Chapter 5

Teaching Jacqueline Wilson

The Suitcase Kid is a family fiction concerning the traumas experienced by a 10-year-old girl as a result of her parents' separation. The themes of marital breakdown, jealousy, anger and the dislocating experience of learning to live with two new families provide material that fits very well with the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) framework. This unit of work will therefore focus on activities that can be interrelated with the SEAL framework and the English and art curriculum. The work suggested in this chapter is particularly applicable to themes 2, 6 and 7: Getting on and falling out, Relationships and Changes. The most important outcome of the work associated with this book is that children enjoy its gritty realism and engage with the central character's struggle to come to terms with her new life. Activities most suitable for a SEAL focus are identified by this icon: 😊. The trial workshop took place with a mixed age group of Years 4, 5 and 6 pupils, and most of them demonstrated a strong identification and empathy with the issues raised in the book.

Synopsis of Jacqueline Wilson's The Suitcase Kid

Andy's parents no longer get on together, so they decide to separate. This means that 10-year-old Andy has to leave Mulberry Cottage and all that she loved about it. This is bad enough, but even worse is the reality of having to live with two new families in two different homes. Andy's life is suddenly turned upside down, and the weekly shuttle between her mother and father is tiring and destabilising. Andy clashes with 'little ratbag Katie', the indulged younger daughter of her mother's new partner, and she is deeply hostile to her dad's new partner, Carrie, and her hippy, peace-loving, wholefood lifestyle. Andy falls badly behind in her work at school, gets into trouble with both new families, and cannot ever be alone when the worst thing imaginable happens. She loses her beloved toy Radish, her only constant friend. Just when things could not get more unbearable, she finds kindness and affection in a new relationship and the beginnings of an acceptance of her new life, which holds some unexpected compensations.

Preparation

Some time spent on practising the different voices in advance of reading the story will enliven its reading. The most important ones are Andy, Katie, Graham (Katie's brother), Andy's mum and dad, Uncle Bill and Carrie.
Reading the story

As you read through the story, get the children, at the end of each chapter, to try to guess what subject the next letter in the alphabet will focus on and ask them to think about why Jacqueline Wilson has chosen to tell Andy's story using an alphabetical structure (leave any responses to this question until the discussion activities, after the story has been completed). While they are listening to the story, encourage them to put themselves in Andy's shoes and think about how they might have felt in her position. It would also be useful for the drama and discussion activities to prompt the children to step outside Andy's perspective occasionally and take one of the other characters in order to consider their side of the story and the difficulties they may be facing.

Responding to The Suitcase Kid

While the first-person narrative structure of The Suitcase Kid is straightforward and easy to follow, this does not mean that challenging and searching thinking cannot be demanded of the children. The discussion on questioning written texts in Chapter 3, Part 1 is equally applicable to this text and should be revisited before selecting questions for the discussion activity. Encouraging the children to move gradually from reporting story content to an analysis of the deeper meanings, patterns and connecting themes within the story is the key to ensuring that children gain greater insight and understanding about the book as well as its wider social and emotional issues. The model used in Chapter 3 is presented again, this time with some exemplifications from The Suitcase Kid. You are advised to make a selection for any one session which follows progressively from the content – narrative – structure framework.

A model for questioning written texts

1. Broad questions that focus on general impressions of the story as a whole. For example, Which parts of the story did you enjoy most? In which part of the story did you feel most sorry for Andy?

2. Questions about the characters and the parts they play. For example, Which character do you find most interesting? Who is the most important character? Which character do you like the most?

3. Search for puzzles in the story and those parts you did not like or understand. For example, Why is Graham so silent and why does he choose to spend so much time alone?

4. Question about narration and point of view. Who is telling the story? When the story is told in the first person through a particular character's viewpoint, does this make you more sympathetic to the character?

