

Balaclava Boy by Jenny Robson

Please note that the answers should be used as guidelines. Essentially, the focus is not on 'right' answers, but on helping learners to understand the text. They aim to alert learners to the development of plot and characters and to the writer's imaginative use of language. Throughout it is important to help learners make connections between what they know and what is in the text. As the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement: Senior Phase Grades 7-9 reminds us: "The teaching of literature ... is impossible without the thoughtful and honest interpretations of the learners themselves".

Chapter 1: Comprehension

Pre-reading

1. Can you remember your first few days at a new school? What did it feel like to be the new girl or boy in your class? Were you excited? Nervous? Or just plain terrified? Try to imagine how the new child in this story is feeling.
1. *This is an open-ended question designed to call to mind necessary background knowledge. The question could be answered individually, in pairs or in larger groups. Learners could be encouraged to describe their first day at school. They could then list possible adjectives to describe how Tommy feels at this point.*

During reading

2. Notice the interesting information the author gives to help us to form a clear picture of the main characters. These details also add a touch of humour and fun to the story.
2. *Learners could list information such as:
Dumisani (Dumz) is a joker
Doogal (Doogz) also likes making jokes. He likes trying out words he has heard other people say.
Cherise is unpopular because she is bossy and a bit of a show off about how clever she is. She is usually obedient.
Miss Venter (Dragon Lady) tends to repeat phrases. She tries to get the children to work. When she speaks to the class, she pats her chest and clouds of white (Lily of the Valley) talcum powder fly up.*

Post-reading

1. Why do you think the school is called Colliery School?
 1. *It is near a coal mine.*
2. How does Dumisani make the comprehension more interesting for Doogal and himself?
 2. *Dumisani adds absurd detail to the story they have been given.*
3. Why is Cherise unpopular with Doogal and Dumisani?
 3. *Cherise keeps trying to boss them around.*
4. We sometimes use acronyms or abbreviations (SABC, for example.) Doogal uses the acronym "aka". What do you think it stands for?
 4. *aka stands for 'also known as'.*
5. Doogal and Dumisani try to work out why Tommy is wearing a balaclava. Write down three of their suggestions.
 5. *He has a birthmark / his face is scarred as a result of a fire/ he has scars all over his body, including his face as a result of an accident.*

6. This book is written in informal/colloquial English, because the narrator is Doogal who thinks and speaks in this way. One example is the word “stuff” instead of “things”. Write down some other examples of colloquial language.
6. *sucks, shush*
7. What do you think is going to happen in the next chapter?
7. *This is an open-ended question aimed at encouraging learners to predict the storyline.
Any valid answers: Dumisani and Dugal are going to make friends with Tommy so they can find out why he is wearing a balaclava / They are going to try to pull off the balaclava.*

Chapter 2: Break-time

Pre-reading

1. We all have a right to our privacy. This means that others should respect our personal space and be polite. Is it polite to ask someone personal questions in order to satisfy your curiosity? Is there a better way to make a stranger feel at home?
1. *It depends on how the question is asked.
It would be better to wait until he or she knows you better. In the meantime, you could tell the new person something about yourself or tell him or her things about the school that could help him or her to feel at home.*

During reading

2. Notice how the children feel when they play a game of soccer and the way in which this sport helps them to feel happy and relaxed.
2. *All the boys mix naturally, even although they are not all from the same class. They are able to make new friends.*

Post-reading

1. Mr Rasool tells the children to be kind to the newcomer. Why do you think Doogal and Dumisani walk around the playground with Tommy at break-time?
1. *They are hoping to find out why he wears a balaclava.*
2. What do the Doo Dudes find disappointing about the way Tommy eats his lunch?
2. *Tommy does not take off his balaclava to eat his lunch.*
3. How do you think Obakeng got his nickname?
3. *He probably has long thin legs.*
4. Why does Obakeng want Balaclava Boy to be on his side the next day?
4. *Balaclava Boy is a good player.*
5. The boys call Comprehension “stupid and boring”. Later they say the same thing about Geography and Maths. Do you think that they really mean this? Explain.
5. *Personal response. Clear explanation of view.*
6. Doogal will be going to boarding school in a different town. Where will Dumisani be going?
6. *Dumisani will be going to his grandmother in Port Shepstone and will be attending high school there.*
7. How does this make Doogal feel?

