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Running
on the
Roof
of the
World

Teachers' Notes



Running on the Roof of the World

by Jess Butterworth

Teacher Notes

Before Reading

- At the beginning of the book the author writes '*To everyone who has ever felt too small to make a difference*'. What is meant by this? Has there ever been a time when you have felt this way? Discuss.
- Share the front cover with the pupils. Discuss and predict what the story might be about. Does the title give any clues?
- Research what life was like in Tibet before the Chinese invaded in 1950.
- Gather pictures of Tibet, the Himalayas and India. Create collage boards so the pupils have a visual representation of where the story is set.

While Reading

Ongoing Activities

- Keep a reading journal to record thoughts, ideas, viewpoints, author style/technique and examples of vocabulary.
- Ask questions and explore answers through reading, research and discussion.
- Explore literary devices used by the author and discuss the effect they have on the story e.g. similes, metaphors, adjectives, verbs, onomatopoeia, personification.
- Study dialogue – using examples from the story, explore the use of inverted commas and the structure of dialogue.

How does the author effectively integrate dialogue to explore characters and advance the action?

- Make regular predictions about what might happen next from details stated and implied.
- Collect and explore the meaning of unfamiliar words through the use of a dictionary.
- Create a glossary of unfamiliar words including words specific to the country in which the story is set.
- Collect and explore effective words and phrases used by the author to develop the setting, characters, mood and atmosphere.
- Search for clues to show that the story is set in another country. Share at least 10 examples with the reading group and discuss why this is integral to the story.
- The narration of the story is written in the first person from the perspective of Tash. What effect does Tash's first person narrative have?

At different points of the story, choose a passage or event and rewrite it in the third person or from the perspective of another character. Discuss how this change in narrative style affects the reader/meaning/tone.

- How does the author show the feelings of the characters through their actions and dialogue?

Use quotations from the text to support your answer e.g. *'I raise my head and my stomach drops.'* (p. 2)

This description shows that Tash suddenly feels nervous and anxious when she notices three soldiers.

As you read the story, collect examples of how the author shows the different emotions of the characters.

Plot character emotions on an emotion graph to study how their feelings change at different points of the story. Are any of their actions/decisions motivated by their emotions?

- Visualisation – at various points of the story, use the author's description to create illustrations for the book. Discuss the importance of the author's language to create a vivid picture for the reader.

Chapters 1–5

- How does the author create suspense/tension in the first few chapters? Give examples to support your ideas.
- Why does the author write some of the words in bold and italics?
- Research why saying the words 'Dalai Lama' would *'get you locked in prison without a second thought.'* (p. 4)

What/who is Dalai Lama? What does it mean to live in exile?

Writing Opportunity - Write an information page for a textbook giving an explanation of 'The Dalai Lama'.

- Read Chapters 2–3. How is today different from what usually happens after school?

Writing Opportunity – Write a description of the market on a peaceful day. Make sure you create the mood and atmosphere through using the senses.

- *'There's movement at the bottom of the monastery. Rows of soldiers march up to the base and gather around the building like a shadow.'* (p. 17)

Writing Opportunity – What is life like in a monastery in Tibet? Research and present findings as an information book for younger children.

- Why do you think soldiers are occupying Tibet? What does it mean to be part of a resistance movement? Why do you think a resistance movement might be formed? Discuss whether it is right to occupy the lands of another country.

On page 25, Mum tells Tash about the Chinese army invading. Research the reasons why China invaded Tibet in 1950. Did this change the life and lifestyle of the Tibetans for the better or worse? How did the Tibetans feel? What were the advantages and disadvantages to Tibet if the Chinese succeeded?

Writing Opportunity – Write a newspaper article reporting key events of the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

- Why does Sam's dad want no part in what happened in the market?
- What are your first impressions of Tash? How does she feel about living in a village monitored by soldiers? How do you know?
- The story is told from the perspective of Tash. What does she think of Sam, her mum and dad, Sam's dad and the soldiers? Summarise your first impressions of the different characters in five key words.
- Visualisation – *'Shadows dance on the wooden ceiling beams that Mum painted with swirling pictures of clouds, dragons and snow lions.'* (p. 24)

Create the image Mum could have painted on the beams using the description above. Why do you think she chose these images? Extend to providing an illustration of their house in Tibet.

Explore language used:

enclosed, barley fields, rustle, disturbs, ultimate defeat, regulations, wujing, cryptic leaflets, resistance movement, exile, kernels, unison, yak herder, checkpoint, commotion, apologetically, curfew, monastery, doused, wedged, hastens onwards, spindle, camouflaged, countertops, yuan, grappling with Dad's words, mutton momos, nomad

Chapters 6–10

- Why do you think the author named Chapter 6 'Secrets'? What secrets do you think Sam and Dad are keeping from Tash? Why do you think Tash is not involved in the conversation?

