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 Dan Smith Author

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## MY FRIEND THE ENEMY BY DAN SMITH

It is summer 1941 in the rural North-East of England. For Peter, the war is a long way away, being fought by a faceless enemy. His only contact with the events happening overseas is through his father, a local gamekeeper who has gone away to fight. However, all that changes when he witnesses a German plane shot down over the woods near his home. The plane crashes, seemingly killing all those on board, but Peter is sure he saw a parachute opening moments before the crash ...

Together with his new friend Kim, an evacuee from Newcastle, Peter returns to the crash site in order to claim an all-important souvenir. But when the souvenir hunt is cut short (after the Home Guard interrupt proceedings) the pair retreat to the woods. It is then that Peter discovers he has absent-mindedly picked up an object neither expected to find - a gun.

Keen to keep their souvenir a secret, Peter and Kim return to the woods to hide the weapon. But in doing this they come across another, more terrifying find. Deep in the woods they find themselves face-to-face with an injured German airman!

Torn between their feelings of pity for the wounded man, and a sense of duty to their country, the pair eventually decide to take care of the enemy combatant; and they set about bringing him food and provisions.

As they concentrate their efforts on bringing their new German friend back to health, Peter and Kim find themselves battling other 'enemies' closer to home.

Through it all Peter and Kim must make some tough decisions about what is right and what is wrong.



## **WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS ...**

My uncle was a rear-gunner on a bomber in the war, and when he was shot down I hoped that someone would look after him. This is the choice facing our hero Peter, who finds out that being brave sometimes means doing what is most difficult. Loyalty to real values is even harder when war seems so black and white. Dan Smith's courageous story is exciting, moving, and full of conflict. I think you'll find yourself really caring about what's going to happen next.

**BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE**

## **AUTHOR BACKGROUND**

Growing up, I led three lives. In one I survived the day-to-day humdrum of boarding school, while in another I travelled the world, finding adventure in the paddy fields of South East Asia and the jungles of Brazil. But the third life I lived in a world of my own, making up stories . . . which is where some people say I still live most of the time!

## **AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

I loved writing this book for lots of reasons. My Friend the Enemy isn't about me or anyone I know, but it feels incredibly personal and I came to know the two main characters, Peter and Kim, very well while I was writing about them. I'm also fascinated by the history of WWII and the strength of the people who endured the hardship of such a terrible and massive war. It must have been both exciting and terrifying for children to have lived with the constant bombing and fear that their fathers and brothers and uncles would never come home. My own grandfather was a captain in the British Army during WWII, my grandmother's sister was an anti-aircraft gunner in the ATS, and my great-grandfather was the Secretary of State for War in 1945, so there's a bit of family history there too.

## **Describe My Friend the Enemy in three words ...**

Exciting. Adventurous. Emotional.



# THEMES

- War
- Friendship
- Courage and Bravery
- Trust
- Bullying
- Loyalty
- Rural Life
- Understanding differences

# WRITING STYLE

My Friend the Enemy is an exciting historical adventure story set against the backdrop of the Second World War. The writing is richly descriptive and reflective, and depicts the historical and cultural environment of the rural North-East of England in the early 1940's. There is a strong emphasis on the development of friendships and trust, and the drama is played out at a domestic level, with family relationships forming a significant part of the novel. The main characters face moral dilemmas and bullying, and there are a couple of moments in the novel that some younger readers may find upsetting.



I am a huge believer in reading for pleasure, and I am not suggesting that after reading every chapter of a book, students should carry out a task and analyse the text. Sometimes it is better to simply discuss how readers feel about the story, or to maintain the momentum of the story and keep on reading. However, in the following pages, you will find some suggested activities based on selected chapters of My Friend The Enemy. At the end of this document I have included some more general ideas for tasks, and some proposed research to enrich specific aspects of the story.

Please feel free to use these tasks in any way that suits your students, and your enjoyment of My Friend The Enemy.



