

TEACHERS' NOTES



The Sunday Times Children's Book of the Year

Michael Rosen's STICKY McSTICKSTICK

The Friend Who Helped Me Walk Again



Michael Rosen * Tony Ross

9781529503241 • Paperback • £7.99 • 5 years +

“Funny as well as moving”

The Sunday Times

[@WalkerBooksUK](#) [@MichaelRosenYes](#)



WALKER
BOOKS

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.

These teaching notes have been written with children in Years 3 and 4 in mind but you will need to differentiate them as appropriate to the needs and experience of your own class.

Before you start:

- The book explores the journey a patient takes to recover from a serious illness and how grateful they are for the support and help they received. It explores their experiences of hospital life and depicts them in a hospital bed. There may be some individuals in the class who have seen family members in this situation who did not make a recovery; this, therefore, will need to be considered and handled sensitively by the adult.
- As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal to organize and store discussions and responses to the text. The journal can be a place to capture reflections on the plot, characters and themes, as well as thoughts about how the writer uses language for effect.
- As you read, you may also want to encourage the group to pause to consider words and phrases that may or may not be familiar to them and discuss and clarify their meanings and origins. These might include but will not be limited to words like *gasped*, *panting*, *pleaded*, *parallel bars*, *deserted*. Add these to a glossary, following up on new and unfamiliar vocabulary by using photographs and video sources to support the pupils in understanding them in the context of these stories.
- Look at the front cover with the children. Explore the title and illustration together. *What do you think the book is going to be about? What extra information does the subtitle give us? Does anybody know Michael Rosen's story already? What happened to him to inspire him to write this book? What does the illustration tell us about his relationship with his stick? What do you notice about the stick? Why might the stick have eyes?*
- Think about the title, *Sticky McStickstick*. *Why do you think the book is called this? Consider the playfulness of the title. Why is it memorable?* Draw the children's attention to the alliterative, repetitive nature of the title and consider how this makes us view the stick as the story unfolds.
- Following this exploration of the front cover, turn to the first page of the book and look at the author's dedications. Talk about the people to whom he has dedicated this book. Ask the children to consider who is important to Michael Rosen in his life and why he may have dedicated this book to "all doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and hospital workers".

Reading aloud and key talking points:

- Turn to the first page in the book and before reading the accompanying text, ask the children to look closely at the illustration. Pose the following questions: *Where is he? What words or phrases could you use to describe how he is feeling? How has the illustrator conveyed this message? Does this image evoke any memories for you? Have you ever been in bed and felt like this? What about anyone else in your family?* At this point, be mindful of any children in your class who may have had difficult or traumatic experiences of hospitals or being by somebody's bedside. Read the accompanying text. *Does this support the impressions you gained from the illustration? Have*



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you ever felt so ill that you couldn't get up? How poorly do you have to be to not be able to get up? Discuss as a group some times when you may have felt poorly and what sort of words come to mind to describe this feeling. Collect these on a flipchart, extending and recasting vocabulary for the children to build on later in the text.

- Read the next two pages of the book and look closely at the illustrations. *What do you notice about the people around his bedside? What do they look like? What are they wearing? Who could they be?* Remind the children of the dedication that Michael Rosen made at the start of the book. Have a wider discussion about why they might be wearing face coverings and make connections to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Children will undoubtedly have some personal experiences of COVID-19, so spend some time listening to the children and allowing them time and space to discuss these experiences. Again, be mindful of the differing experiences children will have had and handle these conversations sensitively.
- Consider with the children why there might need to be three people around his bedside. Elicit, using the illustration, that they are going to need to carry him out of bed to “get him up”. *Why can he not get out of bed for himself? Why might he need help in this way? How would you describe the people helping him?*
- Read aloud again the three short sentences “**I gasped. I panted. My legs were shaking.**” *What effect on us as a reader do these short sentences have? What is it like to gasp or pant? Have you ever gasped or panted? Why might you make these noises? How would you be feeling?* Depending on the experiences of your children, you may wish to engage in some role play at this point. Children could have a go at gasping or panting and then discuss how they felt doing this. *What kind of emotions do these actions convey? Why would this situation make him want to gasp or pant? Why were his legs shaking?* Discuss how this could have two meanings: one is because he has been in bed without moving his legs for a long time so they are a bit shaky, but it is also because he is feeling scared. *Why is he feeling scared?*
- Read the next line aloud again: “**I pleaded with them to let me get back into bed.**” Discuss the word “pleaded” and explore what it means. *Why was this word chosen? What other verbs could have been used that have a similar meaning? What impact does the word “pleaded” convey to us as readers?* Elicit from the children that the word “pleaded” implies that he was desperate to get back in bed and was not happy about being out of bed. *Why might this be? Why did he feel the need to plead with the nurses?* Explore the line “**please let me go back to bed**”. Discuss the implications that the patient is at the mercy of the nurses and needs to get their permission to do anything. *How would this feel if you had to get someone else's approval first before you could do anything?* At this point you may like to engage in some [Reader's Theatre](#) and encourage the children to read the line “**Please let me go back to bed!**” with appropriate tone and intonation. They could vary their expressive reading of this line and see how this variation gives different impressions and meanings to readers – other than those which the author intended. Consider the use of a comma after the word “please”; model how we could read this with an aggressive tone and then more softly by elongating the word “please” to convey vulnerability, which is more likely to be the way the author intended it to be read. Refer back to the earlier words collected about feeling poorly, and remind the children that this patient has been seriously ill. Then consider the way the nurses responded: “**They let me.**” *What does this tell us about the nurses?* Elicit that they are accommodating, friendly, reassuring, etc. Look at the illustration and discuss the look of relief on his face.
- Read the next two spreads (up to “**I wheeled round the room and the corridors**”) and look closely at the accompanying illustrations. Discuss how the nurses have returned to his bedside again. *What does this suggest about*