Is it right to keep secrets?

- Why does Mum keep a trunk under her bed? What is inside? Why did she keep these items hidden away from sight? Why are the items inside the trunk a symbol of hope?
- Inside the trunk is a small portrait of the Dalai Lama. Using the information gathered from the author, create a small portrait of Tash. Annotate with key words and phrases to describe your first impressions of the main character.
- What does the author mean?

'The notes spiral through the room.' (p. 35)

'The commander whips his head around, following Dad's line of sight.' (p. 43)

- Read Chapter 9. Tash faces a dilemma: *'In my hands is everything they're looking for. I should run, hide the bag, bury the photograph ... I can't leave Mum.'* (p. 43)
What do you think Tash should do? Should she save her family or do as they ask and escape with the items they have given her? Give reasons to justify your answer.
- When does Tash realise that everything has gone wrong?
- After reading chapters 6–10, do you agree that Tash has the *'luck of the dragon ... and the bravery of the snow lion'* (p. 39)? Discuss whether her parents were right.

Explore language used:

ushering, chubas, lunge forward, declares, honour, unlatching, portrait, sash, hoists, restricts, urge

Chapters 11–15

- Why was this not a time to follow the rules?
- *'I know Mum would warn me about wild wolves and leopards ...'* (p. 52)
'I see the dark shape of two huge vultures in the branches. As I get closer they flap their wings, annoyed at being disturbed, before settling back down to watch me with their beady eyeballs.' (p. 52)

Writing Opportunity – Create an information book about a selection of animals living in Tibet using a range of resources such as non-fiction books and the internet. Gather information about the animal's habitat, diet, lifespan, distinguishing features, characteristics which allow them to survive in a particular habitat etc. Information gathered could be recorded in different colours, on a mind map or an annotated picture to group facts together before producing the final product.

Investigate endangered species in the surrounding environment and write a persuasive argument on what needs to be done to protect such animals.

- ‘*The Snow Lion. Dad’s secret leaflet for the resistance.*’ (p. 53)

Research information about the snow lion and explain why the resistance leaflet was named after it. What characteristics does the snow lion represent and why might they inspire the resistance?

- What does it mean to be ‘*a threat to social stability*’? (p. 53)
- What does Tash find when she goes back home? How is she feeling at this point of the story? What should she do now?
- Why is it important to have a glimmer of hope?

Keep a record of the symbols of hope displayed to Tash throughout the rest of the story – e.g. picture of the Dalai Lama (Ch. 12), old yak bell carrying the spirit of the yak herders (Ch. 16), clouds forming in the shape of a dragon (Ch. 16).

- Why does Tash decide to go to India?
- Using a map, plot the journey Tash and Sam would take from Tibet to India. Be prepared to explain your choices.
- Research the landscape, climate and physical features of the journey they would take and suggest what the characters might need for their long journey to India. Does this match what the characters gather together in Chapter 12?
- Why does nobody want to open the door to Sam and Tash? What would you do? Give reasons for your answer. Do you think it is right for people to live in fear?
- How does Tash feel when Dorjee’s sister cuts her hair? Use the description to help: ‘*She shuffles off and returns with scissors. Clasp my long hair, she snips it off in two strokes so it’s the same length as Sam’s. I run my fingers through the strands. My throat is scratchy and I try to swallow it away. All I can think about is Mum plaiting my hair last night.*’ (p. 66)
- What do Tash and Sam plan for their escape? Why do they want to take Eve with them? Is this a good idea?
- How does the author create suspense throughout Chapter 15?

Explore language used:

exposed, manoeuvre, rasping cry, demonstrations, tsampa grains, provisions, hessian, tarpaulin, averts, bulky, flinches at every sound, alley, corrugated metal, patrol

Chapters 16–20

- What is unusual about the sky over the mountains when they leave Mani’s?
- What is important about the yak bell hanging around Mani’s neck?
- Why does the author use italics to deliver the interior thoughts of the narrator?

Writing Opportunity – In the same style as the author, write what Sam might be thinking at key points of the journey. Do you think his thoughts would be similar or different to those expressed by Tash? Give reasons to support your answer.

- *'Wandering nomads'* (p. 86)

What was life like for a wandering nomad?