# 1. Crash (Chapter 1)

## Using Imagery

Peter's encounter with the German plane at the start of the novel is depicted through descriptive language. Notably, the plane's engines are anthropomorphised at the bottom of page 3, becoming 'whining and coughing ... dirty giants.' This is a good opportunity to explore the meaning of the term 'anthropomorphic', and could lead on to some interesting written work. Following a close reading of this passage (detailing exactly what it is that makes the engines appear human), ask students to write about a real life experience, where they have 'interacted' with non-human objects. The aim of the exercise is to describe an object without naming the thing directly. Pupils could then share their writing with their friends, who would have to try and identify what it is that is being described.

# 2. Aftermath (Chapter 2)

## Writing Emotion

In the first two chapters of the book, Peter has a terrifying experience. Ask students to think of a time when they were afraid of something. Discuss this with them, then ask them to write about it. Encourage them to use strong verbs and adjectives to describe what happened to them and how they felt. Alternatively, ask students to imagine they are Peter and write an account of what happened to them the day they went to the woods.



# 3. Crash / Aftermath (Chapters 1-2)

## Character Chart

Ask students to think about their impressions of Peter in the first chapters. What kind of a person do they think he is? Using **'inference'** and **'deduction'** what can they find in the chapter that supports their view of Peter?

(**'Inference'** is an interpretation that goes beyond the literal information given. **'Deduction'** is an understanding based on evidence given in the text.)

Quotation	What does it tell us about Peter?
I wanted to be with Mam. I wanted to know she was safe, and she'd want to know I was safe. (p2)	Peter is considerate and thinks of others.



# 3. Kim (Chapter 3)

## Character Chart

Ask students to think about their impressions of Kim in this chapter. What kind of a person do they think she is? Using **'inference'** and **'deduction'** what can they find in the chapter that supports their view of Kim?

(**'Inference'** is an interpretation that goes beyond the literal information given. **'Deduction'** is an understanding based on evidence given in the text.)

Quotation	What does it tell us about Kim?
I'm talking to you.' She looked sideways at me.	Kim is confident - she has no problem starting a conversation with someone she doesn't know.



## 4. Letters (Chapter 4)

### Comprehension

After reading this short chapter, students could either answer these questions themselves, or they could be discussed as a class.

1. Can students find anything on pages 38-39 that indicates Peter is missing his father?
2. Peter says 'Just about everything was rationed.' but what does that mean ?
3. Is there anything in this chapter to indicate how Peter feels about Mr Bennett?
4. What does Peter carry in his pocket?
5. On page 41, Mam says 'Don't go gettin' all pernickety, young lad'. What do you think this means?
6. Where is Peter's Dad? How do you think this makes Peter feel, and why?
7. Why does Mum put the tripe 'furry side down' on the plate? Do you know what tripe is?
8. What do Peter and Mam listen to on the radio?
9. Where are Dad's letters, and why does Mam keep them there?
10. Where is Dunkirk, and why does Peter mention it?

## 5. Shapes in the Moonlight (Chapter 5)

### Engaging the Reader

It can be exciting to break the rules. In this chapter, I try to give the reader a sense of Peter deciding if he will sneak out in the night to meet Kim. Then, I try to build a sense of fear and excitement about doing something Peter knows he shouldn't be doing. Ask students to think about how I have used my writing to engage the reader. Consider sentence length, paragraph length, sentence structure, character reactions, punctuation, sound, dialogue, repetition, imagery etc.

Ask students to think about a time (or imagine a time) when they did something they knew they shouldn't have done. Ask them to write a short story about what they did, and how it made them feel.





## 6. Bodies (Chapter 6)

### Writing a Letter

Ask students to think about everything that has happened either to Peter or to Kim over the first few chapters of the story. They should make bullet points to highlight the main events. Pretending they are either Peter or Kim, write a letter to their dad explaining what they have been through and how it has made them feel.