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the nurses? Elicit that they are determined and dedicated to help him. Discuss the fact that he is still gasping and panting but despite this, he gets up and gives it a go. *What does this suggest about his character?* Elicit from the children that he is showing determination as well as trust in the people trying to help him. *Have you ever had to be determined? How did it feel? Was it easy? Did you want to give up?*

- Despite panting and gasping, the patient says, **“I did.” “Just a tiny bit. But I gasped and panted some more.”** *What does this tell us about him?* Elicit from the children that he is taking small steps and that although it is not always easy and can be scary, he is going to persevere. *Have you ever had to persevere with something? What did you have to overcome to be successful? Did you do it at the first attempt?*
- Discuss how the narrator is giving us, as the readers, a step-by-step guide to his recovery. Now he has progressed from a frame to a wheelchair. *How do you think he would feel being in a wheelchair? What do the illustrations suggest about his experiences? Do you know anyone in a wheelchair? What kind of skills do they need to navigate around in a wheelchair? Do you think this was a straightforward experience? What gives you this impression?*
- Consider the sentence **“We did it.”** Up until this point, the narrator has said, **“I did it.”** *Why do you think he chose to say “we” this time?* Elicit from the children that he is valuing the team effort and acknowledging that he cannot do this without the help of others. *How easy is it to accept help from others? Can you think of a time when you had to rely completely on someone else in order to succeed? How did this feel?*
- Read the next page and consider the illustration. Discuss how he must be feeling to be able to see these things for the first time in months. Consider the mundanity of the events he witnesses. *Why has he included this in the story? What does it add to our understanding of the severity of his illness and his gratitude to have overcome it? Have you or someone you know ever been in a similar situation? Think about what it might have felt like for us during lockdown when we couldn’t see the people we love or go the places we wanted to go. Can this help us to understand how he might have been feeling? Think today, if you saw these mundane things out of your window, would you be smiling like he is in the illustration? Why is he happy to see these things?*
- Read aloud the line **“They put me back to bed after that.”** What does this suggest about the nurses? *Why might it be important that he goes back to bed? What can we learn about the narrator’s opinions of the nurses here?*
- Read the next two spreads (up to **“I learned how to walk down a corridor using a frame”**) and look closely at the illustrations. Consider the repetition of **“the gym”** and the use of punctuation. *What does this tell us about the narrator’s thoughts on this? Look also at the short sentences that follow this line. What does this add to our understanding of how he feels about attending the gym?*
- Look closely at this illustration. *What does his expression convey about what he is feeling and how does this reinforce the message we get from the text?* Explore with the children that despite all of this fear and anxiety, his determination is exemplified in his continual following of the nurses’ requests, drawing the children’s understanding back to the ideas of perseverance and determination.
- The next spread examines this hesitancy further. Highlight to the children how these sentences talk about what the nurses said they would do and the fact that they did. Explore this idea with the children that sometimes we have to listen to the experts and go with their advice even if we don’t really want to. *Has anyone ever given you advice or offered your help? Was it easy to accept this help? Have you ever had to learn to do something? How did you feel/do you feel when you were/are learning it? Do you think it is good to be supported all the way? Why?*