7. *Doogal feels sad that he'll be losing his best friend in the whole world, and worried that he won't find any new friends in his new school.*

Chapter 3: Maths

Pre-reading

1. Do you have a nickname? If so, how do you feel about it? Can you think of any nicknames that are clever but hurtful?
 1. *This is open-ended. It might be best to have a whole class discussion that the teacher can guide. This could be linked to Life Orientation.*

During reading

2. Each child has a different way of speaking. This helps us to imagine each character. Obakeng says "My bruz" and JECO says "EISH". What about Thandi and some of the others? What does this tell us about them?
 2. *Thandi says "Wazzup": This suggests that she likes to know what is going on.*
Cherise says "Grow up": This suggests that she is bossy and superior.
Tommy says "Because": This suggests that he is not willing to share his secret.

Post-reading

1. Dumisani and Doogal get to school much earlier than usual on Tuesday morning. What is the reason for this?
 1. *They were eager to find out why Balaclava Boy wears a balaclava./There was a mystery to be solved.*
2. Do you agree with Cherise that "because" can't be an answer to a question? Explain your answer.
 2. *"Because" cannot usually be an answer to a question. Literally it means that you are about to give the answer, but here it is used on its own to indicate that this person does not want to give a reason.*
3. Cherise calls the boys "Double Trouble" instead of the Doo Dudes. How do they feel about this nickname?
 3. *They do not like the name, probably because they want a more glamorous image.*
4. How did Miss Venter get her nickname, the Dragon Lady?
 4. *When she pats her chest, a cloud of talcum 'puffs' out. This reminds the children of the song "Puff the Magic Dragon".*
5. Explain why the children call Billy de Beer "Lost-in-Space".
 5. *Billy spends a lot of time staring out of the window during class time (probably daydreaming).*
6. What are the children doing that causes Miss Venter to call them "Jack-in-the-boxes"?
 6. *The children are finding reasons to get up so they can walk past Dumisani and Doogal's desks to find out why they are doing their work so quietly.*
7. Explain Dumisani and Doogal's different ways of dealing with going separate ways in Grade Eight.
 7. *Dumisani prefers to focus on the present; they are still in the same school and can be best friends for six more months. Doogal prefers to focus on the future.*
8. Write down a simile from p.21.
 8. *"Behaving like Jack-in-the-boxes"*

Chapter 4: Tuesday Natural Science

Pre-reading

1. Do you like adding bits to make a more serious picture funny. Some people like blackening some of the teeth in a picture of a smiling face. What else could you do?
 1. *This is open-ended. Any valid suggestion should be accepted. E.g. You could add a beard or a moustache; you could put freckles or a wart on the face.*

During reading

2. Psychology is the study of the mind and how people behave. In this chapter, Cherise tries to use *what she thinks* is psychology on Tommy to get him to share his secret. Notice what she says to him.
2. *Learners should notice that she first tries to “boss” him by telling him about reasons and explanations. When this does not work, she asks “why” questions that he would want to have the answer to. When he asks for a reason, she says “because”. She is trying to make Tommy realise how annoying/frustrating his answer “because” is.*

Post-reading

1. By copying Tommy’s reply (“Because”) Cherise tries to persuade him to share his secret with her. Is this a good plan, in your opinion? Explain why or why not.
 1. *It is not a good plan because Tommy soon recognises what she is trying to do.*
 2. How would **you** try to gain Tommy’s trust?
 2. *This is open-ended and could be linked to Life Orientation. In the feedback, there should be a discussion of the suggestions that are likely to work and why.*
 3. How do Dumisani and Doogal amuse themselves during the Natural Science lesson?
 3. *Apart from labelling the fins of the fish, they spend time adding humorous touches to the drawing. Dugal adds an iPod and spectacles and Dumisani adds a cowboy hat and dreadlocks.*
 4. How do you think Mpho (aka Mousie Mousie) got her nickname?
 4. *She probably got her name because she never says anything (as silent as a mouse).*
 5. Briefly describe Dumisani’s Plan B.
 5. *Dumisani’s Plan B is to follow Tommy home without being seen and then watch him through the window when he takes off his balaclava.*
 6. Do you think they are going to find out Tommy’s identity in the next chapter? Explain your answer.
 6. *Personal response. They need to give a simple, but clear explanation of their view. [This is another question designed to encourage children to predict.] Possible answer: No, because the story has quite a long way to go.*
 7. What does the expression “to get stuck into (something)” mean?
 7. *To start something whole-heartedly or with conviction.*

Chapter 5: Questions

Pre-reading

1. It is a good thing to ask questions. But questions can also be annoying and out of place. What examples can you think of?
 1. *This provides a useful link with Life Orientation. A possible way of handling this would be to let learners work in pairs to share their ideas before exploring their suggestions in a whole class situation.*

