

## *Oliver Strange and the Journey to the Swamps* by Dianne Hofmeyr

### Chapter 1: Strange Travel Companions

#### Pre-reading

1. What kinds of things do you consider essential items to take with you in case of emergencies when you go away?
  1. *This is open-ended but the list must clearly focus on emergency needs.*  
(Some possibilities: extra money, extra clothes)
2. Look on a map and find out where the Victoria Falls are in Zimbabwe, and the Okavango Swamps are in Botswana. What distance is there between these places?
  2. *Learners can use their rulers and a scale map to work out the distance as the crow flies or they could use Google to find out what the distance by road is.*

#### During reading

3. Look at the list of things Oliver has brought with him.
  - a) What do they reveal about his character?
  - b) What do they suggest about how he sees his mission?
3.
  - a) *He is someone who likes to be well-prepared and who thinks things through beforehand. He is independent.*
  - b) *It suggests that he is expecting to travel through difficult terrain.*
4. How old do you think Oliver is? Say why you think so.
  4. *He is probably about 14. He is travelling alone and has had to do his own packing.*
5. Where does Oliver land?
  5. *He lands in Zimbabwe.*

#### Post-reading

1. The airport officials want to question Oliver.
  - a) What is odd about this do you think?
    - 1 a) *Teenagers are not usually questioned by airport officials./ They do not seem to have a valid reason for doing so.*
    - b) They say they think he is a spy. Why?
      - b) *He has said on his form that he has come to rescue his father./ Like all customs officials they are suspicious of anything out of the ordinary. / Oliver was wearing sunglasses and a cap when he came into the building which could have been to hide his real appearance.*
2. What makes him wonder for a moment whether the letter is genuine or not?
  2. *The letter is printed, not written in his aunt's handwriting.*
3. Explain in your own words why a "rat is still gnawing away in Oliver's stomach"?
  3. *Oliver is fearful that his plan to rescue his father with the help of his aunt is going to put him in danger.*
4. Find one example each of hyperbole and simile in the chapter.
  4. *Simile: "paddles like orange ping-pong bats" or "heat . . . like a solid wave of water". Hyperbole: "ancient fire-engine"*

### Chapter 2: Mistaken Identity

#### Pre-reading

1. Have you ever travelled anywhere on your own? How did you feel? What are the advantages and disadvantages of travelling alone? Can you sympathise with Oliver's feelings here?

1. *This question is exploratory and is aimed at establishing or activating background knowledge. It lends itself to being used as a whole class activity.*

#### **During reading**

2. How do we know that the girl on the railway platform knows the area?  
*2. She knows the way things run. She is on her own but is confident about where the train will be leaving from and how the train system works.*
3. What does “dumela” mean?  
*3. Hello*
4. Why does Zinzi say that the snake is “small by python standards”?  
*4. The snake is not yet full-grown. However, she probably says what she does to show up Oliver’s ignorance.*
5. Why does Ollie choose the top bunk?  
*5. He feels he will be safe from the python there.*

#### **Post-reading**

1. As he looks at the moon, what does Ollie find odd about his present position?  
*1. He finds it strange that his grandma in Tooting is looking at the same moon as he sees here in Africa in quite a different environment.*
2. Ollie does not seem to know very much about wildlife. What is strange about that?  
*2. His father is a zoologist (specifically a herpetologist) so one would have expected him to know a lot.*
3. Based on this chapter, what kind of person do you think Zinzi is?  
*3. Zinzi is fiercely independent. She loves wild animals and is knowledgeable about them.*
4. Write down a sentence with alliterative text.  
*4. “We’re going to Ilala, we’re going to find your father”*
5. After reading the first two chapters you should be able to relay the basic plot to someone. In no more than five concise sentences, write down the basic plot.  
*5. Oliver Strange is a British boy. He has come to Botswana to look for his father, a zoologist/herpetologist. His aunt was supposed to meet him at the airport in Zambia, but she did not turn up. At the train station Ollie meets Zinzi, a girl of his own age, who has a python and a bush baby with her. As instructed by the note his aunt left with the airport officials, Oliver is now travelling on a train to Victoria Falls Station, from where he will catch a bus to Kasane, where his aunt will meet them.*

