here? How did it make you feel?*

- *How do the words and pictures work together? What would be lost if you had only one without the other? What details in the text do the illustrations pick up on? What details about the story do they give you that the text does not?*
- Encourage the children to draw on their knowledge of story and other books they have read and films that they have seen to predict what might happen next. *What do you think the next spread might show? How and where do you think the pair's journey will end?*



Then share and read aloud the next spread, starting **“But ... there are footsteps to follow”**. Allow time and space for the children to reflect on what they have heard and seen, then discuss:

- *What do you think is happening here? Is this what you predicted? How do you think this spread relates to what has gone before? Is the mood the same; how has it changed?*
- *What do you notice about the girl and the fox's body language and facial expressions in this spread? Where do you think this is? How would you describe the place they have reached?*
- *How does the figure of the stag strike you; does he remind you of characters you have met in other books or stories? What qualities might you associate with this animal? Why do you think this particular animal was chosen to greet them at the shore?*
- *How does the mood and atmosphere change in this spread? What has the illustrator done to signal this change?* The children might comment on the change in scale of the character on the page, the left-to-right journey of the composition and the movement that drives the pair onwards through the book, as well as the colours chosen for the spread.
- Re-read the text from this page, and support the children in considering how it also signals the shift in the narrative. Children might note that starting the sentence with **“But ...”** marks a definite shift, especially when followed by the ellipsis, and that **“wise”** and **“guide”** are affirmative words.



Share and read aloud the next two spreads as the girl and fox are led and carried into the light. As before, allow the children time and space to reflect on what they have seen and heard, then discuss:

- *What do you think is happening here?*
- *What details in the illustrations help you to understand more about the events you can see? What does the composition of this illustration say to you? What do the body language and facial expressions of the girl, the fox and the other creatures you can see convey about the atmosphere? What impact do the colour choices make?*
- *How does the rising sun make you feel, after the darker spreads that have preceded it? How do you think it might affect the girl and the fox? Would this be a good end to their journey and to the book? What do you think could still happen in the story beyond this point?*



Turn the page to share and read aloud the next spread, and give children the time and space to reflect on what is being shown and appreciate the way the text and illustration work together.





- *Why do you think the choice has been made to break the text and illustration into panels? What does this show?* The children might observe that each whitespace-separated panel in the rising slope shows a different part of the growing cycle. They might comment on the rhythm that the short simple sentences create, the repetition of **“before”** also echoing the **“rain before rainbows, clouds before sun, night before daybreak”** of the story’s start.

Turn to share and read aloud the next spread:

- *How does this night-time scene compare to earlier night scenes in the book? What does this convey about the character’s journey throughout the story?* The children might observe the house-like den that has been constructed from the trees and branches, the comfort of the other animals sleeping nearby, gentle light bathing the sleeping pair, the artwork showing the girl and the fox over the lintel.
- *How does this spread link to what you have seen in earlier spreads? On the left-hand page children might hear the echoes of **“rain before rainbows, clouds before sun, night before daybreak”** but here with a different ending: **“a new day’s begun”**. What does the ellipsis at the end of the right-hand page lead you to expect? Can you predict what the rhyme for **“light”** might be?*



Re-read the text **“A day full of promise, a day full of light, the morning is breaking...”** then turn the page to read aloud and share the final spread. Allow the children the time and space to reflect:

- *How does this spread make you feel? How do you think each character feels? How do you know?*
- *What is the impact of the colours chosen, the arching rainbow; the light, life and movement of the illustration? How does this fit with the text, **“and the morning is bright”**?*
- *How do you respond to the way the story ends? Is this what you predicted?*

AFTER READING, YOU COULD ALSO:



Ask the children to discuss their responses to the story with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls **“the four basic questions”**, which give children accessible starting points for discussion:

- *Tell me ... was there anything you liked about this book?*
- *Was there anything that you particularly disliked?*
- *Was there anything that puzzled you?*
- *Did any of the characters, settings or episodes remind you of other books or stories?*



Leave the book for children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group. Stanley Tucci reads it aloud at <https://stayhome.walker.co.uk/rainbows/>.



Review the story in chronological order — a storymap could be effective for revisiting key events — and consider the different emotions the girl has felt throughout the story.



Use **hot-seating** to explore the feelings of the girl and the fox; one member of the group role-plays each character as they are interviewed by the other children. This activity involves children closely examining the motivation and responses of the two characters.



The children could work collaboratively to choose words that describe the girl's emotions at different points of the story. Write these on post-it notes and then organise them to demonstrate the shades of emotional intensity that she might have felt in the story and create a **graph of emotion**. If they were to plot the fox's emotions alongside the girl's, would they match or would they be different at different points of the story? Why might this be?



Give children the opportunity to re-read and focus on the poetry of the text, discussing the features of the writing that particularly stand out for them, such as rhythm or rhyme, alliteration, imagery and figurative language.



Invite children to further explore the book through performance. As they re-read, they can identify the words and phrases they find interesting, and consider how they could perform it for others. You could illustrate different techniques like repeating or echoing certain words or lines, deciding which parts might be read with a single voice or could be better in unison, how to pause for effect, and how to incorporate facial expression and body language. Mark up the text with performance notes and rehearse before performing. Allow pupils the opportunity to watch, reflect on and evaluate and to respond to each other's performances, noting the impact on their engagement and understanding.



Consider the book as a product of the time and conditions in which it was published.

- *What do you think is the significance of the book's title "**Rain before Rainbows**"? Why do you think so many people drew rainbows during lockdown in spring 2020? How has reading this story of the girl's and the fox's journey deepened your understanding of what rainbows mean to people?*
- *What do you think is the relevance of the quotation from the Old Testament at the start of the book, "**Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning**"? How do you think the journey the girl and the fox make illustrates the truth of this proverb?*



The children could retell the story of the journey from the point of view of the girl or of the fox, perhaps also providing the back story that precedes the opening scene of the girl and the fox fleeing the smouldering castle.



Consider the theme of friendship, between the girl and the fox, and with those "**courageous and kind**" friends they make when they come ashore. Encourage the children to reflect on the qualities of a special friend, and undertake free writing or poetry to capture their thinking, especially if they have recent and relevant experience of missing their own friends and family.



David Litchfield's illustrations delight with their use of colour and of contrast. Children could reflect on the emotional associations of colour, mapping emotions onto the colours of the rainbow. Titles are suggested below to support children in exploring and articulating their emotions.



Children might undertake other artwork inspired by the weather — snow sculptures, mobiles blown by the wind, suncatchers, watercolours dipped in puddles or splashed by rain, even sun photography (cyanotypes) — all, of course, weather permitting!





Other suggested titles by Smriti Halls and David Litchfield
or to support further exploration of themes
arising from the book:

The Color Monster: A Story about Emotions, by Anna Llenas (Templar)

A Book of Feelings, by Amanda McCardie and Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)

Happy, by Mies van Hout (Lemniscaat)



Selected other books by Smriti Halls:

I'm Sticking with You, illustrated by Steve Small (Simon and Schuster)

The Little Island, illustrated by Robert Starling (Andersen Press)

The Ways of the Wolf, illustrated by Jonathan Woodward (Wren and Rook)

You Make Me Happy, illustrated by Alison Brown (Bloomsbury)



Selected other books by David Litchfield:

The Bear and the Piano series (Frances Lincoln)

Lights on Cotton Rock (Frances Lincoln)

Grandad's Secret Giant (Frances Lincoln)

Children might also like to find out more about
the author and illustrator at their websites:

<https://www.smriti.co.uk/>

<https://www.davidlitchfieldillustration.com/>

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