During reading

2. Look out for Doogal's use of amusing similes in this chapter. The first is "going like a Boeing".
2. *Other examples: purring like a Porsche; racing like a Lamborghini in fifth gear.*

Post-reading

1. When you compare one thing with another, it can help you to imagine or understand something better.
 - a) Explain how "She patted her chest until powder hung like a cloud over our heads" helps us to picture what happens and to enjoy the humour.
1.
 - a) *You can picture Miss Venter patting her chest again and again until the powder forms a cloud and you can also picture the discomfort of the children. A cloud also foretells rain, and they know that the powder will eventually land on them.*
 - b) Find another simile (comparison using 'like' or 'as' that helps you picture what is happening.
 - b) *This is open-ended. The children need to find examples.*
2. Why does the Doo Dudes' Plan C fail? Describe what happens in your own words.
2. *The plan fails because Tommy's only answer is "because". Eventually he stops doing even that.*
3. What is plan C? Explain in your own words.
3. *As many of the class as possible need to find an excuse to go past Tommy's desk one by one and ask in a whisper why he is wearing the balaclava. The idea is that Tommy would give in and answer.*
4. What do you think Dumisani and Doogal's drawing looked like? Do a quick sketch.
4. *Learners can explain and then do a sketch or simply do a sketch of caps and scarves and smiley faces on a tooth diagram.*
5. Something funny happens when Lost-in-Space walks past Tommy's desk. Explain the humour.
5. *Lost-in-Space forgets what he is supposed to say.*
6. Doogal's mom is "pretending this is fun". How do you think she really feels?
6. *She feels as sad and worried as he does.*

Chapter 6: Answers

Pre-reading

1. What does the saying, "Curiosity killed the Cat!" mean? What problems can arise when we are too curious?
1. *It means that curiosity often takes you into dangerous territory. Personal response.*

During reading

2. In the second paragraph, the narrator tells us that Cherise "smirked"? What does this tell us about the kind of person she is?
2. *She likes to be the person who knows how to do things. She enjoys seeing others fail.*

Post-reading

1. What is funny about the sentence: "We went back to writing about our stupid, boring Most Exciting Holidays"?
1. *The children do not find the topic exciting at all.*

2. Cherise has another plan that includes all the Grade Seven children. She collects all their written answers to a question. All these answers begin with “because”. What was her question? What does she plan to do with all these answers?
2. *Her question was “Why does Tommy wear a balaclava”? She is planning to read them out during class on the next Friday, hoping that Tommy will get so tired of hearing the wrong reasons that he will tell them the real reason.*
3. Which answer do you like best?
3. *Learners are free to choose the answer they like.*
4. **Doogal** thinks that Obakeng’s answer is weird. What do you think?
4. *Learners can agree with Obakeng or disagree. They should be able to explain their choice.*
5. Write down 10 of the misspelt words and then see if you can correct them.
5. *stik – stick*
imbarissed – embarrassed
hez – he’s
fanz – fans
disees – diseases
intlgnt – intelligent
bhind – behind
thinx – thinks
idiyots – idiots
cabiges – cabbages
n – an
6. Write down an example of antitheses from this page.
6. *“Then I realised I wasn’t shouting, I was whispering.”*

Chapter 7: Assembly

Pre-reading

1. Do you have bullies at your school in your neighbourhood? What are the ways in which they hurt other children?
1. *This is could be linked to Life Orientation. Since children may be reluctant to speak in front of others, you could let them write their answers on an A4 page and then use the answers as the basis of a class discussion.*

During reading

2. In telling the story, Doogal often gives us the exact words the children or the teachers say and then comments. How does this help us to enjoy the story?
2. *It makes the story more vivid – the characters come alive.*

Post-reading

1. Why do the Grade Sevens forget all about Cherise’s plan for free orals?
1. *On the day before, Tommy was dragged off to the bush behind Mr Plaatjies shed.*
2. Who launches the attack on Tommy?
2. *The bullies in Grade Eight.*

3. How do the Grade Seven children feel about the bullying? Look for clues in their behaviour at Assembly and in the playground.
3. *The Grade Seven children hate and fear bullying.*
4. Mrs Twetwe is the only teacher who doesn't have a nickname. Why is this so?
4. *I think the learners are really scared of her.*
5. Although Mr Rasool is always telling the children to be kind, there is a lot of bullying going on in the school. You might have experienced this problem in your school too. What do you think should be done about it?
5. *This is another opportunity to link English to Life Orientation. In this story, there is both verbal and physical bullying. It might be useful to make a list of the answers and then discuss these in a whole class environment.*
6. What is Doogal's plan to stay at Colliery Primary? Do you think it's a good idea? Why/why not?
6. *He considers failing Grade Seven on purpose. Personal response to 2nd half of the question.*