### **Chapter 3 – Mosi oa Tunya**

#### **Pre-reading**

1. Why do you think the Victoria Falls is called “Mosi oa Tunya” (The smoke that thunders)?  
*1. The river crashing down into the ravine below makes a great deal of noise and the clouds of spray rising above the falls looks like smoke.*

#### **During reading**

2. Why had Ollie been put in a compartment with Zinzi?  
*2. The administrative staff had mistakenly listed him as Olivia and so he was put into a cabin with a girl.*
3. Ollie is so fascinated by his first view of an African market that he has to be called away by Zinzi. What fascinates him?  
*3. He is fascinated by the array of goods, the colourfulness of the scene and the monkeys who keep trying to steal things being shoed away by the women.*
4. a) What would make it obvious that Ollie is English?  
b) Why is it important for him to seem ‘local’?  
*4 a) The most obvious thing is the way he talks and his obvious unfamiliarity with the place./  
b) If he is seen as a foreign tourist, he will be charged a high tourist price to go into the Rain Forest.*

### Post-reading

1. Why is Ollie suspicious of the man with the umbrella? What is there about him that suggests that he is not a tourist?
  1. *Ollie is suspicious because the man seems to be hanging back, keeping his umbrella down low. He does not seem interested in seeing the falls and he also does not have a camera, quite unlike a tourist.*
  2. Zinzi is fearless – or is she just bragging about wanting to make a bungee jump to impress Ollie? Explain how you came to your answer.
    2. *This is open-ended. It aims to encourage learners to describe their own responses and also be able to explain them. (She is fearless – she is not at all alarmed when the first person does a bungee jump. Her eyes are shining with excitement./ She is bragging – she enjoys being in command and calling Ollie “silly”.)*
    3. Why does Ollie pretend that he knew that the person who jumped off the bridge was a bungee jumper all along?
      3. *He does not want Zinzi to know how scared he is./Other valid answers.*
      4. Why does Ollie say that “things in Africa were making him dizzy”?  
*There has been so much to take in and quite a number of things have unnerved him.*
      5. a) What is the last thing Ollie notices as they cross the bridge?
        - b) What do you think this means?
          - a) *He notices that the man he has been suspicious of is going across the bridge just as they have done.*
          - b) *The man is following them. This suggests they are in some kind of danger./ Valid alternative.*
      6. If you could choose a scary or exciting sport like bungee jumping, white water rafting or sky diving which would be your choice and why would you choose it?
        6. *Personal response. The reason should be clear.*

## Chapter 4 – A Whisper of Something Sinister

### Pre-reading

1. What does the chapter heading suggest about what will happen next?
  1. *This encourages learners to predict. Possible answer: Zinzi and Ollie are going to get some idea of the danger they are facing.*

### During reading

2. a) “An icy flash of lightning streaked up his spine”. What does this tell us about how Ollie is feeling?
  - b) How would you feel in this kind of situation?
    2. a) *It tells us that Ollie is frightened. Seeing the man again has been a shock.*
    - b) *Personal response. It gives the learners opportunity to empathise with Ollie.*
  3. Why does Ollie only “think” that his father is in Ilala?
    3. *He does not know where his father is because it is so long since he last had a letter from him.*

### Post-reading

1. Look at a map of Africa and a map of England.
  - a) What do you notice about the relative size of each?
  - b) How well do you think Ollie understands this difference in size?
    1. a) *England is much smaller than Africa.*
    - b) *Ollie has no real conception of the difference in size. He sees England as big; it is very hard for him to imagine a continent in which even one country is bigger than England.*
  2. Why does Zinzi not share Ollie’s suspicions about the man in the dark sunglasses?
    2. *Any valid answer. E.g. She is used to people behaving strangely.*
    3. Explain which parts of Ollie’s journey have been the strangest in your opinion.