## 7. Bodies (Chapter 6)

### Examining the Text

In this chapter, I wrote some gruesome description of the discovery inside the cracked aircraft. Often, young readers tell me they like this part of the story, while adults often tell me they think it's too gory. Ask students how *they* feel about the description. Do they find it disturbing? Do they think it's important that I have shown this, or should I have left it out? Is it important for adults to shield young people from the darker aspects of war, or should adults be honest about how awful war is?

## 8. Gun (Chapter 7)

### Argument - Write a Play

In this chapter, Peter and Kim find the missing German. They have a discussion about what they should do with him. Kim wants to take him to the soldiers, but Peter thinks they'll get into trouble for breaking the curfew. Ask your students what they would do in this situation. Encourage them to think about reasons for and against taking the German to the soldiers. Will they hurt him? Will they kill him? Will Peter and Kim get into trouble or will they be heroes? Ask students to imagine they are either Kim or Peter, and in pairs (1 Peter, 1 Kim) write a short play in which the their character argues about what they should do. Confident students might want to act their play in front of the other students.



## **9. The Souvenir (Chapter 8)**

### Design a Book Cover

This chapter is called The Souvenir, which was the original title I chose for the book. My publisher asked me to change the title to My Friend The Enemy. Discuss what you have read so far, and discuss predictions about what students think might happen in the rest of the story. Using these ideas, ask students to come up with an alternative title for the book. Design book covers to suit the new title and what students think will happen in the rest of the story.

## **10. The Best Hiding Place Ever (Chapter 9)**

### Design a Camp

When I was growing up, my brother and I used to love playing outside. One of the things we used to love doing most of all was building camps in the woods, using trees branches and old pieces of wood. It was building those camps that gave me the idea for Peter's secret hiding place by the sycamore trees. Ask students to design their ideal secret camp. Write bullet points of all the things they would like it to have, then draw the camp, labelling all the important parts.

## **11. A Knock At The Door (Chapter 10)**

### Discussion

One of the themes of the book is about understanding the difference between people. In this chapter, Peter asks Mam about Germans - what do they eat? What do they do? Do they go to the shops? Do they sleep in a bed? This is a good way to spark a discussion with your class about whether or not all Germans would have supported the war. It's might also initiate a discussion about whether or not it's right to judge people because they are different.



## 12. Lieutenant Whastisname (Chapter 11)

### Comprehension

After reading this short chapter, students could either answer these questions themselves, or they could be discussed as a class.

1. What do you make of the Lieutenant? Find passages in the text to infer and deduce what kind of person he is.
2. What does Mam say will happen to the silk from the parachute that was found?
3. What does the Lieutenant mean when he says 'My sergeant has a nose like a bloodhound'?
4. On page 117, what does the word 'precaution' mean?
5. Can you find a passage in this chapter where Peter tries to dissuade the soldiers from looking for the German?
6. When Peter and Kim go outside, what is the sergeant doing?
7. What does the sergeant tell Peter and Kim they should be carrying?
8. Peter tells Kim why Mr Bennett isn't away fighting in the war. What is the reason?
9. Why doesn't Peter like Mr Bennett?
10. What does Kim say she will do to Trevor Ridley next time she sees him?

## 13. Reconnaissance (Chapter 12)

### Discussion

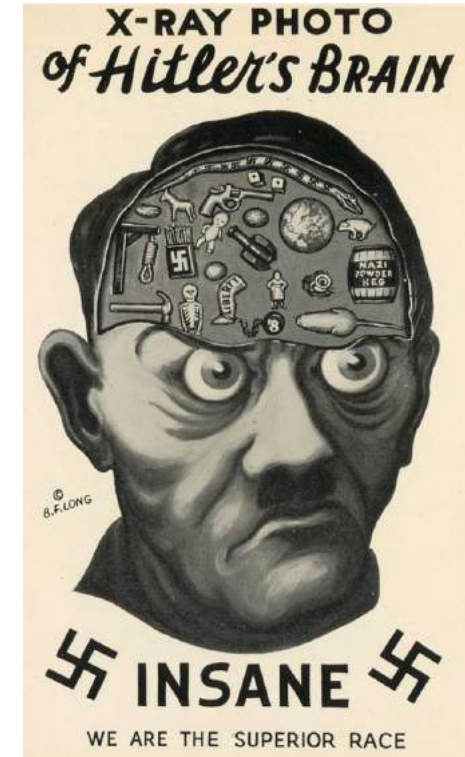
What does Peter mean at the end of the chapter, when he says 'Our German was different. He was a real person. He was here, he had a face and he was in trouble.' Discuss with the class.