5. Identify patterns or links in the story. In The Suitcase Kid, for example, Wilson has deliberately chosen to use an alphabetical framing device as the structure or form for her book so that she can zoom in and out of Andy's experience of marital breakdown. Why has she chosen to tell the story in this way?
As has been suggested in previous chapters, seat the children next to someone they can work well with. In order to achieve maximum pupil involvement, use a paired discussion strategy for the first two or three activities at least. In the first few teacher-directed questions, I have indicated where paired and whole-class interactions might best take place. The remaining questions leave this to teachers' judgement and discretion. The following questions broadly follow the content — narration — structure framework detailed in the model on the previous page.

◊ **Group discussion and interaction**

◊ **Why did you find the story interesting?** Give at least two reasons. Discuss in pairs first. Share some responses with the whole class.

◊ **Tell your partner why you enjoyed the story.** Give three reasons. Share one or two different sets of reasons with the whole class.

◊ **Which part of the story did you enjoy most and why?** (Paired activity).

◊ **Were there any parts of the story that puzzled or shocked you or which you did not understand?**

◊ **Divide the children into small groups and assign each of them one of the following characters: Andy, Graham, Andy's mum, Andy's dad, Katie, Paula, Carrie, Uncle Bill, Zen and Crystal. Each group is to contribute all they know from the story about their assigned characters. One person from each group should share their knowledge of the different characters with the rest of the class.**

◊ **Which character interested you most?** Give reasons for your choice.

◊ **Who do you think is the most important character in the story?** Give reasons for your choice.

◊ **Which character do you like or dislike most in the story?** Refer to those parts of the story that make you react in this way about your chosen character so that you begin your answer like this: 'I like X because . . . ' or 'I dislike X because . . . '

◊ **Who is telling the story?** When one particular character is telling the story, how does this affect the way you feel about the character narrator?

◊ **Why do you think Jacqueline Wilson has chosen to tell her story from Andy's point of view?**

◊ **What part does Radish play in the telling of the story?**
What kinds of things do we learn about Andy that we would not know about without the inclusion of Radish in the story?

Which character changes most in the book? Use examples from the story as evidence for your reasons.

Why do you think the author has chosen letters of the alphabet to organise the way she tells her story?

The author knew that she was writing this story for an audience of children, so what do you think were some of the reasons that led to her decision to use the alphabet device to structure her story?

With a partner, make a list of at least three things that you learned from the story about what matters most when a child has to get used to living a new kind of life as a result of her or his parents splitting up.

Drama activities

The following activities do not depend on the use of the school hall. A space created in the classroom by moving the furniture safely to the sides of the room is perfectly adequate. The following sound effects are not essential, but they greatly enhanced the quality of dramatic involvement of the children who participated in the trial workshop.

Menu of activities

1. Individual character freeze-frame
2. Group sculpting activity
3. Hot-seating
4. Mime improvisation, warm-up
5. Mime improvisation, ‘Andy tries to rescue Radish’
6. Group role play, ‘Understanding Andy’s feelings’
7. Cool-down

Useful props

- Sound effect of footsteps crunching through leaves as though someone were walking through a forest. Available for a small fee at http://www.tradebit.com/tagworld.php/crunching-footsteps.
Both of these sound effects can be downloaded onto a CD. Either or both would work well with the drama activity to be outlined later in this section.

**Freeze-frame activity (ten minutes)**

Before you begin this activity, it will be helpful to provide children with a list of the key characters and their role in the story, either in the form of a photocopied sheet or displayed on an interactive whiteboard. The idea of this activity is that children freeze in role on a given command.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The characters in <em>The Suitcase Kid</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy (Andrea) – central character, narrator and protagonist, 10 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy’s mum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy’s dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radish (Andy’s tiny spotted Sylvanian rabbit, her best friend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie (Andy’s stepsister), 10 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham (Andy’s stepbrother), 12 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula (Andy’s stepsister), 14 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Bill, Andy’s mum’s new partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie, Andy’s dad’s new partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal and Zen, Carrie’s 5-year-old twins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The children sit in a space on the floor and are asked to choose the character that they would like to be. Before beginning the activity, ask the children to:

- Think carefully about who you are and what you might be doing. You can either stand still and mime an action typical of the character you have chosen, or you can move around the room in role.