3. *Open-ended. Learners should choose at least two and provide explanations for their choices that are convincing.*
4. Name the literary device used in the following sentence: “There was a rat gnawing at his stomach.”
4. *Metaphor*

## **Chapter 5: Tooting, London – Wanted Alive**

### **Pre-reading**

1. Have you ever travelled outside the town, or even the country where you were born? If you have, where have you travelled to, and if you have not, where would you like to travel to if you could do so?
1. *Open-ended. This is designed to heighten the learners’ enjoyment of the book.*

### **During reading**

2. How do we know that Ollie is a very organized boy?
2. *He had thought through what to bring on the trip very carefully and made sure that he packed carefully. He makes lists (like the one at the end of Chapter 4 to order his experience. He had been putting numbered red stickers on a globe to mark all the places his father had visited. When he thinks about what his father takes with him and why, he makes neat lists in his head. Every letter he received from his father had been carefully labelled to match.*
3. What lies behind Ollie’s feelings about frogs?
3. *His low opinion of frogs is because he resents the fact that his father is often away on frog hunting expeditions.*
4. What is a “delta”?
4. *A delta is a flat area where the main stream of a river divides into several smaller streams. It is usually at the mouth of the river, but is sometimes inland as in this case.*

### **Post-reading**

1. Look at the description of Ollie’s father’s equipment. Then look at the first paragraph of chapter one and what Ollie has brought with him. What does this suggest to you about Ollie’s view of his father?
1. *Ollie’s has brought the things that will equip him to find his father. This suggests that Ollie does not think that his father takes care of himself. All he is concerned about is finding frogs.*
2. Ollie’s father is described as very “inexact” for a zoologist. Why would a zoologist need to be exact?
2. *A zoologist (herpetologist in this case) needs to be exact because he needs to keep accurate, scientific records of the behaviour, size, shape and colour and the habitat of the frogs he finds.*
3. Why is Ollie so sure that something has happened to his father?
3. *He usually receives letters very regularly, but there has been no post for months.*
4. Ollie decides to set up a “blog”. Why does he think this will help him to find his father?
4. *This will increase the chances of finding his father. People will be on the alert and send him any information they have.*
5. What might make you suspicious about Aunt Hortense’s letter and her reply to his blog?
5. *Any valid answer. E.g. It seems too much of a coincidence that she should be the one to reply.*

## **Chapter 6: Danger!**

### **Pre-reading**

1. Ilalahand may not be a real place but the Okavango Swamps and the Kalahari are. Work in pairs. One of you researches Okavango Swamps and the other the Kalahari. Share what you have found out about what the area is like.  
*This is a good opportunity for learners to do some research. You could divide up the task so the learners can find as many interesting aspects of the countries as possible. The learners should present their work in a form that can be pinned up on the classroom display boards.*

### **During reading**

2. Aunt Hortense is not quite what Ollie expected.
  - a) Why is he confused as to how to greet her?
  - b) What is odd about her reaction to Zinzi when they are introduced?
  - c) How does she react when she hears Zinzi's mother works for CITES?
2. a) *He has not had to greet a relative he does not know before so he is not sure whether the right thing is to kiss her or to shake her hand.*
- b) *You would expect her to be polite and to welcome Zinzi. Instead she seems annoyed.*
- c) *She does not seem very pleased about this/ she seems even more annoyed.*
3. How does Ollie react when he realises that the strange man is with his aunt?
3. *He is dismayed. He gulps and bites his lip.*

### **Post-reading**

4. How do you feel about Zinzi flying to Maun with Ollie and his aunt instead of waiting for her mother?
4. *Open-ended. This is to encourage learner response.*
5. Why is Ollie nervous about the plane journey?
5. *There are a number of possibilities. His aunt is behaving strangely, the man that he fears is flying with them and they are going to use a small plane.*
6. Why is it odd that the strange man, now the co-pilot, is wearing lynx skin?
6. *It is odd because Aunt Hortense supposedly works for CITES, a conservation group.*
7. a) Why does the co-pilot make a sudden grab for Zinzi and Ollie?
- b) What does he then do to them?
  - a) *He wants to tie them up and gag them.*
  - b) *He sedates them by injecting them with a drug.*
8. Can you think of any reasons why Aunt Hortense should egg the co-pilot on?
8. *She is the ringleader/mastermind and she wants the children to be totally in her power.*
9. What are ellipses? Explain in one sentence and write down an example from the text.
9. *It is used at the end of a sentence which is not finished and it is indicated with three dots (. . .) "Then nothing more. . ." or "Air currents at this time of day make it bumpy. . ." or "What . . .?" or "Zinzi's not . . ."*

## **Chapter 7: No Escape**

### **Pre-reading**

1. What does the chapter heading, "No escape," suggest about the seriousness of their position?
1. *It is an absolute statement – there is no way out.*

### **During reading**

2. a) Where is the sound of drumming coming from?
- b) How does it make Ollie feel?
2. a) *The river.*
- b) *Ollie felt terrified. It was as if his environment was under attack.*
3. When do you first recognise that the woman is not really Aunt Hortense?
3. *Personal response. There are several points in the story that the learners could choose. Some may say that they have known that she was an imposter since she met Ollie, for instance.*

### **Post-reading**

1. Some of Grant and Zinzi's things are missing when they wake up. What do you think has happened to them?
  1. *Open-ended. Any feasible suggestion.*
2. What is "Aunt Hortense's" reason for bringing Zinzi along as well?