Chapter 8: Sixth period

Pre-reading

1. What are you hoping you will find out in this chapter?
1. *This is open-ended but answers should reflect an engagement in the story, e.g. I hope that the bullies will be punished./ I hope we will find out at last why Tommy wears a balaclava.*

During reading

2. We saw how action can be expressed by choosing good verbs. Giving us a clear picture of the characters is another. What do we find out about Mr Rasool in this chapter?
2. *We find out that Mr Rasool is a soft-hearted man. He becomes upset (cries) when he hears about cruelty in his school.*

Post-reading

1. What have we learnt so far about Tommy? What else do we find out about him in this chapter?
1. *We know that he is a good soccer player and that he is able to refuse to answer questions he is not willing to answer. We now find out that he has been to seven different schools. He is brave and has a good sense of humour.*
2. Why is Mr Rasool's nickname 'Mr Mosi'? Do you think it is a good choice?
2. *He is called Mr Mosi because he cries so easily. Mosi is short for Mosi-oa-Tunya, the other name for the Victoria Falls.*
3. Germolene is an antiseptic ointment for cuts and sores. Can you work out why Mrs Modise is nicknamed the Germolene Queen?
3. *She is called the Germolene Queen because she is the first aid lady so she is the one to go to when you need antiseptic ointment on cuts and sores.*
4. In the sixth lesson, Cherise tells the class that she has decided not to read out their notes in Friday Free Orals. She also gives her reasons for this decision. What does this tell us about Cherise at this point in the story?
4. *This shows that there is another side to Cherise. She is able to see when she is wrong and to admit it.*

5. Doogal has a “brilliant idea”. At exactly the same moment, Dumisani has the same idea. He explains it to Cherise and the others in the class. The reader is **not told what it is**, however. What does this add to the story?
5. *This makes the story more gripping. It makes us want to read on to find out.*
6. The writer deliberately does not tell us everything. This is known as building suspense. Skim through the chapter again to see how this is done.
6. *This would be a good activity to do with the whole class. The teacher helps the learners to see what the writer leaves out.*
7. How would you describe the type of personality Dumisani has?
7. *Personal response. Could be “gregarious, approachable, likeable”.*

Chapter 9: Surprise

Pre-reading

1. Incognito means being disguised, or pretending to be someone else. This is something you do when you attend a fancy-dress party, or cover your face with a mask. How could it be useful to wear a disguise?
1. *Open-ended. Some suggestions: People may reveal sides of themselves that they would not if they knew that you were there / You could take some risks – for instance, ask someone to dance with you or go out with you that you would be nervous to ask otherwise.*

During reading

2. Enjoy the fun and humour, not to mention all the surprises!
2. *Enjoying the book is very important.*
- . *There are quite a few surprises – the whole class comes to school wearing balaclavas. During break the soccer boys do not know who they are so they can race past the bullies and shout insults. The biggest surprise is that Tommy asks Dumisani to be the one to explain why he wears a balaclava. The fun comes in what the boys have to wear as balaclavas. Doogal has to adapt a pink-and-purple tea-cosy with flowers on top. Because there is only one hole – the hole for the tea-pot handle – he can only look with one eye at a time. Dumisani has to wear his cousin’s army balaclava which is much too big for him. Obakeng has to wear an old black beanie with a jagged hole cut in it so he can see. X-man, Riyaad and Innocent have their faces squashed flat by the pantyhose legs they wear. The soccer game at break is hilarious because no one was sure who was in whose team.*

Post-reading

1. What is the wonderful surprise the whole school gets on Friday morning?
1. *Everyone is in that class is in balaclavas.*
2. Choose the two balaclavas you find most amusing, and describe them in your own words.
2. *Any two can be chosen. One obvious choice is Doogal’s pink-and-purple tea-cosy with flowers on top, with only one hole – the hole for the tea-pot handle – so he can only look with one eye at a time.*
3. Describe Miss Venter’s reaction to her strange- looking bunch of children.
3. *Miss Venter was so shocked that she was unable to speak and looked at her class wide-eyed.*
4. Explain why the Grade Seven children are able to shout insults at the Grade 8 bullies. (Why are they not scared of them now?)