- If you are moving in role, think about the differences in the way you would walk if you were, for instance, Graham, who has a jerky walk, or Paula, who thinks a lot about her appearance and loves make-up, cool clothes and pop stars.

On the instruction ‘Go’, the children move into role. On the command of ‘Freeze’, the teacher and any other adults in the room have to guess which character a chosen child is playing. Repeat one more time, ensuring that the children hold their action absolutely still on the command of ‘Freeze’.

Now split the class into two, one half watching while the other half mime a character different from the one they had chosen before. Tell the watching half of the class to concentrate on watching one or two children only.

- **Go.**
- **Freeze.**
Selected members of the watching half try to guess which character(s) they were playing.

Praise the children for what they did well and change over so that the watching half become the acting half. Repeat as above.

**Group sculpting activity (ten minutes)**

Get into groups of three. One of you is to be Andy, the other Andy's mum and the third, Andy's dad.

Make a group sculpture of Andy, her mum and her dad, showing the conflict and differences between the three as the parents are on the point of separating.

Share some of the group sculptures, asking selected groups to explain to the rest of the class the thinking behind their group sculpture.

**Hot-seating activity (fifteen minutes)**

Children choose which character they would like to be in 'the hot seat'. Limit the choice of characters to Andy, Katie, Andy's mum and Andy's dad. *(More characters can be added if you wish to extend this activity.)* You may need to remind the children of what was said in the discussion about the main characteristics of each of these before beginning the activity. Seat the children in a horseshoe shape with a chair in the gap of the crescent. Before beginning, ask the children to:

Think carefully about the character you would like to play and the kind of person he or she is.

Close your eyes for a minute or so and think about the role their character plays in the story in relation to the other characters.

Begin the activity by choosing a child who is reasonably confident about performing in front of others and who will be able to sustain credibility in their chosen role. This will set the tone for the others. Children and teachers then ask questions of the character in the hot seat in turns. Keep the pace moving and give as many children as time allows a chance to be in the hot seat. If children choose to hot-seat the same character as one that has previously been 'hot-seated', it is important to encourage them to ask questions different from those asked before, otherwise the activity will become tedious and undemanding for the new child in the hot seat.

**Mime improvisation: warm-up**

Scenario: Andy cannot sleep without Radish, so she sneaks downstairs and out of the front door to try to find the house in Larkspur Lane where she lost her. She is very tired and frightened but she has to find Radish.

In order to raise children's awareness of how they might show their distress at losing something very precious to them, do the warm-up activity first, focusing on the movement and gestures made with the hands.
Find a space on the floor.

Imagine you have lost something very precious. You do not need to tell anyone what it is.

Watch while I mime something precious that I have lost and find again. Notice whether it is big or small, alive or not, by the way I use my hands and eyes.

Children then mime their own 'lost and found' scenario.

Think about how big or small it is.

Is it an animal or a favourite toy or something very special which someone has given you?

Show by the movements of your hands and the way you pick it up what kind of 'thing' it is. Make sure you follow every movement of your hands with your eyes.

How do you show your distress when you realise you have lost it? What will you do to show your joy and relief when you have found it?

Think about where you lost your precious belonging. Is it outside in a garden, on a beach, in the woods or somewhere in your house?

Mime the sequence from the moment of loss to the moment of finding it again.

Share two or three examples of convincing and effective mime. Point out examples of the convincing use of hands and eyes.

Rescuing Radish

Sit or lie down and think about Andy's desperate search in dangerous circumstances to find Radish. Shut your eyes and listen while I give you this sequence:

- Get out of bed.
- Creep carefully downstairs, trying not to make a sound.
- Put on your scarf.
- Slowly open the front door, trying not to make it creak.
- Start walking through the streets. All the time, you are scared that someone may be following you.
- Climb over the gate into the garden of the house in Larkspur Lane.
- Creep round the edge of the lake, treading very carefully in the dark.
- Find the tree where you dropped Radish.
- Try to reach for her inside the tree hole.
- While you are trying desperately to feel for her familiar shape . . . something startles you. Is it an animal? Something is making a rustling sound in the grass. Is it somebody's footsteps? What is it?
- Freeze into a position of fear and hold absolutely still.