2. *In her view, Zinzi would have revelled in giving full and accurate descriptions of her and her accomplices to the police once it became clear that the scientist and his son were missing. She does not want anyone to be able to identify them.*
3. Molotse wants to dump the children in the swamp?
  - a) Why?
  - b) What will then happen to the children?
  - c) What does this tell you about the morals of their captors?
3. *a) He wants the children to disappear without trace.*  
*b) They will be eaten by crocodiles.*  
*c) It shows that they are ruthless and will stop at nothing to be successful.*
4. Why does “Aunt Hortense” need them to be alive?
4. *“Aunt Hortense” wants to use Ollie and Zinzi as bargaining tools to force Ollie’s father to give her the reed frogs she wants.*
5. There appear to be two separate deals on the table, one concerning the tree frogs, the other not yet explained. What do you think the two deals are?  
*This is open-ended. It encourages the learners to speculate. Accept all valid suggestions.*

## Chapter 8: The Python

### Pre-reading

1. Find a map of the Okavango Swamps. How easy do you think it would be to travel in these?
1. *This builds background knowledge. It would not be at all easy to travel in these unless you had the right kind of vessel and knew your way around in them. (There are no accurate maps of all of the waterways and there are many hippos and crocodiles in the swamps.)*

### During reading

2. Why does Ollie think Zinzi’s escape plan is crazy?
2. *The hole in the roof is rather small. Even if they got out, they would have no way of escaping because the swamps are so dangerous.*
3. There is a patch of hair missing from Ollie’s head. Suggest what happened.
3. *Open-ended. Learners are encouraged to make informed guesses. Accept any feasible answer.*

### After reading

1. a) Explain why Puku has a piece of paper in her mouth.  
b) Where does Ollie think it has come from?
1. a) *She found some chocolate on the paper and so put the paper in her mouth.*  
b) *He thinks the paper is a page from his father’s diary.*
2. a) What makes Moletse scream?  
b) What opportunity does this situation offer Zinzi?
2. a) *He screams because a snake tried to slither into his sleeping bag.*  
b) *She offers to catch the python. This means a chance to get out of their “prison”.*
3. Alecto has the name of one of the three Greek furies. Why is this a good name for her?
3. *She has a nasty temper and is almost always angry.*
4. Explain what Zinzi means when she says the python “smells in stereo”?
4. *The python flicks the air with its forked tongue as it turns its head. This allows it to use the two forks to identify where the smell is coming from.*
5. Outline the cunning way Alecto managed to fool Ollie into coming to Africa from England and then into going to Kasane.
5. *Alecto had pretended to be his “aunt” in the response to the blog and invited him to come to Zimbabwe. Her follow-up email. She could not pick him up at the airport in Bulawayo because she*

*feared the customs police might spot her. She got Mr Moletse to write a note supposedly from her directing him to go to Kasana. He followed the children closely to see that they got there.*

6. How can Alecto feel confident that Zinzi's mother will not be worrying about her?
6. *Buses are often delayed in this part of Africa so she will not be worried when her daughter fails to arrive on time.*
7. Ollie reveals that he knows about frogs.
  - a) Why was this not a sensible thing for him to do?
  - b) What else should he not have mentioned?
7. a) *Alecto and her henchman would know that they have been eavesdropping./ They might decide to make him help them in their frog project.*  
b) *He should not have mentioned that he knows that she captured his father.*
8. Write down one example of each of the following from the chapter:
  - a) idiomatic expression
  - b) sarcasm
8. a) *gone without a trace, couch potato*  
b) *"You can't just call snaky snaky"*

## **Chapter 9: Action**

### **Pre-reading**

1. Why is it not a good idea to become so angry or upset that you say things you should keep to yourself?  
1. *This provides a good link with Life Orientation. The discussion could be done with the whole class or in small groups.*