# 14. Not Much Of A German (Chapter 13)

## Design a Poster

In this chapter, Peter and Kim discuss the fact that Erik is not what they expected Germans to be like. The only things they know about Germans are from the propaganda posters they have seen. Research types of propaganda posters used during World War Two and discuss what effect they had. How can this kind of propaganda change our way of thinking? Did they also use propaganda in Germany? Ask students to think about issues at school, and design a poster to highlight the issue. For example, it could be an 'anti-bullying' poster, a poster announcing the benefits of eating school dinners, or the importance of doing their homework.



## 15. Broken Bone (Chapter 14)

### Bullying

In this chapter, Peter has a run in with Trevor Ridley and his gang. Mr Shaw tells Peter he should hit Trevor. Kim says the same thing, and so does Ma. Ask your students what they think about this advice. Have they ever experienced bullying? Have they witnessed bullying? Have they ever been given any advice about bullying? Is there more than one way to deal with bullying? What do they think is the best way to deal with bullying?

- Ask students to make an anti-bullying poster.
- As a class, or in groups, write a short play about someone who is being bullied.
- Ask students to imagine they are being bullied. Write a letter to someone they trust, explaining what has been happening to them, how they feel about it, and what they have done to stop it.

## 16. Dad's Shed (Chapter 15)

### Descriptive Writing

I loved writing the description of Dad's shed when Peter and Kim go inside. It reminded me of the sheds and garages we had when I was growing up. Ask students to think of a place that is important to them and write a short piece of prose, in the first person, as they enter that place, describing it to the reader. Encourage them to use evocative adjectives, metaphor, simile, and personification in their description. Be sure to use colour and sound. It's also great to describe smells, because smell can evoke an excellent response from the reader. How do they feel when they enter this place?

## **17. Air Raid (Chapter 16)**

### Free Writing

Even though this is a short chapter, I did a tremendous amount of research to make sure it felt just right. When I visit schools, I sometimes run a workshop about air raids, and students always love to immerse themselves in the idea of being caught up in the drama of all those bombs and sirens! Ask students to imagine they are caught in an air raid. It can be tremendously liberating for students to be allowed to choose their own way of telling a story, so ask them to write about their experience in any way they want to - perhaps a piece of prose, a diary entry, a letter, or even a poem.

## **18. Sledgehammer (Chapter 17)**

### Making a List - Making a Decision

In this chapter, Peter and Kim steal supplies from the doctor. As a class, try to think of all the times Peter or Kim have stolen something, and of all the times they have lied about something. Write them all down on a list, and then try to remember the reasons why Peter and Kim have done those things. Is there any justification for their actions? Were they right to steal and lie? What would have happened if they hadn't done those things? As a class discuss if it is ever right to lie or steal.

## **19. The Soldiers Come (Chapter 19)**

### Newspaper Report

In this chapter, the soldiers come into the woods, searching for the missing airman. Ask students to write a report about the plane crash, the sighting of the parachute, and the search for the missing airman. They could include excerpts from interviews with some of the villagers and soldiers.



## 20. The Soldiers Come (Chapter 19)

### Interview

At the end of this chapter, Peter thinks Erik feels guilty because he believes everything that has happened has been his fault. Peter and Kim have broken the rules, and risked great danger. They have lied and stolen for Erik, and now Kim has been hurt. Ask students how they think Erik feels about this. What does this tell us about his character? Imagine that Erik can speak English, and write an interview with him about everything that has happened so far.