Play the sound effects you have recorded while the children imagine the scenario you have given them.
Go into your first position (lying in bed, having made up your mind to find Radish, whatever danger it will involve).

Play the sound effect after they have crept downstairs, opened the door and started to walk away from the house. Ask the children to repeat the whole sequence at least once, saying clearly how it could be improved.

Think about how you can increase the suspense in your mime. Perhaps one of the stairs creaks loudly as you go downstairs, and you have to stop, freeze and listen, fearing that you may have woken someone up. . . . Show this tension in your movements and in the expression in your face. . . .

No one seems to have stirred, and you go on towards the front door, grabbing your scarf as you go. Continue until the moment you freeze in terror as you hear a sound coming from somewhere in the Larkspur Road garden.

Share one or two individual mimes and get the children to say what worked well.

SEAL Theme 2: Getting on and falling out (twenty minutes)

Some of the children as well as adults in *The Suitcase Kid* do not always act in Andy’s best interests and are sometimes thoughtless, unkind, selfish and hurtful. In this activity, the children are going to be asked to think about three different occasions when Andy is hurt very badly as a consequence of other people’s selfishness and cruelty. The first of these incidents concerns Katie’s, Paula’s and Graham’s grandparents, who deliberately exclude Andy from the presents they buy for their grandchildren, adding insult to injury with the words ‘But Paula and Graham and Katie are our grandchildren. . . . Andrea’s nothing to do with us.’ Read from the third line on p. 96 beginning ‘But the worst ones of all . . .’ to the bottom of the page.

The second incident occurs when Andy’s dad arrives to collect her for the weekly visit to his new family. Unfortunately, Andy is ill, but she is torn between staying with her mother until she gets better and leaving with her father, who is insisting that she get up and go with him as arranged. Read from the second line on page 56 of *The Suitcase Kid* beginning ‘And then the others came home from school . . .’ to the end of the first sentence on p. 57.

The third occasion happens when Andy is distraught because Radish has fallen down a hole in a tree in the garden at Larkspur Lane. Everyone else has gone to bed and only Andy and Katie are awake. Andy is desperately missing Radish; Katie knows it and plays on her distress. Read the last paragraph on p. 115 beginning ‘Down a tree, is she, Andy Pandy?’ When all three passages have been read, give the following instructions:

Get into groups of three and four. Each group is given the ‘grandparents’, the ‘Andy’s dad’ or the ‘Katie’ incident.

Find a space on the floor with your particular group. Discuss between you how Andy would have felt at the time of your assigned incident. When you have thought about how you would feel, think up a sentence you would like to say to the person responsible for your hurtful ‘incident’.

Stand or sit in a way that shows how Andy is feeling.
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Find a space on the floor with your particular group. Discuss between you how Andy would have felt at the time of your assigned incident. When you have thought about how you would feel, think up a sentence you would like to say to the person responsible for your hurtful 'incident'.

Stand or sit in a way that shows how Andy is feeling.
Take it in turns to say one sentence each that expresses Andy’s reaction to the incident.

Think carefully about the body posture she would adopt. What expression would be on your face? How will you show your feelings with your eyes and mouth? What will you be doing with your head, arms, hands and legs? Will you be lying, sitting or standing up?

Decide who is going to speak first, second, third, and so on.

Give the children one or two minutes to make this decision.

On the count of three – Go!

Share one of each of the three different ‘Andy’ incidents and praise what was effective and convincing about each of them.

Stay in the same ‘incident’ groups. Think of three or four things you could say and do to lessen the hurt and conflict they caused Andy.

Give children two or three minutes to discuss this in their groups.

Sit or stand in their group and say one kind thing they could say to help Andy feel better.