### **During reading**

2. Zinzi is not impressed when Ollie steals some paper. What does he have in mind?  
2. *Ollie is planning to get the snake to send a note to his father.*
3. Why would Puku go back to try and find Ollie's father?  
3. *Puku would want to get some more chocolate to eat.*
4. What does Alecto plan to do with the chunk of Ollie's hair?  
4. *Alecto will use this as evidence that Ollie is her prisoner.*

### **Post-reading**

1. Zinzi also has a plan. What is it?  
1. *Zinzi is going to put acacia gum on the paper to entice Puku to put it in her mouth.*
2. Who taught Ollie to cook?  
2. *His grandma taught him to cook.*
3. What does "potent" mean?  
3. *"Potent" means very strong.*
4. Lynxman says that he is thinking of becoming vegetarian?
  - a) What makes him say this?
  - b) How does it increase the chances of Zinzi's plan's succeeding?
4. a) *He had been revolted watching the python eat the buck, and by the chef preparing seafood in Grenouilles.*  
b) *Lynxman is far more likely to eat the leaves they have cooked. They want to make him have a major stomach upset.*
5. Where do you think Alecto has been? Why?  
5. *She has probably been in a boat on the river. She has mud splashes on her shorts. (Accept any valid answer.)*
6. Puku returns. What evidence is there whether she has found Ollie's father or not?

6. *Puku has found Ollie's father. Her cheek is puffed out which means she has another page of his diary in her mouth.*
7. "His tightly-filled pork sausage body". Identify the literary device.
7. *Metaphor*

## Chapter 10: The Quest Begins

### Pre-reading

1. The words in the letter "stop in mid-sentence". Why could we view this as a bad sign?
1. *It seems that the person writing it was interrupted. In this case, we suspect that Ollie's father was threatened in some way. Perhaps the criminals have found where he is hiding.*

### During reading

2. Why would the criminals want to freeze frogs?
2. *The want to freeze the frogs so they do not go off. The syndicate wants to be able to use the flesh of the frogs.*
3. Why is Ollie's father's map almost useless?
3. *The map is not much good because he has forgotten to show where North is. That means that Ollie and Zinzi will not be able to get their bearings. In addition, the waterways in the swamps keep changing.*

### Post-reading

1. What is Zinzi's solution to finding his father?
1. *Zinzi's solution is to use the rivermen. They know all the swamps really well so know where all the hidden waterways are.*
2. Zinzi knows a great deal about the local wildlife and their habits. How does this come in useful?
2. *Zinzi is able to warn Ollie about the likely dangers and how they can avoid them. She knows, for instance, that lions hide behind the branches of the acacia candle pod tree during the day, that baboons will leave them alone if they do not annoy them and that buffalo look like rocks from a distance. To keep safe they need to be down-wind so the buffalo do not pick up their scent (they are very short-sighted so are unlikely to see them). She knows they are safe from the very dangerous hippos during the day and at a distance and that crocodiles attack only when they are in the water.*
3. Why does Ollie set such store by his Swiss Army Knife?
3. *A Swiss Army Knife has a number of tools on it. That means that it can be used to help you get out of all kinds of difficult situations.*
4. Why does Zinzi not allow Ollie to take all his luggage along with them?
4. *Zinzi is aware that they need to move fast. The luggage would slow them down. If they find the rivermen, there will certainly not be space for the luggage.*
5. Ollie and Zinzi lose their tempers with each other at this point. Why does Ollie refer to what Zinzi is trying to do as "games"?
5. *He feels that she is telling him all these things to show off or just because she enjoys frightening him./ He feels that she is enjoying teasing him.*
6. How serious is Ollie about abandoning the search for his father?
6. *He is tired and frustrated and so says negative things about his father. However, he loves his father too much to abandon the search.*
7. Ollie decides to look for the boat. What do you think of this plan?
7. *Ollie does not know the terrain very well. He is unlikely to find the boat, and even if he did find it he does not have a clear idea about how he would use it. He does not know how to fly so he does not have a clear idea of where he would go.*

## Chapter 11: An Encounter

### Pre-reading

1. If you were able to give Ollie advice at this point, what would you say?  
*1. This is open-ended. It is aimed to encourage learners to engage with the story. Any valid suggestion should be accepted. (It might be good to have a follow-up in which all the suggestions are listed so the learners can decide (pairs / groups / whole class) which solution would be best.*

