

MY FRIEND THE ENEMY BY DAN SMITH

SYNOPSIS

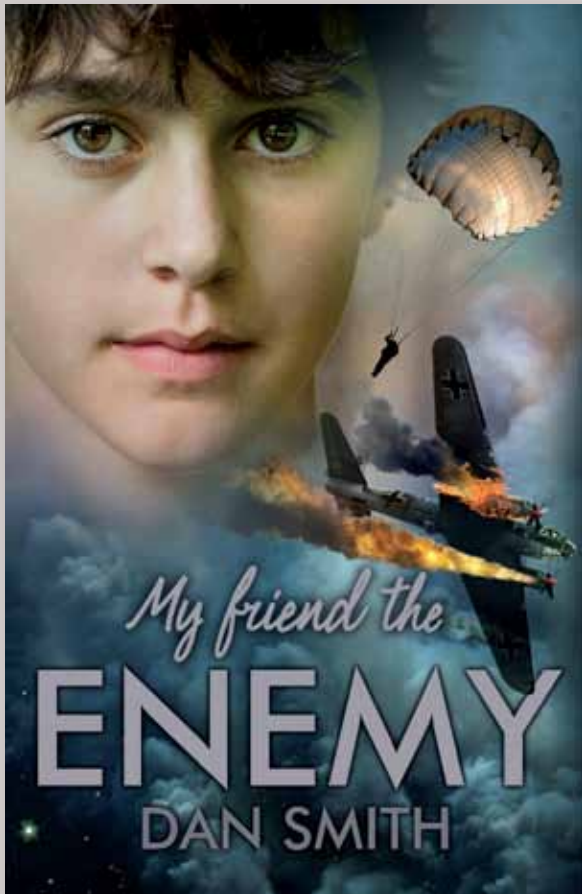
It is summer 1941 in the rural North-East of England. For Peter, the war is a long way away, being fought by a faceless enemy. His only contact with the events happening overseas is through his father, a local gamekeeper who has gone away to fight. However, all that changes when he witnesses a German 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.



www.doublecluck.com

 Chicken House UK

 @Chickenhsebooks



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, Dan Smith lived three lives: the day-to-day humdrum of boarding school, finding adventure in the paddy fields of Asia and the jungles of Brazil, and in a world of his own, making up stories.

He lives in Newcastle with his wife and two children. *My Friend the Enemy* is his debut children's novel.

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 ... **DAN SMITH, AUTHOR**

Describe My Friend the Enemy in three words ...

Exciting. Adventurous. Emotional. I wish you'd let me have more than three words!



What inspired you to write My Friend the Enemy?

It's hard to say. One day, the image of the crashing bomber just popped into my head and wouldn't go away. I started to wonder where it had come from, who was flying it and what would happen when it landed. Then I saw Peter, running across the field, running for his *life*, and I knew this was the war and that his father was away. I was busy writing other things at the time, so the story just grew and grew until I couldn't hold it in any more. I wrote the original version very quickly then I had to go back and do a lot of research to get the era as authentic as possible.

Who is your favourite character? Why?

I'm torn between Peter and Kim. Peter, of course, because this is his story and he's such a likeable character. I really feel as if I connect with Peter. But, then, Kim is brave and tough and clever and so very, very loyal to her friends. I think they're both great!

Did you know how the story was going to end before you started writing?

Yes. I don't plan my books in any great detail, but I usually know how they are going to start and how they are going to end. And then I *always* end up changing the beginning.

The three main characters, Peter, Kim and Erik seem very real. Are they based on people you know?

They seem real to me too. Sometimes I feel as if they *were* real and that their story *really* happened, but ... I made them up. Maybe there's a little bit of Peter in me, and I know for sure that when I was twelve, I would have loved to have a friend like Kim.

Towards the end of the book, I had to check whether this was a true story or not. I was completely drawn in. How much research did you do to be able to write such a convincing story?

I did do quite a lot of research. I read a lot of books, watched films, looked at old photographs, visited museums and read real-life accounts from people who lived in 1940's Britain. I also dug out lots of old family photos of my grandfather who was a captain in the army during the war, my great-aunt who was a flak-gunner



and shot down German bombers, and my other grandfather who was a Lancaster bomber pilot. I didn't do so much research that it would take over, though. The story is the most important thing, and the historical detail is there to give the reader a sense of time and place.

Some parts of the story are heart-wrenchingly emotional. Were these hard to write?