Share one or two individual responses from each of the three group scenarios. Acknowledge each of the groups’ responses, highlighting constructive and imaginative suggestions.

Cool-down activity (two to three minutes)

Lie comfortably on the floor and close your eyes.

Either imagine you are Andy dreaming about Mulberry Cottage and all the things you used to do there or imagine the best place you have ever been to and what it was that made you so happy when you were there.

When you are ready, slowly get up and stand, breathing deeply in a relaxed position.

Writing, drawing and SEAL activities

Writing and language work

Three or four extra copies of the text will be needed for this activity. The objective of this part of the unit of work is to draw two of the characters in *The Suitcase Kid* using Nick Sharratt’s simple, bold black-and-white line drawings as a model, along with the descriptions of their
appearance and personalities in the book. Begin by focusing the children's attention on one of two of Nick Sharratt's drawings, encouraging them to note, in particular, how he communicates the changing mood of his characters by very small alterations in the arch of their eyebrows, shape of the mouth, position of hands and arms, and so on. Enlarged paper photocopies or copies displayed on an interactive whiteboard will provide a fruitful focus for a whole-class discussion and analysis of why his illustrations fit so well with Jacqueline Wilson's stories.

Display an enlarged version of the following description of Andy and Katie on the interactive whiteboard from pp. 13–14.

My name is Andrea West but I mostly get called Andy. My sly little stepsister Katie calls me Andy Pandy. Everyone just thinks she's being cute. Katie specializes in cute. We are exactly the same age — in actual fact she's five days older than me — and yet she barely comes up to my waist. I happen to be big. Katie is extremely small. People don't twig she's ten. They only think she's seven or eight and she plays up to this for all she's worth. She blinks her blue beady eyes and wrinkles her small pink nose and puts on this squeaky little sugar mouse voice. People go all drooly and practically nibble her ears. Katie is not a sugar mouse. Katie is a King-Size Rat.

If the boys would prefer to draw two of the male characters, they could choose to do Uncle Bill Graham or Andy's dad. There are descriptions of Uncle Bill (pp. 15–16) and Graham (p. 21) Encourage the children to find further information about Katie and Andy, or Uncle Bill and Graham, from copies of the text. When they have decided which two characters they are going to focus on, give each child an A4-sized piece of paper and ask them to fold it in half vertically.

At the top of each side, write the names of each of your characters.

Questions to stimulate and direct the children's thinking

- Think about the kind of hair your character has and the expression he or she will wear.
- What kind of clothes and shoes will they be wearing? You can only use black colour or felt-tipped pens, so think carefully about pattern, design, shape, logo, etc.
- Think about an object that your character(s) would be most easily identified with. For example, Graham's would be a computer. This should be part of your drawing (see example of work on pp. 155–156, 159–161).
- When you have found out all you can about your characters, list their characteristics in each of the columns on your piece of paper, including details of their clothes, design and shape of hair, and facial expression.
- When you are very clear about what the precise details you are going to put in your drawings, you are ready to begin your first drawing. Remember to make your character fill up most of a plain piece of A4 paper.
- You may wish to label parts of your drawings and/or draw a thought bubble coming out of your character's head saying what he or she is thinking at the time.

Writing and drawing activities

The following range of activities are designed to develop empathy and the ability to write and think from another point of view using The Suitcase Kid as the context. The development of this
orm of writing closely interrelates with empathy and the themes of *relationships and changes* in the SEAL curriculum. Teachers may wish to place a greater emphasis on one over the other, but the activities provide sufficient scope for development in *both* writing and social and emotional aspects of learning.

***Radish’s point of view***

> Write two diary accounts of Radish’s best and worst day. Start the first paragraph with the sentence ‘My worst day was when . . .’ and the second with ‘My best day was when . . .’ (see examples of work on pp. 157–158).

> It would help you to organise your thoughts better if you made two lists, under the headings of ‘Worst Day’ and ‘Best Day’, of all the things that happened, including who was there at the time when things happened, where you were at the time and what Andy was doing.

