The Dark Wild Chatterpack

Reading and activity ideas for your Chatterbooks group
The Last Wild and The Dark Wild  by Piers Torday

About this pack

Here are two absorbing adventures, set in a world being destroyed by human misuse and abuse, where the last creatures have been driven into hiding. These books will appeal to readers aged 9 years and upwards – they are stories rich with suspense, humour, emotion, and thought-provoking content. The Last Wild was published in 2013 and was shortlisted for the Waterstones Children’s Book Prize. Second (in what will be a trilogy) is The Dark Wild, just published in March 2014.

This pack gives information and tasters from the two books, suggestions for more reading around the books’ key themes, and lots of discussion and activity ideas for your Chatterbooks reading groups. It’s brought to you by The Reading Agency and their Children’s Reading Partner, Quercus Books - www.quercusbooks.co.uk.

Chatterbooks [www.readinggroups.org/chatterbooks] is a reading group programme for children aged 4 to 14 years. It is coordinated by The Reading Agency and its patron is author Dame Jacqueline Wilson. Chatterbooks groups run in libraries and schools, supporting and inspiring children’s literacy development by encouraging them to have a really good time reading and talking about books.

The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more through programmes for adults, young people and Children – including the Summer Reading Challenge, and Chatterbooks. See www.readingagency.org.uk

Children’s Reading Partners is a national partnership of children’s publishers and libraries working together to bring reading promotions and author events to as many children and young people as possible.

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Top Tips for a Successful Session
The Dark Wild and The Last Wild – author Piers Torday

I was born in Northumberland, which is possibly the one part of England where more animals live than people, and spent my early years crawling around on the floor of the children's bookshop that my mother ran. My first proper story was written age 13, which starts - 'Sam was a dog. And like most dogs, he was a detective.' After school and university I ended up working at the Pleasance Theatre on the Edinburgh Fringe, and then in TV, where I helped to develop the game show Come And Have A Go If You Think You're Smart Enough for BBC 1 I still write for TV, including the recent Boom Town on BBC 3. But after my Dad wrote his first book at the age of 59, Salmon Fishing in the Yemen, I felt inspired to try stories again and went on an Arvon Course at Ted Hughes' old house in West Yorkshire, where I began to write The Last Wild. It has now sold in over 10 countries worldwide and I have written the sequel, The Dark Wild, published in 2014. In between, I have also been trained as a Volunteer Reader by the brilliant Beanstalk and am very privileged to be working with them in North London to help challenged young readers enjoy books the way I did.

The books

Piers Torday The Last Wild Quercus 978-1780878300

This is a story about a boy named Kester. He is extraordinary, but he doesn’t know that yet. All he knows, at this very moment, is this:

There is a flock of excited pigeons in his bedroom. They are talking to him. His life will never be quite the same again...

This is a captivating animal adventure destined to be loved by readers of all ages. In a dystopian world where animals no longer exist, twelve year old Kester Jaynes sometimes feels as if he hardly exists either. Locked away in a home for troubled children, and unable to speak, he’s told there’s something wrong with him. So when he meets a flock of talking penguins and a bossy cockroach, Kester thinks he’s finally gone a bit mad. But the animals have something to say. The pigeons fly Kester to a wild place where the last creatures in the land have survived. A wise stag needs Kester’s help, and together they must embark on a great journey, joined along the way by an over-enthusiastic wolf cub, a spoilt show-cat, a dancing harvest mouse, and a determined girl named Polly. The animals saved Kester Jaynes. Can Kester save the animals?

A Taste: ‘I am the Wildness, and these creatures are my wild. The last such gathering of animals left alive. Once we roamed far and wide for many strides all over this island – until your sickness came and destroyed so many. The creatures you see before you are the last who remain, each sent by their kind to firm this wild and keep their blood alive, in response to my call. I led us as far north as the ground went, and found this hide-all – a Ring of Trees, free from humans and disease. It is all we have left. We are the last. The last wild.’
Here is what readers have said about The Last Wild:
Imagine a world without animals. Imagine a world without fruits or vegetables. Imagine a world where one corporation controls everything and people are encouraged to live strictly in cities. This is the world of The Last Wild.

This book is for a confident reader of 9 years, up to a young adult reader who wants to further explore the dystopian setting so popular in today’s books for young people. By focusing on animals and creating a protagonist who can talk to them while the natural world is coming apart, readers are offered a first-hand account of what the "end of the world" means for nature and its inhabitants.