- Why does Tash feel a flutter of victory? Does she have this feeling for long?
- What does it mean to have a *'whole area under lockdown'*? (p. 88)
- What is the significance of the letter?
- Find examples of how the author creates tension and periods of calm.
- What do you think Sam means when he says *'We live on the roof of the world'*? (p. 94)
- *'Mum always says that you couldn't get much closer to the stars than this. When India collided with the rest of Asia the mountains were pushed up out of the earth towards the sky.'* (p. 94)

Writing Opportunity – Tash's Mum liked to tell her stories. Research traditional folk tales from Tibet and rewrite the stories in your own words.

- *'I have no idea where we're going but at least we're moving.'* (p. 101)
Where do you think they are going? Do you think Sam and Tash were right to go in the truck without knowing where they were going? What would have done in this situation?

Explore language used:

dismounts, scythes, mantis, propelled forward, bayonets, coarse hair, grunts, reluctantly, welded

Chapters 21–25

Writing Opportunity – Create a comic strip. Illustrate and write text for the key events that take place during Chapters 21–25. Remember to break the events down into ten key moments and to carefully plan the illustrations and text that will summarise the events succinctly.

- Why does the narrator keep having flashbacks of the man who set himself on fire at the market? What significance does this have in the story?
- Why does Jinpa give the bundle of notes back to Tash?
 - Jinpa states that *'it's good to meet some young warriors.'* (p. 116)

What key attributes are the characters going to need in order to complete their journey?

- Do you agree with Tash when she says that '*every life is precious*'? (p. 117)
Give reasons to justify your answer.

Explore language used:

memorised, thukpa, authoritative, informers, young warriors, craters, torrent, cascades, gorge, plummeted, precipice

Chapters 26–30

- Why is Tash worried about seeing the cranes migrating? What is meant by the term 'migration'? Investigate the migration pattern of a chosen species.
- '*We look like superheroes*' (p. 131)

Discuss the concept of '*a hero's journey*'. Do you think Tash and Sam are heroes? What does it mean to be a hero?

- Why does Tash's hope come crumbling to the ground at the beginning of Chapter 28? What do you think they should do in this situation?

Writing Opportunity – Create a comic strip. Illustrate and write text for the key events that take place during Chapters 26–30. Remember to break the events down into ten key moments and to carefully plan the illustrations and text that will summarise the events succinctly.

- Discuss how Tash and Sam show their personal strength, courage and self-belief throughout their journey across the Himalayas.
- Discuss how the story would be different if Tash and Sam had stayed in their home village.

Explore language used:

rummage, jerky, lumbering stride, rations, migrating, thenthuk, tingmo, angular shadows, snipers, lammergeyer, amplified, beckoning, coax, lumbers, mallet

Chapters 31–35

- How does the moon help with cracking the code in the letter?

Writing Opportunity – Chapter 32 is entitled 'Glaciers'. What is a glacier and how are they formed? Present findings in the form of an explanation text or powerpoint presentation.

- Visualisation – using the description on page 158, draw an illustration of the nomad's camp in the mountains.

Writing Opportunity – Discuss the way the author describes the camp using the senses.

Use a similar style to create own description of the setting ensuring mood and atmosphere are created through using the senses.

- Why is Tash suspicious of the nomads? Why do Tash and Sam escape from the nomads? Do you think the nomads are informers? How is Sam feeling at this point in the story? What clues does the author give to support your judgement?
- Retell Chapter 35 from Sam's perspective.
- How does the author create tension in Chapter 35?

Explore language used:

embers, propel, descending, frustration, distracted, ridge, distinctive, quizzically, grimaces, anchorage

Chapters 36–40

- What is a mandala? Why does Sam create a mandala on the floor of the cave?
- What secret has Sam been keeping from Tash? What is Tash's reaction to his news? Do you think it is fair to call Sam a liar? How will this change their relationship? Do you think Sam was justified in leaving Tash alone in the cave?
- What do you think has happened to Sam? Where do you think he has gone? Predict what might happen to Tash now Sam has gone.
- Why does Sam come back? Discuss the theme of friendship and loyalty.
- Why does Tash blame herself for Eve's death?

Explore language used:

unscramble, exhalation, loyal companion, motionless

Chapters 41–49

- ‘They’re desperate for the situation to change but they can’t resort to violence, they can’t go to war or fight.’ (pp. 200–201)

In groups, discuss the above statement given by Sam.

Ask pupils to share instances where groups of people have tried to restore the world to harmony.

- On page 205, Tash questions ‘Can we really make a difference?’ Do you think they are making a difference?
- How do Tash and Sam show courage in the later stages of their journey? Do they ever doubt their ability to complete their journey or question whether they are doing the right thing? Give examples from the text to support your answer. What does this say about their personalities?