### During reading

2. a) Is Ollie right about what you should do if you come face to face with a lion? Why?  
b) What would you do?
2. a) *This is an opportunity for learners to show they can argue logically.*  
b) *This is an opportunity for learners to show they can think laterally.*
3. a) Why does Zinzi say that she must stay and help Ollie to find his father?  
b) Why does she think that Ollie is being quite brave?
3. a) *Zinzi sees Ollie as her friend and wants to help him. Her father is no longer alive but she understands how much a child would want to help his/ her father.*  
b) *She is aware of how hard it is for him to be in unfamiliar/ hostile terrain and how frightening he finds it. It takes courage to keep making every attempt to save his father.*

### Post-reading

1. What are some of the inconveniences that Ollie has had to overcome since he arrived in Botswana?  
*1. Learners should try to list five. A snake in his compartment/ mosquitos stinging him/ Matabele ants biting him/ very high temperatures / little food/ no toilet paper/ no clothes to change into/ no handkerchief /no toothbrush or toothpaste to use to clean his teeth.*
2. a) The painter, Rousseau, painted many famous jungle scenes without ever having been in, or even seen a jungle. His inspiration came from other people's illustrations and from visiting the Botanical Gardens in Paris. What about the jungle makes Ollie think of Rousseau's paintings?  
b) How can Ollie's experiences in Africa and Rousseau's jungle paintings be said to be similar?
2. a) *It is hot and he feels afraid to sleep because a lion could attack him just as a lion attacked the man in the Rousseau painting.*  
b) *Oliver finds himself having to sit on the ground like the monkey in one of Rousseau's paintings.*
3. Ollie notes that it is "too quiet". What does he notice as he looks around?  
*3. He notices that there is a hut that has been partially covered with leaves, presumably to make it difficult to see.*
4. How does Ollie know that his father has been in the hut recently?  
*The clothes have a strong smell of having been recently worn on an expedition by his father. There are also signs that the person has left recently. The sheet is turned back and the lamp is ready to be lit as if these have been used the night before and will be used again tonight.*
5. What warns them of someone's nearby presence?  
*5. They hear the alarm cry of a bird.*

## Chapter 12: *Phyllobates Terribilis*

### Pre-reading

1. a) Which language is the title of the chapter written in?  
b) What do you think it means?  
c) Why is it not written in English?
1. a) *It is written in Latin.*  
b) *It means terrible terrible leaf climber. Learners should be able to suggest terrible species.*  
c) *Latin is used to give animals and plants their scientific names.*

### During reading

2. What is the difference between a dagger and a machete?
2. *A machete has a long, wide blade sharp on one side. A dagger is short, slender and pointed..*
3. a) What are Thunderkicks and who would wear them?
- b) How does Zinzi know this?
- c) Why is Alecto wearing Thunderkicks?
- a) *Thunderkicks are shoes used by kickboxers or other people who do martial arts.*
- b) *She has probably seen kickboxers in action on the television (or in a film) or perhaps during a contest.*
- c) *She is wearing them because she wants to be ready to attack Ollie's father.*

### Post-reading

1. Would you say that rivermen are eco friendly in their way of life? Explain how.
1. *They are eco friendly. They use a pole to move their boats along and not engines. This reduces pollution. They catch only as much as they need to eat and cut the reeds in a way that will allow them to grow again. They also pick fruit without damaging the trees. They do not eat endangered animals like monkeys.*
2. Why do the rivermen dislike Alecto so much?
2. *She has tried to bribe them to overfish, to kill too many elephants, to kill monkeys, and to catch frogs. She is an animal trafficker who deals in rhino horns, elephant tusks and monkey heads.*
3. a) Why does no-one listen to the rivermen when they try to tell people what they have seen happening?
- b) How does this help people like Alecto with their illegal trade?
3. a) *They are ignored because they are simple tribesmen.*
- b) *It means that the only people who could report her actions do not even get a hearing.*
4. a) What kind of poison does *Dendrobates* carry?
- b) How does it affect people if they come in contact with it?
4. a) *It is a poison that attacks the nerves.*
- b) *People die if they come in contact with it.*
5. a) Where do the frog toxins come from?
- b) How powerful are they?
- c) What connection is there between the South American frogs and toxins?
5. a) *The toxins come from under the skin of the frogs.*
- b) *They are extremely potent.*
- c) *The South American frogs produce the deadliest toxins of all.*
6. Explain why the metaphor of the rat growing to the size of a hyena is so effective?
6. *Personal response. It should be clear that the learner understands that Oliver's feelings of doubtfulness about their situation (represented by the rat) have now escalated to full-blown fear (represented by the hyena).*