And newspapers:
‘Inventive, with laughs, tears and cliff-hangers’ The Sunday Times

‘The sequel had better come soon’ The Observer

Piers Torday  The Dark Wild  Quercus 978-1782064855

Twelve-year-old Kester thought he had discovered the last wild animals in the land. He thought his adventure was over. He was wrong.
Below the sparkling city of Premium, deep underground, a dark wild remains: animals who believe the time is right to rise up against their human enemies.
And soon Kester realises: he is the only one who can stop them.

Kester Jaynes saved the animals. Can he save the humans too?
Together with his loyal friend Polly, and a brave gang of child outlaws, he must find a way – helped too by companions from his previous adventure, including the stag, the cockroach, the wolf-cub, and the dancing harvest mouse.

A Taste: Squinting...through the rain, I can see houses and lawns, with cars parked in the drives. Lawns and drives covered with the wild dogs I saw in the Underearth. They press their paws against the doors and windows, climbing over the cars. The lights in the houses have gone out, but I can see glimpses of pale faces behind the glass.
‘Keeping the humans trapped in their tall-homes they are!’ the bird chirrups. ‘The old moon has gone, the world is in darkness and the storm of storms begins. Soon the great wet will flood over all things and we can start again.’

After you’ve enjoyed these two books look out for the final instalment of Kester’s adventure – coming soon!

www.thelastwild.com
A sample Chatterbooks session plan (times approx.)

Welcome – juice & biscuits

Getting started – ice breaker; a simple warm up activity (10 mins)
– e.g. Scrambled! or Special power – see below.

Discussion – eg. Talking about the books (10 mins)

Longer activity – see the suggested activities, including discussion items (30 mins)

Choosing books (10 mins) Goodbye – and Dates for the next meeting

Ideas for your Chatterbooks sessions
Some of these ideas have a generic theme and can be used in reference to either book. Others link to a particular title.

First of all read one or both of the books! You could start by introducing them in a session and reading one or two chapters together.

Things to talk about
Here are a few shorter activities to get your group thinking and talking.
Use big sheets of paper to write and draw on and keep these on hand for the whole session to inspire and motivate.

The books themselves
What did people think about them?
Which parts have stayed most in their minds?
What did they like best? What didn’t they like?
What did the book/s get them thinking about?
Who was their favourite character? Why?

Special power
Kester finds that he can talk to animals, and hear and understand what they are saying. If you could have a special power, what would it be? Why?
How to grab your readers! First lines, cliff-hangers, and more.
The opening sentences of a book are really important – they have to catch your attention and get you wanting to read more.

What do you think about the **first lines** of these two books? How do they work for you?

**The Last Wild:** My story begins with me sitting on a bed, looking out of the window. I know that doesn’t sound like much. But let me tell you where the bed is, and what I can see from it.

**The Dark Wild:** In the shadow of our apple tree, looking out across a river at a city full of glass and whispers, I take my dad’s hand and watch our enemy fly towards us.

In these two books the author, Piers Torday, ends lots of chapters with a **cliff-hanger**, often something exciting or scary - leaving you in suspense and wanting to see how things can work out in the next chapter.

Here’s one from **The Last Wild:**

*I take a last step back, and as he Lunges for my legs, crying out... I fall back into the air.*

Look for some more cliff-hanger chapter endings and talk about how well you think they work.


Do you think there is a good mixture in these books, to keep readers interested?

Here’s the ending of **The Dark Wild**: Kester is saying that he feels proud...

*Because we’re still here. Because the sun is shining bright in the clear sky. Because there are birds on the towers and deer in the street... We’re going to start this world again*

**What do you think might happen in the 3rd book in the trilogy?**
Listening
It’s really important in this story that Kester listens carefully, not only to what creatures are saying to him, but also to the sounds around him, which can give him clues about what is happening.
Do you think we listen enough to what people are saying to us? Can you think of times when you haven’t listened properly - and maybe things went wrong?

And sometimes there’s more to hear than we realise – Kester says ... *you hear things in the quiet, you see. The sound of something shifting its weight on the ceiling above, or a gust of air that could so easily be a breath...*

In your group, sit in complete silence for 2 to 3 minutes, and listen really carefully for all the sounds around you.
Then collect on a flipchart all the sounds that everyone has heard - there will probably be a lot, even when you think things are pretty quiet!