### GENERAL TASKS

- Throughout *My Friend the Enemy*, there are references to the propaganda posters that were prevalent in the Second World War. For pupils that are unaware of these, the novel provides an excellent opportunity to explore this phenomenon. Perhaps starting with the numerous examples on the internet, pupils could discuss how these posters make us view the subject of the propaganda, and what it is that makes us hate one particular character (or type of character) and love another. Turning to the novel, pupils could be encouraged to re-read page 139, in which Peter recalls the images of Germans he has seen on the propaganda posters and compares these with the German he discovers in the woods (Erik). Clearly, for Peter, until a person has first-hand experience of a German, they are likely to believe what they hear from other people - regardless of whether this is an accurate description. The novel also demonstrates that propaganda often means that, in one country Germans may be portrayed as brave and heroic, and in another ruthless and evil. To help illustrate this point, pupils could be asked to produce a propaganda poster based on a description or piece of writing that provides details about a person or people (real or imaginary). Ideally, this description should be detailed, but not too biased in terms of its viewpoint (sympathetic, critical, flattering etc.). Pupils then would be required to devise two different propaganda posters, using the piece of writing as a basis for their designs. One poster should portray the person (or people) as heroic, and the other as villainous. Both posters should draw on some element of the writing, but this could be contorted in any way the pupils wish in order for them to meet the brief. It would be interesting to compare the pupils differing takes on the same subject, and could lead into a discussion about the effects of propaganda.

# GENERAL TASKS

- The people who live in Peter's village often share rumours about the things happening in their part of the country and in the war overseas. In chapter 24, when the villagers congregate around the site of the bomb explosion, a number of different rumours emerge about the bomb and how it got there. It seems no one knows for sure, but each person claims to know the truth. Pupils could be encouraged to think about how rumours get started, and how they are perpetuated and elaborated upon. To help illustrate this, the pupils could be asked to play a version of Chinese Whispers, in which a pupil is tasked with secretly telling one of their friends a short story about what they got up to at the weekend (it does not need to be particularly exciting). The friend, in turn, secretly passes on this story to the next pupil, but is allowed to change one thing about the story they pass on. The change they make can be quite colourful and interesting, but in order for the activity to work it still needs to be plausible and within the realms of possibility! The story is sent around the class, from pupil to pupil – each changing one element of the story. Once the story has been passed on to every pupil, the last pupil retells the tale, and the first pupil is asked to retell the original story. The pupils must then decide if the finished story bears any resemblance to truth, and a discussion could follow as to why certain elements of the story were changed, and how this affected the final version. Finally, pupils could be asked to discuss how we come by the news in our communities, and what sources of information can be deemed reliable, and which cannot.
- At the end of the novel we see the letter Erik writes to Peter some years after the War had finished. Having read the story, this letter makes sense to the reader, who is able to piece together Erik's journey after he was taken away by the British soldiers. However, the letter is also illuminating when read in isolation, and provides a few clues as to the storyline in the main part of the book. There are, of course, a great many ways this storyline could be interpreted and 'fleshed out' in the imagination of the reader on the basis of the letter alone, and it would be interesting to hear what those who have not read the novel think might happen given what Erik touches on in his writing. This device could be used as a starting point in a piece of creative writing. Pupils could be asked to write a letter to an imaginary character that reflects on a previous time, or series of events. The letter can touch on some key details, but should avoid being too explicit in detail – instead retaining an air of mystery and intrigue. These letters could then be swapped with other pupils in the class, who would be tasked with interpreting the letter and devising the story on which the retrospective letter was based. It would then be interesting for the pupils who wrote the letters to compare their vision of the events they were describing with the story that was subsequently written.