## Chapter 13: Dynamite!

### Pre-reading

1. How do you think the dynamite is going to be used?
1. *The answer is that Alecto is going to use the dynamite to kill the fish. This makes it easy to collect them. The learners are unlikely to come up with that answer. They are being invited to predict so accept any feasible answer.*

### During reading

2. How will Fishbone be able to tell whether Alecto has made her escape?
2. *He will know she has escaped if they find that she has broken through the fish traps*

3. Why can you not fly to South America in a single prop plane?
3. *It does not have the necessary speed or the necessary fuel capacity.*

### Post-reading

- 1 a) Do you think Ollie is being stupid for calling out to Alecto as he does?
- b) Why does he feel he has to do it?
1. a) *This is open-ended. Learners need to make a case for their point of view.*
- b) *He is essentially decent./His conscience would not allow him to leave her to die.*
2. What do Alecto's fishing methods tell us about her attitude to wildlife and to life in general?
2. *She does not respect life. She will kill anything and anyone to serve her interests.*
3. Why do you think, does Fishbone want Alecto to believe that there is only one boat?
3. *He does not want her to know that there are many other rivermen who have come with them.*
4. What do the words "come back while you have the chance," indicate about her plans for them all?
4. *She is ruthless and will do whatever it takes to prevent them from stopping her from succeeding in her plan to obtain toxins. She would have no hesitation in dynamiting them too.*
5. What does Ollie suggest as an alternative to Alecto taking his father to South America?
5. *He suggests that Alecto could get the names of the many South American herpetologists from him. They could help her get the frogs she wants.*
6. Alecto says "all I **needed** was to produce you" and not "all I **need**". This indicates a change in her plans. What is this change?
6. *She has taken Ollie's father prisoner and so does not need to use Ollie as leverage.*
7. The writer uses short sentences in the last two paragraphs. Suggest a reason for this.
7. *She wants to show how quickly everything is happening.*
8. Write down an example of a rhetorical question from this chapter.
8. *"Do you hear me? I'm losing patience" or "Are you out of your mind?"*

## Chapter 14: The Battle

### Pre-reading

1. Ollie says that "soon he would be remembering all this like some strange dream". What is the strangest dream that you have had?
1. *This is open-ended and aims at establishing connections with learners' experience to heighten their enjoyment of the book.*

### During reading

2. Why does the kingfisher remind Ollie of one of his aunt's enamelled brooches?
2. *The brilliant colours of its black eyes, blue wings and red beak remind him of her brooch. Presumably the brilliant colours used on the brooch are the same.*
3. Is the picture of a giant's hand scooping up the swamp a good one to describe the aftermath of the explosion?
3. *This is open-ended. Learners can decide whether it is a good description or not. They should explain their response.*
4. Ollie is still obsessed by hippos. What is he afraid of happening?
4. *He is afraid that one or more of them will overturn the boat.*

### Post-reading

1. Why does Ollie imagine a danger sign in the river ahead?
1. *He is really frightened about what lies ahead. His vivid imagination creates this image in his mind.*
2. Explain how the motor boat is stopped.
2. *The rivermen stretch a rope across the river that stops the propeller.*

3. a) Why does the fire spread so rapidly?
- b) What does the narrator compare the sound of the fire to?
3. a) *The dynamite in the boat was ignited and the explosion meant that the petrol on the surface of the water caught fire too. That feeds the flames so the fire spreads very quickly.*
- b) *The narrator compares the sound of the fire to the noise of a beast on the rampage.*
4. Ollie risks his life to save Alecto and Molotse.
  - a) What small precautions does he take?
  - b) Would you have done the same or not?
- a) *He wets his shirt and uses it to protect his face and nose.*
- b) *Personal response.*
5. Try acting this chapter in class. Divide into two groups: one group is to act the rescue of Ollie's father from the boat and the other the rescue of Alecto and Lynxman.