The things humans do to animals: and animals to animals
Discussion
Both the *Wild* books raise issues around what humans do to animals – e.g. keep them as pets, hunt and kill them, eat them, tread on them. Some of these actions might be justified, some not. And animals eat other animals – a natural part of the food chain.

Think about what Kester says ‘I know animals will always kill some other animals, because they have to eat. But should any animal – including us – ever have that much power over another one?’

Activity ideas

Warm up

Scrambled!
Can you unscramble these words? They are all the names of things and people in the *Wild* books

ROFLAMU SERDIWLENS SERKET YESDIN FLOW-BUC
THREADRUNE EHT NALGERE LYPLO DRAUGSAM REMPUIM
Naming things
The creatures in the Wild books sometimes give their own names to things – e.g. they call a river a ‘fishroad’.

Here are some more of the names they use. What are our words for these things?
- Watersnake
- Whiterforce
- Firestick
- Tall-homes
- The great wet
- Kombylarbester
- Culdee Sack

Have a go at this the other way round - try making up new names for these things!
- Book
- Car
- Forest
- Television

Imagery: Similes
In these books the author often uses similes to make vivid descriptions by comparing things. Here are a couple of examples:

*My thoughts swirl like the clouds above us*
*Cameras perch like eagles on the corners of buildings.*

Have a go at completing these similes, thinking up your own comparisons:

*The scraps of paper fluttered in the wind like...*
*The bright sun was like...*
*The field of blue flowers shimmered like...*

Longer activities

**Your favourite characters**
Talk together about the characters in these stories – collect their names on a flipchart and then ask everyone to choose their favourite character/s and draw them and write about them. E.g. the stag, the cockroach, Polly, Kester, Wolf-Cub, Sidney, Littleman, and the harvest-mouse.
Global warming
These books imagine a time when global warming has had terrible effects on the world: *...when the rest of the world grew too hot, and cracked open in the sun....* *...Half the world flooded. The other half dried up.*

Talk together about what we mean by global warming – look it up in books and on the internet. See the suggested non-fiction titles in the More Reading list at the end of this pack, and also this very recent report about climate change. Have a look at The Guardian’s climate change report.

What can we do to help to look after our world?

In *The Dark Wild* all the animals share a dream – a secret story that foretells all that happens with Kester and the animals. The words near the end of the dream say:

*The sky’s tears filled the great wet*
*And those waters spilled out over the earth*
*Covering us all...*

You could compare this with the story of Noah’s Ark - a global flood, and animals finding a safe place for survival. Or talk about the weather in the UK this winter 2014...

*I have never seen the sea so angry before. The Dark Wild*

Activities and discussion inspired by *The Last Wild*

Scrabbling around

As Kester can’t speak to Polly when he first meets her, he spells out what he wants to say using Scrabble tiles. Get a Scrabble set with a bag of tiles, put children into small groups, and give each group a handful of tiles with a mixture of vowels and consonants. Ask them to try to spell out a sentence with their tiles, using as many as possible – if possible, a sentence which has something to do with *The Last Wild*. Mix up the letters and have another go.

This could be an opportunity to introduce children to the game of Scrabble – it would be an enjoyable occasional activity for the group, maybe playing in pairs against each other.
**The Last Wild: Timeline of Kester’s journey**

*Download this map* of all the places in *The Last Wild* – or draw your own map, copying the one from the front of the book. A3 size or bigger would be good.

- Write short notes next to each place – saying what happened when Kester was there: e.g. Spectrum Hall – ‘Kester escaped from here, thanks to cockroaches and pigeons’.
- Number each place in the order that Kester came to them in the story.
- Put arrows leading from the first place to the second to the third etc, showing the route which Kester took.

**Foraging**

Foraging is searching for wild food and medicinal resources. Polly has been taught by her parents to be an expert forager with good knowledge about what she is looking for, and she keeps detailed pictures and notes about everything in her notebook.

Bring in some wild flowers, leaves and berries for your group to research and identify from a collection of books you have gathered together for this session. Then everyone chooses one thing to draw and label, with a note about anything the plant can be used for. The pages could be put together to make a notebook like Polly’s.

**Chemicals in food production**

In *The Last Wild* ‘Formula’ is a chemically produced food – bright-pink gloop, tasting of prawn cocktail crisps.

In fact quite a lot of our food contains chemicals – e.g. for colour and to enhance flavours. Sometimes the flavour is completely artificial and not real at all! – eg. some meat flavoured crisps.