# GENERAL TASKS

- The depiction of the plane crash on pages 5-6 takes longer to read than the event itself. The level of detail, and the amount of observations recorded in this passage effectively slow the action down and allow the reader a more intimate understanding of what is going through Peter's mind as the crash takes place. A similar technique is employed later in the novel, on page 291, when Kim gets knocked to the ground. This is perhaps a useful lesson in employing detailed writing to enhance action sequences, and it could be interesting to have pupils acting out scenarios (such as the fight on page 291, or any other relevant scenario from the novel) and replaying them at an increasingly slower pace. This could be a catalyst to helping pupils think about the amount of things a person notices in fast-paced situations. Even though a particular event may happen very quickly, often we will have gathered a large amount of information about what has taken place. Following this drama-based activity, pupils could be tasked with recalling the events in the form of a detailed piece of writing, in which they break the action down into tiny chunks. If time allows, it would also be worthwhile to ask pupils to complete this activity in two parts: first by having the pupils put the event into writing before the slow motion drama activity, then - after the all the slow motion work has been completed - having them write up the event again. Once this is done, comparisons between the two pieces of writing can take place, and a discussion can be had as to what piece of writing is more truthful, or more enjoyable to read, and why.
- In chapter 20, Peter and Erik try to communicate with one another; but they find it difficult as they do not speak the same language. Eventually however, both find a way to make themselves understood. Pupils could be encouraged to think about how we, as humans, have the ability to communicate effectively despite the fact we may not speak the same language. Pupils could be given a simple message to relay to one another (perhaps written on a piece of card and selected by the pupils in the style of a 'lucky dip'). They could then be tasked with communicating this message with as many pupils as possible in an allotted time. The pupils must not be allowed to use their own language, and it might even be interesting to see if they can make themselves understood when making no vocal sound at all. That said, pupils could be encouraged to verbalise their message (as long as they do not use recognisable language). The objective of the task would either be for one pupil to make all the others carry out a particular action using the communication strategies at their disposal or, alternatively, for pupils selecting the same message from the 'lucky dip' to find one another and form a group. The winning group would be the one that found all its members the quickest. This activity could help pupils reflect on the different forms of communication open to humans, and which forms of communication work best. Pupils could be encouraged to think about the circumstances in which each of the different forms of communication identified would be most useful.



# GENERAL TASKS

Below is a table of some of the themes of My Friend The Enemy. Ask students to think about examples from the book for each theme.

Theme	Example
Friendship	Peter and Kim's friendship
Courage and Bravery	
War	
Loyalty	
Bullying	
Trust	
Rural Life	
Understanding Differences	



## FURTHER RESEARCH

- When we think about air raids during WWII, we often think about raids over London, but many other parts of Britain were bombed. Consider researching other towns and cities that were bombed. Why were they bombed?
- Rationing was a big part of life in Britain during WWII. When I was researching *My Friend The Enemy*, I visited Eden Camp in North Yorkshire, where I saw a mock-up of a week's worth of rations for a family. What kind of foods were rationed? What did people do to acquire rare food? Was rationing worse or better for those living in the country rather than in a city?
- In the story, Mr Bennett is not away fighting because he was previously injured. For what other reasons might men not have been allowed to fight? For example, one of my grandfathers worked in the food industry during WWII, so he was not allowed to join the army. My other grandfather was a teacher so was not allowed to join up until much later in the war when he joined the Durham Light Infantry.
- Britain was one of the few places in Europe that was never invaded by the Nazis, but planes did crash here, and there were POW camps in Britain. What can you find out about them?
- My grandmother's sister joined the ATS and was part of an anti-aircraft gun crew during the war years. Research the important role of women in Britain during WWII.
- Many people expected the Nazis to invade Britain on the east coast. On the town moor close to where I live, there are still remnants of tank traps that were built to slow down a Nazi invasion, and a few miles away on the beach, there are crumbling pill-boxes that would have been used as machine-gun placements. Are there any WWII fortifications close to where you live? Perhaps an old bunker or air-raid shelter that might help bring the history to life for the students.
- When researching *My Friend The Enemy*, I learned a lot about rationing, air raids, and evacuation in Britain. Do your students know what these are? What do they think life was for people living in other countries? What was life like in Germany? Did they also have rationing, air raids, and evacuation?