> Give very clear details about *why* it was your worst and your best day, describing your feelings as well as those of Andy.

> You will make your diary more interesting to read if you include what you thought about one or two of the other characters’ behaviour and what they were doing on your best and worst days.

> Make your descriptions of where you were when good or bad things happened as clear and as detailed as possible – as though you were painting a picture with words instead of paint and brushes.

***Acts of kindness – thinking, talking, writing and drawing***

Acts of blatant self-interest, meanness and spite are balanced in the story by generosity, sensitivity and kindness. It is important that children see the latter as being as much a part of life as the former and that the balancing of these extremes of human behaviour in the plot and characterisation is a central ingredient in the power of any story to sustain its readers’ interest and involvement. In the following activity, children are asked to consider what it was in Mr and Mrs Peters’ behaviour that made such an impact on Andy and why their kindness mattered so much to her. Before starting the writing activity, get the children to think about the following in pairs or small groups:

> Help each other recall from the story everything you can remember about Mr and Mrs Peters and the kind things they did for Andy, sharing one or two contributions with the whole class.

***Filling Larkspur Lake with kindness***

> Work together in pairs with one large piece of paper between you. You are going to draw a large picture of a lake like the one in Larkspur Lane and fill it with kindness. You can make up your own shape for the lake and your own ideas for what you put in it. Nick Sharratt’s drawing on p. 73 of *The Suitcase Kid* might give you some starting points. On
another, smaller sheet of paper, make a list of all the kind things Mr and Mrs Peters did. You can do this on your own or together, taking it in turns to do the writing.

◇ Decide between you which you think are the most important things on the list which made Andy feel happier.

◇ You are going to write these in bold, clear writing on pieces of paper cut out in the shape of leaves, yacht sails or fishes, or any other shape that you think would fit well in a lake setting.

◇ You will need to make your shapes big enough to have enough space on each of them to write a sentence from your list of Mr and Mrs Peters' kind acts.

◇ Do not make your shapes too big or you will not be able to fit many of them on to your lake.

◇ When you have filled up your shapes with the most important 'kind acts' chosen from your list, stick them carefully on to your lake. Your lakes of kindness can then be part of a classroom display or the focus of an assembly.

If you wanted to place a greater emphasis on the SEAL aspect of this activity, you could involve the whole class in making a large frieze of the lake with everyone writing an 'act of kindness' sentence arising from the story, on an appropriate shape for sticking on to the lake. The display can be used as a visual reference point to remind children about the importance of kindness, especially when they are particularly unhappy. It can also be used in connection with other SEAL-related work on the theme of relationships.

😊 Writing activity: making changes

There are at least two other characters in the book who show kindness and sensitivity towards Andy and whose understanding behaviour slowly helps her begin to adjust to her new life. Towards the end of the story, Andy also makes some changes in her thinking and understanding about life.

Organise the children into discussion groups of 4 to 6. Give them five minutes to come up with a response to the following:

1 Name two other characters in the book who display kindness and understanding towards Andy.

2 What do they do and say which makes them genuine acts of kindness (where they do something positive rather than just talking about what they might do)?

3 Suggest how these acts and words of kindness help Andy begin to make changes in her attitude to both her new families.

The last instruction is the most challenging because it makes demands upon the children to engage in some higher-order thinking about the way change can happen, even when it is unexpected and unanticipated. It may therefore need some teacher support and guidance.
Write a letter to your best friend

- Imagine you are Andy and you want to tell someone about some of the better things that are now happening in your life. Write a letter to your best friend telling her or him about the friendships you have made with Mr and Mrs Peters and Graham. Say how you met Mr and Mrs Peters and tell the friend about some of the kind things they have done for you.
- Explain how you did not think you would ever be friends with Graham because he shuts himself up in his bedroom all the time, but once you got to know him, he turned out to be a really good friend.
- Mention too how you are even beginning to like the irritating Carrie more than you did and tell your friend why.
- End your letter by telling your friend how these new friendships have helped you to change your attitude to both your new families and what new things you have learned as a result of the hard times you have had in recent months.
- You could conclude your letter with some face drawings of your new friends so that your best friend can see what they look like.