- Read the next three spreads and look closely at the illustrations, as we are first introduced to Sticky McStickstick. Consider the first line of this spread: **“A few days later, they said I had to give up the frame.”** Why do you think the narrator chose to use the phrase **“give up”**? *What does this imply about his reliance on his frame? How easy would it have been for him to give this up? Can you think of a time when you have had to “give up” something that was supporting you, such as stabilizers on a bike or arm bands when in a swimming pool? How did you feel when this first happened?* Children could be encouraged to make a list of the emotions they may be feeling here and may want to look back at the list they made earlier. *How similar are these lists of emotions?*
- Think now about the stick and consider again the illustration that matches that of the cover illustration. *Why has he given his stick a name? Have you got something special that you have named? How does giving something a name help you? How did it help Michael?* Consider again the subtitle; he considers the stick a friend. *Who else might he consider a friend in these circumstances? Have you got anything special or anyone special who has helped you? How do you feel about them?*
- Even though he has his friend, the stick, things are still not straightforward. Look at the illustration of him at the bottom of the stairs. At this point you may wish to consider [role play or freeze frame](#) to get the children to consider what emotions might be evoked in him at this point. What is he thinking about? What is on his mind as he is faced with **“the hardest thing of all”**. *What is the hardest thing you have ever had to do? How does it compare to this? What was going through your mind at the time?*
- Think also about this in the context of the next spread when he has to give up his stick altogether. *How would he be feeling when he first attempts to walk without the stick?* Look at the final line on this spread: **“I was afraid that I would fall over. But I didn’t.”** *What does this show again about his personality? How easy is it to not give up?*
- Read the last few spreads, which focus on his return home and his family support network. Read the line **“I was very, very proud...”** *Can you think of something that you have done that you are really proud of? How did you feel? Who else might have been proud of you?*
- Read the lines **“I looked back”** and **“I felt that I had deserted him”**. Consider how looking back suggests the past and how he is very much focusing on the future now. *Do we look back on things in our own life with fondness? What are we looking forward to in the future? Why does he feel like he is deserting the stick? Can you empathize with him here?*
- *How do you think Michael was feeling when he was told he could go home? Who might he be looking forward to seeing? What might he want to do first?* Look closely at the illustration when he is reunited with his family. *What words or phrases could we use to describe how he is feeling here?*
- There is a sense here that the family are really interested in his recovery and want to show support along the way. *Who in your own lives cares about what you do? Who encourages and supports you? Who would look out for you, no matter what? Who would you show most support towards?*
- Read again the spread that starts with the line **“Sticky McStickstick watched me too”**. Discuss why he decided to personify the stick. You may want to explore personification more widely with the children, depending on their experiences. *How does this personification of the stick help us to empathize with the narrator? Despite not needing the stick, it is still very much part of his life. What does this suggest about his gratitude towards it? Is there anything in your life that you keep close to you because of its hidden meaning or significance?*



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- Read the line **“It was wonderful being at home with my family.”** *Think about your own family. What do you like doing with them? Consider the remaining text on this page and discuss the sense of not taking things for granted and being grateful for what we have got. What are you grateful for?*
- Read the line **“I can do all these things now.”** *What has he had to do to achieve this? Was it easy? What things can you do that you have had to work hard at? How did/do you feel about it?*
- The last spread ends with the imagery of the stick being there as a constant reminder of what has gone before and is exemplified with the phrase **“just in case”**. Michael’s life has changed for ever but he has accepted this and adapted accordingly. *What does he use the stick to symbolize about this chapter in his life? How does it exemplify his gratitude to all those who helped him? Consider who you are grateful to. How could you show this gratitude? Why is it important to acknowledge the things other people do to support us and others? How might we do this?*

After reading:

- You may want to consider the themes of perseverance and hope and also the acceptance of help by thinking more broadly about the people who have helped us in our lives. How could we thank them? You may wish to write letters of thanks or notes of gratitude to these people.
- Children could look more widely at the work of the NHS. They could carry out research on the organization, finding out what they do, what challenges they face. They could also continue the theme of gratitude by writing letters or notes to NHS workers thanking them for all they do and especially the work they have done during the pandemic.
- Consider the way Michael Rosen has chosen to tell his very personal story to us to help others. Children may wish to contact him to offer their thanks and to commend his bravery as well as his raising of awareness around the support he received from the doctors and nurses.
- You might like to engage in an author study of Michael Rosen and look at his wide range of different children’s literature. You could explore the way that he engages the reader by using his own personal experiences as inspiration for his stories and poems. You may wish to visit his website www.michaelrosen.co.uk to explore his work.
- There are many different writing opportunities that this story might inspire:
 - A thank you letter in role, from the narrator to the NHS
 - Writing a diary entry for the narrator at various points in the book
 - Writing in role as the doctors and nurses taking care of Michael
 - Writing in role as Sticky McStickstick, exploring the story from his point of view.

Other titles by Michael Rosen or to support exploration of themes from the book:

- *A Great Big Cuddle: Poems for the Very Young*, Michael Rosen, illustrated by Chris Riddell (Walker)
- *The Dark*, Lemony Snickett, illustrated by Jon Klassen (Orchard Books)
- *A Book of Feelings*, Amanda McCardie and Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)
- *Feelings: Inside My Heart and in My Head*, Libby Walden and Richard Jones (Caterpillar Books)



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