Writing Opportunity – Gather examples of how the author describes the natural environment of the Himalayas in the story. Write your own description of the Himalayas using figurative language. Why is the surrounding environment important to the story?

- Visualisation – Draw an illustration of the market in India. How is it similar and different to the market described in Tibet?
- Does your opinion of any of the characters change in these chapters? Give reasons for your answer.
- Why does Dawa think it is important to ‘develop compassion, love and kindness’ rather than ‘anger in their hearts’? (p. 244)

Explore language used:

concede, ascent, ice gullies, crevasses, pinnacle, transfixed, adrenaline, grimacing, ricocheted, intuition, instinctively, dehydration, docile, transfixed, regime

Chapters 50–55

- ‘I am lost, with no direction and nothing left to hope for.’ (p. 259)

Why does Tash suddenly feel like this?

What happens to give Tash hope again?

- Before reading Chapter 52, discuss your ideas about the code in the letter using the clues given in previous chapters. Were your predictions correct? What does the code in the letter mean?
- What do you think is meant by the Dalai Lama’s words: ‘Hope leads us on unexpected pathways’?

- Predict what Tash and Sam might do next.

Writing Opportunity – Write about the next key event in the resistance fight against the Chinese regime in Tibet.

Write an additional chapter set one year later. Have there been any changes politically?

- Imagine you are Tash and summarise your journey across the Himalayas to your mum and dad.

Writing Opportunity – Write a newspaper article describing the heroic journey of the two main characters.

Explore language used:

kora, rickshaws, verge, pining

Post-Reading

- Write character profiles or poems for each of the main characters. Use similes, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, prepositions, metaphors and personification in your descriptions.

Make a list of quotes from the book to support your judgement.

- What can we learn from Tash and Sam?

What does Tash learn about herself?

Tash and Sam go on both a physical and personal journey. Discuss.

How do they develop as characters?

- Which moments in the story did you find the most tense? Find examples of key vocabulary and phrases which create tension. What is the effect of using these descriptions?
- Why does the author use short chapters? (Possible answers could be to add pace, tension and intrigue.)
- What do you like about the techniques used by the author?
- Discuss the themes covered within the story (family, friendship, relationships, loyalty, freedom, hope, fear, death, bereavement, courage, faith, self-belief, war, peace, heroism, determination etc.).
- Choose a key moment in the book and change the event. Rewrite the chapter ensuring the pupils adopt the style of the author.

- Write a back cover blurb for *Running on the Roof of the World*. Remember it needs to grab the attention of a potential reader but should not give too much of the storyline away.
- What message does the novel teach the reader? What does the novel tell us about life in an area of Asia?

Cross-Curriculum Links

History

- Study the invasion of the Chinese army into Tibet and the effect this had on everyday life.
- Debate the pros and cons of the Chinese invasion.
- Discuss the effect of political conflict on the people in Tibet. How did the Chinese change the life of the Tibetans?
- Why did many Tibetans decide to become refugees in India, Nepal and elsewhere?
- What was life like for a refugee at this time?
- Identify and describe points of view, attitudes and values shown in primary and secondary sources of evidence.
- Discuss the role of propaganda in a world conflict.
- Investigate explorers of the Himalayas throughout history.

Geography

- What is life like in Tibet and India? Explore the culture, food, buildings and physical geography (size, location, climate, landscape etc).
- Explore and understand the key aspects of the physical geography of the area:
 - Mountains (climate, wildlife, plants, how the Himalayas were formed, why Mount Everest is so dangerous)
 - Glaciers
 - Grasslands
 - Rivers (journey of a river, importance to settlements, caring for the environment, impact of pollution)
- *'Most of Asia's rivers come from up here,' he says, gazing at the raging water below us. 'The Dza Chu, the Dri Chu and the Ma Chu.'*

How have the physical features of Tibet and India influenced the civilisations that developed there?

- Create a tourist guide for Tibet including the capital, Lhasa.



Science

- Throughout the story the author makes reference to the moon and stars. As part of a study related to Earth and space, pupils could research information about the moon and star constellations.

Art

- Sam creates a mandala pattern in the cave. This is a symbolic picture of the universe, symbolising unity and harmony. Pupils could create their own geometric mandala pattern.
- Investigate and study a range of different traditional art from Tibet and India.
- Pupils could study a range of paintings of the Himalayas in different styles of mediums (pastels, watercolours, oils) and create their own artwork using each of the styles for inspiration.

Religious Education

- Learn about beliefs through the study of Buddhism and Hindu gods.