## Chapter 15: A Helicopter

### Pre-reading

1. Look at the chapter heading. Who do you think is in the helicopter?
1. *This question encourages prediction. Any valid suggestion.*

### While reading

2. Look at the similes/comparisons in the paragraph after Zinzi's mother arrives, e.g. "his dad looked like someone trying to put socks on an octopus" and "the story came spilling out like sugar streaming out of a gash in a paper bag with no stopping until it was empty". Pick one of these and say why it is so effective.
2. *Learners choose one these and explain why it is effective.*
3. a) How does Ollie try to stop Alecto?
- b) Why does he believe the men in the helicopter would be armed?
3. a) *Ollie dives at Alecto and tries to grab her ankles.*
- b) *If they are friends of Alecto's they are likely to be criminals.*

### Post-reading

1. How did the pilot manage to find Ollie and Zinzi?
1. *She followed the smoke.*
2. What is meant by "illicit dealings in endangered animals"? Give one example of this kind of trade involving South African animals.
2. *There are a number of examples that can be used. The most obvious is the poachers who kill rhinos kill or maim rhinos just for their horns.*
3. Why can they not save all the animals trapped by the fire?
3. *The fire is very fierce and is moving at such a terrifying pace that there is no chance of rescuing these animals.*
4. Why are the rivermen not afraid of pythons?
4. *They see pythons as their friends because they eat the civets that steal their food. They therefore see them as snakes to be welcomed. You are lucky if you have one in your village.*
5. Why does Tooting seem a very desirable place to be at this moment?
5. *It has been a traumatic time for Ollie. There have been so many dangers to face. A safe and predictable place like Tooting seems very desirable now.*
6. Why do they need to go to hospital?
- They are all suffering from smoke inhalation and burns. Most of them have bad bruises and Ollie's father has a nasty bump on his head.*
7. What kind of note does this chapter end on? Why?
7. *It ends on a humorous note. This is because Zinzi and Ollie and their parents are so relieved to have the danger behind them.*

## Chapter 16: My Dad – the Famous Herpetologist

### Pre-reading

1. Why is it so difficult for Ollie to see a member of his family as famous?

*1. Most people find it difficult to see a member of their family as famous because they know him or her so well. Ollie is no different.*

### During reading

2. The land below the helicopter looks like a giant jigsaw puzzle in black and green. What does seeing things from this perspective make him realise about man's importance in the universe?

*2. It makes Ollie see how insignificant man is.*

3. Why does Alecto still scare Ollie even though he has saved her life?

*3. Alecto looks fierce and even evil. He thinks she looks like a witch. He also knows that she is capable of anything and fears that at any moment she could free herself and force the pilot to fly where she would like to go.*

### Post-reading

1. Do you think that Ollie was brave? Why?

*1. Personal choice. Learners can take either position. They must be able to give clear, valid reasons.*

2. Ollie does not see what his father does as a "proper job".

a) Why?

b) How would you define a proper job?

2. a) *He would like to have his father at home. He would go to work every day and come home every night.*

b) *Personal response.*

3. What will happen if we do not treat nature with respect?

*3. We will find ourselves in trouble. Disturbing the balance of nature can lead to some species dying out, fertile land becoming desert, new conditions which allow certain diseases to develop etc.*

4. Ollie still cannot agree with his father about the importance of his work.

What are his reasons?

*4. There are two reasons. He feels that his father should give more importance to him and his grandmother. He also thinks that his father should have a more serious job – little frogs are not really important.*

5. Ollie says to his father "you don't seem to understand the rules of a family". What is he trying tell him?

*5. He is trying to tell him that he should be more considerate.*

6. How have the roles of parent and child changed following the difficulties faced by Ollie in his rescue attempt?

*6. Ollie is taking on a parent role to some extent in that he feels that he must talk to his father about becoming more responsible and more organised and spending more time at home.*

*His father, on the other hand, is ready to take advice.*

7. Does Ollie really want his father to change? Discuss.

*7. Ollie does want his father to change in small ways. He wants him to take better care of himself, to bear in mind that he has a responsibility to be a father so not take risks, and to spend more time at home. However, he has really come to respect his father's work as a herpetologist and would like him to continue to work hard to ensure that we have a sustainable environment.*