I wouldn't say they were hard to write, because I love writing those parts, but I did have to keep looking out of the window to pull myself together when things weren't going well for my characters. I love feeling the emotion of a story, though, even when those emotions are sad. For me, that's hugely important in story-telling. It's great to be lifted with excitement, but sometimes it's the sad things that really bring a story to life. They help us to connect with characters in a way that feels real.

You have books published for adults and children. Do you find it easier or harder to write for children?

I don't think I find it easier *or* harder. Of course there are differences in the way I write for adults and children, but those differences aren't very big. I approach stories as stories whoever I write them for. My adult books often have children in them, and my children's books often have adults in them, so I just change the focus of who tells the story - the adults or the children.

How did you get your big break?

It's difficult to say whether I've had a big break or not. I think I've had a series of small breaks - which makes me sound like I should be in hospital. My first break, though, was finding a great agent who loves my writing. I spent a lot of time sending letters and sample chapters to different agents until I found just the right one. She always gives me good but brutally honest advice about my books, which is sometimes hard to listen to, but helps me get better and better at telling stories.

Any advice for budding authors?

Read, read, read. And then read some more! I really believe that the more a person reads, the better they will



understand how stories and characters work. The other important thing is to write. It might sound obvious, but if you sit about, waiting for inspiration and dreaming about being an author, then you'll never be an author. Writing makes you an author so ... get writing!

Where is your favourite place to write?

I sit on a small sofa in the corner of the sitting room. It's not very glamorous but it's comfortable and it's the brightest, warmest room in the house. I put my laptop on a cushion and perch it on my knees and, you know what? It's just about the best place in the world.

Have you ever wanted to do anything other than write?

When I was very young I wanted to be a judge. I have no idea why. Then I wanted to be a vet until I saw Star Wars at the ripe old age of seven. After that I knew what I wanted to be. I wanted to be Han Solo. I was never any of those things, though, and by the time I was a teenager, I knew I wanted to be a writer. Nothing else would have been good enough. Apart from, perhaps, being Han Solo.

You can only read three books for the rest of your life, what would they be?

Well, if you asked me this on another day I might give you a completely different answer but today I'm going to say *Lord of The Flies* by William Golding because it's a brilliant story about children who find themselves in a terrifying situation without any adults to help them, *The Old Man and The Sea* by Ernest Hemmingway because it's the classic tale of man versus nature, and *The Go-Between* by LP Hartley because it's a summery, dreamy tale about a shy child who is thrown into an adult world that he struggles to understand.

Do you visit your local library?

Really, I like to own books, because they're such lovely objects to hold and look at, but, yes, I do visit my local library. I find the library especially helpful when I'm researching a book of my own and I'm looking for information about something in particular. Also, both of my children love to borrow books and they take part



in the Summer Reading Challenge every year.

THEMES

- War
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Trust
- Bullying
- Rural life

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. 27 chapters, 305 pages, age 10+.

PUPIL ACTIVITIES

1: Anthropomorphic Encounters

Peter's encounter with the German plane at the start of the novel is depicted through some richly 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), pupils could be tasked with writing about their real life experiences, where they have ‘interacted’ with non-human forces, objects or beings. The aim of the exercise could be to describe an experience without naming the thing directly (whether this is a machine, an animal, an inanimate object or force of nature). Pupils could then be asked to share their writing with their friends, who would have to try and identify what it is that is being described.

2: Life in Slow Motion

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.



3: Propaganda Press

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.

4: Communication Problems

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.

5: The Rumour Mill

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, there are a number of different rumours that 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.

6: Start at the End

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.



WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On page 44, Peter describes the 'ritual' that he and his mother regularly take part in. How do you think this ritual makes Peter feel? Why do you think Peter and his mother might keep up this ritual? Are there any 'rituals' that you take part in? Why?
2. What do you think Peter means when he says, 'Our German was different. He was a real person. He was here, he had a face and he was in trouble'? (p.130)
3. In chapter 14, Peter tells his mother about what Trevor Ridley did to the rations outside the shop. What does she say he should do to stop getting bullied by Trevor? Is this different to advice you have been given about bullying? How do you think Peter should have handled the situation with Trevor?
4. Throughout the novel both Peter and Kim find themselves lying to adults. Make a list of all the lies they tell. Do you think they were right to tell these lies? Do you think it is ever okay to lie? Why?