Have a look at the ingredients listed on food packaging and write down and look up all the ones which seem to be chemicals – e.g. tartrazine, monosodium glutamate.
Positive thinking!
When Kester is locked in his room in Spectrum Hall, as punishment, he says ‘I try to think of happy things’. Do you use thoughts and memories of good things to cheer you up, or maybe to help you to get to sleep? In your group collect on a flipchart all the happy things you like to think of.

Animal voices
The creatures in this story talk to Kester and he describes the kind of sound some of them make. The cockroach’s voice is a crackle, and the spiders make a whistling sound.
If these creatures could talk, what sound do you think they might make?
- A fly
- A snake
- A kangaroo
- A squirrel
- A butterfly

Activities and discussion inspired by The Dark Wild

Waste Town
For reflection and discussion

Waste Town is a town of huts and tents and at its centre is a mountain of rubbish where people scavenge for anything they might use or recycle. Everywhere stinks. There are places like this in the world today – for example the book Behind the Beautiful Forevers, by Katherine Boo, is about people in squatter settlements near the grand airport of Mumbai.

Every morning thousands of waste-pickers fanned out across the airport area in search of vendible excess... These scavengers darted after crumpled cigarette packs tossed from cars with tinted windows. They dredged sewers and raided dumpsters for empty bottles of water and beer...

And in the 18th and 19th centuries, in London, scavengers called ‘mudlarks’ would search in the muddy shores of the River Thames during low tide, for anything that could be re-sold. Conditions were filthy and uncomfortable, with raw sewage and broken glass – and sometimes corpses.
Layers of history  Research and art activity

The rat leads Kester down an underground tunnel to the Underearth of the Dark Wild. As they go they see in the sides of the tunnel layers of earth and abandoned objects, each layer from a different age – e.g. squashed drink cans, plastic bottles, phone handsets, and then, a much lower layer of clay with fragments of red pottery. Talk together about archaeology and digs, and how archaeologists date and interpret their findings.
You’ll find a fun illustration of this in the picture book The Dog that Dug by Korky Paul – and your group could have a go at drawing their own.

Kester also sees paintings on the walls of the Underearth cavern at the end of the tunnel – pictures of bulls and wolves and deer. Find out about cave-paintings and let your group draw pictures of animals in a similar style.

Create your own dance!
The harvest-mouse has a dance for almost everything that she does and feels – e.g. A Dance of Close and Real Escape (on rear paws, shaking front paws in the air), or A Dance of Mousy Concern (a light dance up and down Kester’s arm) – or a quick three-step Dance of Being Caught Red-Pawed.

Get your group in twos and threes to create their own dance. They could be any character in The Dark Wild, and any situation from the story: think about the shape and size of that character and how they might move, and how they might react to the situation.
Or the children can be themselves and create a dance about any feeling or situation. Here are some ideas to get you going!
• Dance of Forgetting to Do My Homework
• Dance of the First Day of the Holidays
• Dance of Feeling Full After a Good Meal
Telling the time from nature

‘Barely half a moon from the battlefield’ says the Cockroach – meaning that about a week has gone by.

Talk about the different ways we can tell the time from nature, including

- The lunar month
- The position of the sun in the sky at different times of the day – and different times of the year
- Birds singing and chattering at dawn and dusk
- The leaves on the trees; flowers at different times of the year

The Amsguard

This is the great barrier built to protect Premium City from rising waters. Find out about the Thames Barrier flood defence and how that works.

Use the description of the Amsguard on p297 of The Dark Wild to draw a picture of this barrier.

For even more ideas you can download the classroom notes for The Last Wild from Quercus Books

More Reading - about the various themes in the Wild trilogy

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<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PUBLISHER</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fiction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony Bradman</td>
<td><em>Under the Weather: Stories about Climate Change</em></td>
<td>Frances Lincoln</td>
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<td>Rachel Carter</td>
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<td><em>After Tomorrow</em></td>
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<td><em>The Promise</em></td>
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<td>Ted Hughes</td>
<td><em>The Iron Man</em></td>
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<td><em>The River Singers</em></td>
<td>OUP</td>
<td>978-0192734808</td>
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<td>Michael Morpurgo</td>
<td><em>This Morning I Met a Whale</em></td>
<td>Walker</td>
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<td>Andy Mulligan</td>
<td><em>Trash</em></td>
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<td><strong>Non-Fiction</strong></td>
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