Writing in the style of Jacqueline Wilson

This is a demanding, extended writing task and is more appropriate for Year 5 and Year 6 children. It may take two or three sustained writing sessions to complete.

- Using the following five-part story structure, ask the children to write about Andy from the perspective of one of the other characters: Bill, Graham, Katie, Carrie, Paula, Zen, Crystal, her mum or her dad.
- Start by telling your readers what your name is. For example, you might begin like this: ‘My name is Graham. I wear glasses and I’m a bit shorter than Andy even though I’m 12 years old. There’s been a lot of rows in the house since Andy and her mum came to live with us, especially between Katie and Andy. I can’t stand shouting and bickering, so I keep out of the way and stay in my bedroom.’

1. Introduce yourself by giving your name, stating what you look like and what you first feelings are about Andy when you first meet her. Use the above example to help you.
2. Describe the first time Andy has breakfast in your house. What are your feelings toward her? Describe her from your point of view. What clothes is she wearing? What thing do you like about her? What things irritate you? Invent a funny incident that occur while you are all sitting round the table eating breakfast.
3. An incident occurs between you and Andy or another person in the family which really annoys you. Describe what led up to it, what happened and how it ended.
4. Andy loses Radish and is very upset about it. What are your feelings about this? Do you feel sorry for her? Do you think she is making a lot of fuss about a silly toy? What do you do?
5. Whatever happens, Andy is going to continue going back and forth between her mum and her dad’s new homes. Something happens to make her new life less unhappy an
more bearable. Describe what it is. Do you have anything to do with it? How does it affect you and Andy? What happens can be different from the book; make up your own ending.

**Things to think about as you write**

- While Jacqueline Wilson writes about serious issues, she uses lots of humour to make things lighter and less serious. Bring some humour into your short story.
- Describe your characters in very clear detail which anyone reading your story would immediately be able to picture and imagine.
- Try to make the five parts of your story flow together so they become a whole story rather than five separate, disconnected parts.
- Enliven your short story by adding one or two illustrations in the style of Nick Sharratt.

**Objectives and learning outcomes**

**Lesson/series of lessons/unit of work objectives**

1. To deepen children’s understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of *The Suitcase Kid*.
2. To help children develop a beginning understanding of how Jacqueline Wilson deals with the issues of marital separation and its effects on children and adults.
3. To provide writing, drawing, drama, and speaking and listening activities that will deepen and extend children’s understanding of the characters in the story as well as how they change and develop.
4. To use parts of *The Suitcase Kid* to develop and increase children’s social and emotional understanding of the effects of loss, unkindness and thoughtlessness, and how these can be countered with kindness, sensitivity, empathy and understanding.
5. To make explicit links with the themes of *Getting on and falling out, Relationships* and *Changes* in the SEAL curriculum.
6. To interrelate the SEAL framework with the English and art curriculum using *The Suitcase Kid* as the primary focus.
7. To extend children’s knowledge and understanding of the first-person narration writing form and why it works so well for Jacqueline Wilson’s family fictions.
8. To extend children’s understanding of how Wilson’s writing grips and sustains her readers’ interest and engagement.
9. To sufficiently stimulate children’s interest and understanding of *The Suitcase Kid* for them to want to read more books by Jacqueline Wilson and other writers of the family fiction genre.

**Lesson/series of lessons/unit of work outcomes**

By the end of the lesson/unit of work, the children will be able to:

1. apply the beginnings of a more critical and analytical understanding of *The Suitcase Kid*;
2. engage in writing, discussion, art and drama activities that deepen their understanding of characterisation and how characters change and develop in a fiction narrative;
3. see the connection between a fiction story and wider social and emotional learning with respect to empathy, managing feelings, relationships and changes;
4 write in a range of forms that show a developing ability to write at length using a first­person narration;
5 understand more about how and why Jacqueline Wilson's books sustain and engage such a large audience;
6 read a wider range of books by Jacqueline Wilson and other writers of the family fiction genre with interest, enjoyment and appreciation.

