

The Mozart Question

Michael Morpurgo

Teacher notes: *The Mozart Question*

Curriculum references: Years 5–6

Programme of study: Reading comprehension

Children should be taught to:

- maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:
 - continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks
 - identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing
- understand what they read by:
 - drawing inferences such as inferring characters’ feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
 - predicting what might happen from details stated and implied
- provide reasoned justifications for their views.

Running the task

- Read out the extract and explain that it is part of a book called *The Mozart Question* by Michael Morpurgo. Michael Morpurgo was the third Children’s Laureate and he writes books that children love.
- Make sure that the children are confident about the characters’ names: Lesley, Meryl, Paulo Levi and Mozart.
- Explain that Mozart was a composer of music who lived in Austria more than 200 years ago. The story is about something that happened in Germany during the Second World War when the characters were living in Germany.
- Ask the children what sort of text this is, discuss the features and how they know.
- Read the extract then ask the children to reread it in pairs, underlining any words they cannot read or do not understand. These can then be explained before the children start the task and will also help inform your assessment of their reading skills, where relevant. Do not explain the meaning of “*distraught*” since this is the subject of a question. However, the children could use their dictionaries to check the meaning of this word before the task begins.
- Children should read the text and complete their answers.
- Take the opportunity to circulate and ask individual children to read aloud to you from the point in the text they have reached, so you can assess their reading fluency and expression.

Assessment guidance

Use the list below to identify the content domains that the children are working on in this task.

Typically, children working at the expected standard will:

- show an understanding of the meaning of vocabulary in context **2a**
- retrieve key details and quotations from fiction and non-fiction to demonstrate understanding of character, events and information **2b**
- make developed inferences drawing on evidence from the text **2d**
- explain and justify inferences, providing evidence from the text to support reasoning **2d**
- make developed predictions that are securely rooted in the text. **2e**

What to expect

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- 1 What sort of writer is Lesley?** (2d)
- Children working at the expected standard may simply say ‘reporter’ or ‘journalist’. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard may add that she writes about the arts, based on her boss’s job title.
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- 2 Find and copy *one* word from the first five paragraphs that tells us Meryl Monkton was very upset when she made the phone call.** (2a)
- Children working at the expected standard should be able to select the correct word to answer this question. Those working towards the expected standard may incorrectly offer a phrase or select a different word.
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- 3 Describe Meryl’s character. Use evidence from the text to support your description.** (2d)
- Children working at the expected standard might say that she is rude and bad-tempered and mention the fact that she “*did not trouble to hide her irritation*”. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard should expand this from different parts of the text, e.g. she always came straight to the point, never bothered with polite chat, did not like stupid questions or people feeling sorry for her. They will make more inferences about Meryl from the way she speaks as well as what she actually says.
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- 4 How do you know Paulo Levi is famous?** (2d)
- Children working at the expected standard should be able to select at least two correct answers.
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- 5 Do you think this story is set in the past, present or future? Explain how you know.** (2d)
- Most children should be able to identify the use of the telephone as showing that it is set in relatively modern times. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard may also be able to see the speed of travel between countries (an interview in Venice the next day) as suggesting it is relatively recent. The fact the text is set in the past tense and the writer is recalling memories from earlier in her career may also be an indicator.
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- 6 Why does Meryl order Lesley not to ask about the Mozart question?** (2b)
- Children working at the expected standard should say that Paulo Levi will cancel the interview because he had only agreed to it if he was not asked the Mozart question. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard may state that it must be something upsetting or traumatic for him to respond in that way.
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- 7 Why do you think “*The silence at the end of the phone was long*”?** (2d)
- Children working at the expected standard may say that Meryl is annoyed that Lesley does not know what the Mozart question is. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard may suggest that Meryl is quite a snappy character and that she is shocked into silence by the fact that Lesley does not know, or that she does not know how explain it.
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- 8 What do you think will happen in Lesley’s interview with Paulo Levi?** (2e)
- The book is called *The Mozart Question*, which suggests that the question is asked or discussed. Children working at greater depth within the expected standard should see this.
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From *The Mozart Question* by Michael Morpurgo

The question I am most often asked is always easy enough to answer.

Question: how did you get started as a writer? Answer: funnily enough, by asking someone almost exactly that very same question, which I was only able to ask in the first place by a dose of extraordinarily good fortune.

I had better explain.

My good fortune was, of course, someone else's rotten luck – it is often that way, I find. The phone call sounded distraught. It came on a Sunday evening. I had only been working on the paper for three weeks. I was a cub reporter, this my first paid job.

"Lesley?" It was my boss, chief arts correspondent Meryl Monkton, a lady not to be messed with. She did not waste time with niceties; she never did. "Listen, Lesley, I have a problem. I was due to go to Venice tomorrow to interview Paulo Levi."

"Paulo Levi?" I said. "The violinist?"

"Is there any other Paulo Levi?" She did not trouble to hide her irritation. "Now look, Lesley. I've had an accident, a skiing accident, and I'm stuck in hospital in Switzerland. You'll have to go to Venice instead of me."

"Oh, that's terrible," I said, smothering as best I could the excitement surging inside me. Three weeks into the job and I'd be interviewing the great Paulo Levi, and in Venice!

Talk about her accident, I told myself. Sound concerned. Sound very concerned.

"How did it happen?" I asked. "The skiing accident, I mean."

"Skiing," she snapped. "If there's one thing I can't abide, Lesley, it's people feeling sorry for me."

"Sorry," I said.

"I would postpone it if I could, Lesley," she went on, "but I just don't dare. It's taken more than a year to persuade him to do it. It'll be his first interview in years. And even then I had to agree not to ask him the Mozart question. So don't ask him the Mozart question, is that clear? If you do he'll like as not cancel the whole interview – he's done it before. We're really lucky to get him, Lesley. I only wish I could be there to do it myself. But you'll have to do."

"The Mozart question?" I asked, rather tentatively.

The silence at the end of the phone was long.

Name:	Class:	Date:
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Read the text, then answer the questions.

1 What sort of writer is Lesley?

2 Find and copy one word from the first five paragraphs that tells us Meryl Monkton was very upset when she made the phone call.

3 Describe Meryl’s character. Use evidence from the text to support your description.

4 How do you know Paulo Levi is famous? Tick **all** that apply.

Lesley knows straightaway that he is a violinist.

The name Paulo Levi is famous.

Meryl says “*Is there any other Paulo Levi?*”

Lesley refers to “*the great Paulo Levi*”.

5 Do you think this story is set in the past, present or future? Explain how you know.

6 Why does Meryl order Lesley not to ask about the Mozart question?

7 Why do you think “*The silence at the end of the phone was long*”?

8 What do you think will happen in Lesley’s interview with Paulo Levi?