4. *The balaclavas will not know who has been insulting them so they will not be able to do anything about it.*
5. Why is being incognito not a good idea on a soccer field?
5. *It is quite impossible to be sure who is in your team.*
6. What do you enjoy most about Mr Abrahamse?
6. *This is open-ended. Learners are free to choose any aspect of the description.*
7. Do you think Doogal's mom really cried for three weeks? What literary device is this an example of?
7. *No, she did not cry for three weeks. It is an example of hyperbole.*

Chapter 10: Free Orals – Part 1

Pre-reading

1. Saying an oral in front of the class becomes much easier if you are feeling confident. Wearing balaclavas gives the children confidence. Can you explain why?
1. *No one will know who is speaking. / The other children will not be able to see your face.*

During reading

2. Miss Venter encourages audience participation. Why do you think the children enjoy this aspect of the lesson?
2. *They do not enjoy sitting quietly; they find it much more fun to join in.*

Post-reading

1. What is so amazing about Mousie's oral?
1. *Mousie/Mpho usually never says a word. During her oral she speaks out clearly and succeeds in telling such a funny story that she makes everyone in the class laugh.*
2. Donna-Kyle's nicknames are Factfile and Discovery Channel. Can you guess the kind of oral she usually prepares?
2. *She usually prepares orals that are packed with interesting facts.*
3. Why do the children find her oral particularly interesting today?
3. *Her oral is about how balaclavas were first used and how they got their name.*
4. Briefly summarize the information given by Donna about the balaclava.
These knitted "masks" were first used by the English soldiers in the Crimean War. They kept their faces warm, but they could still see to shoot. The name balaclava comes from the name of the town where a very big battle was fought during that war.
5. Your teacher is unlikely to allow you to wear a balaclava when you do your oral. Can you suggest some problems that could arise if your face was covered up in this way? On the other hand, wearing a mask could really be a good idea in some orals. What is your view?
5. *Some problems that could arise:
The assessment of an oral often includes facial expression.
It might be difficult to hear the person clearly.
Learners are free to argue for the use of a mask or against it.*

Chapter 11: Free Orals – Part 2

Pre-reading

1. How do you think this story is going to end?

1. *Personal response.*

During reading

2. What makes Dumisani such a good story teller?

2. *Dumisani knows how to get audience to join in and he knows how to keep the audience interested.*

Post-reading

1. Notice how Dumisani gets the attention of the class. He is sincere and honest (very important!) but he also tells a story well.

1. *This would make a good whole class activity. His techniques could be useful information for the learners for the next round of orals.*

2. Using your own words, briefly tell story of why Tommy decided to wear a balaclava.

2. *“Tommy” decided to wear a balaclava because she found it difficult to be at a new school again and again with everyone whispering and staring. At her last school (in Scotland) all the children wore balaclavas and she found it wonderful to feel safe and protected. That is why she asked Mr Rasool if she could wear one at Colliery Primary, her seventh school.*

3. The children have been imagining all kinds of things about Tommy and his balaclava. There is a slight **anti-climax** when the true reason is given. This is followed immediately by the **climax**, the most dramatic moment in the story. In one sentence, summarise the climax.

3. *Tommy is a girl not a boy.*

4. Doogal describes his feelings of absolute amazement when Tommy takes off “his” balaclava. Quote one good line from this paragraph and say why you like it.

4. *Learners may choose any line.*

5. What tells us that Billy de Beer is still Lost-in-Space?

5. *He asks why the new boy has such long hair. (He obviously has not registered that Tommy is really a girl.)*

6. Many of the characters have changed during the story. Which one have you enjoyed reading about most? Briefly explain.

6. *This is open-ended. Learners can choose any character that has changed.*

7. List the following characters: Doogal, Dumisani, Tommy, Cherise, Miss Venter, and Billy de Beer. Add two more characters of your own choice. Next to each name write down how the person has changed (grown) during the novel.

7. *Doogal – he has started enjoying school and has become thoughtful to others*

Dumisani - he has started enjoying school and has become thoughtful to others

Tommy – she has gained confidence and is thoroughly enjoying being part of the class

Cherise – she is no longer solely interested in her own success and in correcting others. She

has become part of the class and interested in helping others rather than setting them right. However, she is still bossy.

Miss Venter – she is a little less nervous. She does not pat her chest as often.

Billy de Beer – He has made only a little change. He still daydreams most of the time. However, he does occasionally join in.

Mpho – she has revealed her ability to write imaginatively and to tell funny stories.

8. A good story must have a successful climax. There should be an element of **surprise** as well as a satisfying **feeling**. Soon after this, the story should be rounded off with a suitable conclusion. What do you like or dislike about the end of the novel?
8. *Personal response.*