Diary

While most of the children in the trial workshop enjoyed the reading of *The Suitcase Kid*, it was evident that some of the older boys were less engaged. Given the girl protagonist and her close relationship with a toy girl rabbit, this was not too surprising. However, all the children were caught by the drama activities. The hot-seating activity revealed that the boys, in particular, were very interested in the issues of marital separation and its effects on both children and adults in the story. For example, a Year 6 boy chose to go in the hot seat as Andy's dad. One of the girls asked, 'Why did you leave Andy's mum? She is much better-looking than that skinny Carrie.' He quickly retorted, 'Looks aren't everything. I got sick of the nagging and shouting and I can talk to Carrie. She understands me and we can talk honestly with each other without the rows.' Another girl responded, 'You should have tried harder to understand Andy's mum and tried to work things out.' Again, the boy responded with remarkable poise: 'I like Carrie's personality and I can be happier with her than I ever could be with Andy's Mum. I wish we could have worked things out but we just didn't get on.'

The class teacher commented that all the drama activities helped the children to gain a deeper understanding and empathy with the key characters in the story. The mime activity based on a personal loss scenario followed by the 'Rescuing Radish' improvisation gripped the children's imagination, and the sound effects of crunching footsteps and spooky music certainly intensified their involvement. They were very keen to improve upon their first efforts, and by the end of the session their mime had reached a very high standard.

The key point of pedagogical interest here is the significance of the structured sequence to the children's commitment and engagement with the improvised mime. It gave them an internal narrative that they could replay as a kind of visual score in their minds. It also provided a clear and bounded framework with a beginning, development and resolution, which also allowed scope for their own individual interpretation. All the children in this wide age range (Years 4 to 6) were able to experience success and enjoyment in this activity. The discussion beforehand had also served to sharpen their understanding of the characters' behaviour and their relationship within the story as a whole.

The writing and drawing activities were accessible to most of the children, and they especially liked drawing in the style of Nick Sharratt (see examples of work on pp. 155–161). The differentiated writing activities worked well for the younger age groups but those devised for the older children did not sufficiently draw upon their clear interest in the conflicts and relationship issues that arise between adults and children when parental separation occurs. They have therefore been redesigned to take greater account of their close interrelationship with the SEAL curriculum and to offer opportunities for more challenging and extended forms of writing.
Examples of children's work
Figure 5.2 Work by Amy (Year 5).
My best day was when I was

My worst day was when I fell

Raddish's View
Radish's View

My worst day was when I fell down a hole in a pond and I banged my head on the side of the pond and loads of slugs were surrounding me and Dad was trying to reach me but her arms weren't long enough.

My best day was when I was sailing on the lake on my new boat with and pushing me along the water with the breeze wafting in my face.

Figure 5.4 Work by Holly (Year 4).
Teaching resources

• Copy of The Suitcase Kid. The edition used for the trial workshop was J. Wilson (1993) The Suitcase Kid, Corgi Yearling Books, London: Random House Children’s Books. Two or three extra copies would be useful so that children can use them to refer to the text for help with the writing and drawing activities.
• Sound effects of crunching footsteps and spooky music. Full details for these are given on p. 143.
• List of key characters (see p. 144). This can be displayed on an interactive whiteboard or large photocopied sheet.
• Enlarged photocopies of two of Nick Sharratt’s illustrations.
• Good-quality black Berol Colourpens or felt pens.
• Sheets of plain white A3- and A4-sized paper.
• Paper for cutting into fish, yacht sails or leaf shapes.

Useful websites and additional sources of information

For an interesting and informative interview with Jacqueline Wilson in which she discusses her approach to writing including the source of her idea for the alphabetic framing device used in The Suitcase Kid, see:


For a comprehensive biography and complete list of Jacqueline Wilson’s books:

For a profile on Jacqueline Wilson:

For the official, interactive Jacqueline Wilson fan club website: