

Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie

Pre-reading Activities

1. Charles Henderson

One of the main characters in the story is Charlie Henderson. He is going to see a pantomime – a form of theatre traditionally seen at Christmas time – with his family. From the following extracts you will get an idea of what the relationship between him, his son Alec and his wife are.

Mrs Henderson's son, Alec, said *Peter Pan* wasn't a pantomime. At least not what his mother understood by the word. Of course, there was a fairy-tale element to the story, dealing as it did with Never-Never land and lost boys, but there was more to it than that, 'It's written on several levels,' he informed her.

'I've been a lost boy all my life,' muttered Charles Henderson, but nobody heard him.

'And I doubt,' said Alec, 'if our Moira's kiddies will make head nor tail of it.¹ It's full of nannies and coal fires burning in the nursery.'

'Don't talk rot,' fumed Charles Henderson. 'They've seen coal fires on television.'

'Shut up, Charlie,' said Alec. His father hated being called Charlie.

¹won't understand anything



When Alec had gone out to attend a union meeting, Mrs Henderson told her husband he needn't bother to come to the theatre. She wasn't putting up with him and Alec having a pantomime of their own² during the course of the evening and spoiling it for everyone else. She'd ask Mrs Rafferty from the floor above to go in his place.

'By heck,' shouted Charles Henderson, striking his forehead with the back of his hand, 'why didn't I think of that? Perish the thought that our Alec should be the one to be excluded. I'm only the blasted bread-winner.' He knew his wife was just mouthing words.

²having a pantomime of their own' implies they will be arguing ridiculously



On the night of the outing to the theatre, a bit of a rumpus³ took place in the lift. It was occasioned by Moira's lad, Wayne, jabbing at all the control buttons and giving his grandmother a turn.

Alec thumped Wayne across the ear and Charles Henderson flared up. 'There was no cause to do that,' he shouted, though indeed there had been. Wayne was a shocking kiddie for fiddling with things.

'Shut up, Charlie,' ordered Alec.

³Disturbance, noise ⁴frightening the grandmother



'Behave yourself,' shouted Charles Henderson, and he strode in front of the bonnet and made a series of authoritative signals. Alec deliberately drove the car straight at him.

'Did you see what that madman did?' Charles Henderson asked his wife. 'He ran over my foot.'

'You're imagining things,' said Mrs Henderson, but when he looked down he saw quite clearly the tread of the tyre imprinted upon the Cherry Blossom shine of his Sunday left shoe.'



Using the information above, answer the following questions:

1. How does Alec treat his father?
2. Why does Mrs Henderson tell her husband he isn't going to the theatre?
3. Why do you think Charlie got angry with Alec about the treatment of Wayne?
4. Do you think Alec deliberately drove the car at Charlie?

2. Building a story

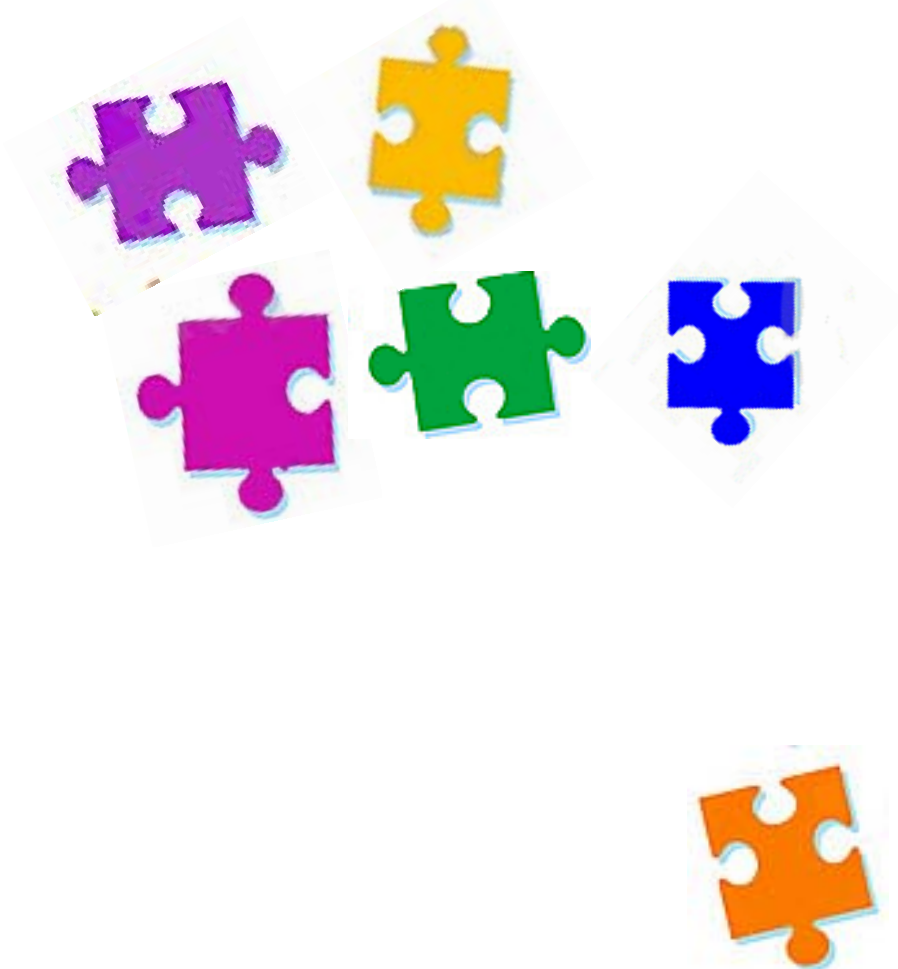
1. From the activities in the first part, you will now know a little about the Henderson family. Now you are going to create a story about the Henderson's going to see a pantomime. The first thing to do is to look at this glossary of words used in the story written by Beryl Bainbridge. Choose any three words that you want, preferably words that you like the sound of. Underline them.

In this little glossary, all words and phrases are explained within the context in which they appear in the story. Other definitions and meaning in other contexts may well exist.

as they pleased – when they wanted
bashed – hit
Belt up – be quiet (rude; unpleasant)
blasted – (mild expletive) damned, bloody
blazed – intense light
bolt upright – sit with a straight, rigid back
bonnet – cover of car engine
brewery – beer factory
carry-on – disturbance; unfortunate event
Cherry Blossom shine – very well polished
clasped – held tightly
coddled – take special care of
codswallop – rubbish, nonsense (*archaic*)
cotton on – understand
cough mixture – medicine for sore throat
craned sideways – looked to his side
Cubs – junior version of Scouts
daft – stupid
dangling – hanging, suspending
dazzling – causing bright light
dozed – slept a little
dressed up – disguised
drooped – hung down
engrossed – absorbed; interested
feeble – weak
fiddling – playing with
flared up – became angry
flicker – light becomes uncertain, irregular
fly off the handle – get angry
foregone conclusion – the result is understood before it happens
fumed – said angrily
giving a turn – shocking or surprising
glimpsed – quick, perhaps involuntary look
glow – give (low) light
good riddance to bad rubbish – losing this was a good thing
grunt sardonically – low, cynical sound
hinges – supporting fulcrums
hissed – spoke through his teeth
hooted – laughed in derision; in disbelief
howling gale – loud, strong wind
jabbing – violent pushing with (e.g.) finger
jerkily – with uneven, awkward movement
knocked down – demolished, destroyed
lead – heavy, base metal

mouthng words – doesn't mean what she says
'nannies and coal fires burning in the nursery' – nannies look after children; the nursery is where children are looked after. The whole phrase, however, implies something upper-class.
nudged – pushed
offspring – children
on a par – equal to
outlandish – ridiculous, stupid
pandering – agreeing with because that is what she thinks he wants to hear
perambulated – walked in a leisurely way
perch – a place of support (especially for birds)
Perish the thought – remove that thought
quid – pound (£)
rancour – bad feeling
rumpus – confusion, annoyance
scoffed – say in such a way as to show that you don't believe what has been said
shed – small building with or without sides
slung a hook – thrown a sharp object
snared – trapped
soar – fly
sobbing – crying
stinging – sharp pain
Sunday shoe – best shoes
swivelled – turned
talk rot – talk nonsense, rubbish.
tap – mechanical device for obtaining water
terraced house – a house connected on each side to another house
throttle – strangle; suffocate
thumped – hit
tiddlers – very small fish
tread of the tyre – (the mark made by) the patterned rubber section of the wheel (of a car).
twinges – small but obvious pains
warehouse – a storage building
with a start – suddenly
wouldn't give it houseroom – dismiss idea

2. Now work in small groups to discuss the words you have chosen. Make a group list of five words from those you discuss.
3. Now create the frame work of the story by answering the following questions. The answers are to be found in your imaginations.
 1. Where do the Henderson's live?
 2. What are they going to see this Christmas?
 3. Who is going?
 4. Who is looking forward to going, and who isn't?
 5. What happens on the way to the theatre?
 6. What does Charlie think about the first half of the show?
 7. How does Charlie feel during the second half of the show?
 8. What is the light doing on the stage?
 9. What happens to Charlie at the end?
4. Now be prepared to tell your story to the rest of the class. Do not write your story down. When you tell your story, you must at least three of the five words from your group list. Write these words on the board before you start to tell the story.



Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie

While Reading Activities

1. Read from the beginning until line 68.

- Describe the relationship between a) Charlie and his wife and b) Charlie and Alec
- What kind of house or flat do you think they live in? Can you describe it? Have they always lived there?

2. Read from line 69 until line 123

- Compare where they live now to where they lived before. According to Charlie, is it better or worse?
- How do you think where Charlie and Mrs Henderson have lived since they were married compares to where they lived when they were children?

3. Read from line 124 until line 202

- What was Alec referring to when he talks about 'Never-Never Land'?
- How do you think Charlie, Alec, Moira and Wayne respectively enjoy the first part of the play?

4. Read from line 203 until line 300

- What is the difference in attitude to the metaphor of Mr Darling/Captain Hook displaying 'kindly' and 'brutal' traits in the same character between Alec and his father? What do you think Moira would have to say on the subject?
- What significance do you think Charlie's indigestion pains will have during the final part of the play?

5. When you have finished reading the story, can you explain the title it was given "Clap Hands, here Comes Charlie"?

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After Reading Activities

Pantomime (1)

Question 1: In the story, 'Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie' the Henderson family go to see a Pantomime – 'Peter Pan'. In the following description of what a pantomime is, most of the headlines have been removed. They are in the box below. Put them in the correct place in the text, but do note that there is one headline that doesn't fit anywhere!

1. Who is who?
2. Get on the right side
3. Tradition isn't what is used to be
4. Don't be left out
5. Is it natural?!
6. What's the plot?

a) What is Pantomime?

In the United Kingdom, 'Pantomime' usually refers to a piece of seasonal theatre, performed around Christmas. In most towns and cities (and even in enthusiastic villages) throughout the country in December and into January, performances of the local pantomime – or 'Panto' as they are more commonly known – can be found. The origins date back to the Middle Ages, and have been influenced since by the Italian 'Commedia dell' Arte', Italian mime, and British Music Hall. In each generation the art form has had to adapt to survive, and its success in doing so means it is very much alive and kicking today.

b) _____

The performances are mainly (though not exclusively) aimed at children, and take as their basis popular fairy tales or folk legends. The most popular subject for a pantomime is 'Cinderella', closely followed in popularity by 'Aladdin', 'Dick Whittington' and 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves'. Other titles include 'Jack and the Beanstalk' and 'Sleeping Beauty' as well as 'Peter Pan', though many purists would not consider this to be a pantomime, rather a children's story. 'Peter Pan' was first performed as a play in London in 1904, and today performances have many of the elements of pantomime included in it. So, what are the 'elements of pantomime'? What makes them different from 'children's stories'?

c) _____

As pantomime has adapted constantly to survive, it should come as no surprise to learn that novelty plays an important role. Modern trends and topical events are frequently included in the performances – everything from references to contemporary politics, popular artists and issues to the latest music and fashion. Those who talk about preserving 'traditional' pantomime would be well advised to keep this in mind.

d) _____

Some of the 'traditional' elements are a matter of 'managed' theatre: a strong story line, which is well told and must include the main elements of good battling evil, and good must always win. Remember that these plays had their origins in the morality plays of the middle ages. In this tradition, the villain or 'baddie' must always enter from the left side of the stage (the 'dark side') while the good guys must come on from the right.

e) _____

Other traditional characteristics include the characters, and the players who take their parts. For example the Pantomime Dame, usually the hero's mother (and, therefore, an older woman) is played by a man, and the role is always a comic one. The Principal Girl (often the title role, like 'Cinderella', 'Snow White', 'Little Red Riding Hood') is usually a glamorous young woman, and in the contemporary scene frequently a character from a popular 'soap opera' from television or the like. The Principal Boy ('the hero') is played by a woman (this is an extension of an 18th century tradition, which was encouraged by Victorian gentlemen who were starved of the sight of women's legs in day to day life!).

f) _____

Bearing in mind that most Pantomimes end with a glamorous wedding between the Principal Boy and the Principal Girl – evil having been roundly defeated – it just shows how modern in concept traditional Pantomimes really are. After all, in the last scene, we will be witnessing two women getting married, while the sobbing mother of the groom is, in reality, a man. Those who wonder why Pantomimes have never been particularly popular beyond the shores of Britain (or some English speaking countries) need look no further!

Question 2: Now complete the following statements in a way that most accurately reflects what the text tells us.

1. 'Peter Pan' a) was written as a Pantomime b) has become a Pantomime c) might be compared to a Pantomime
2. The best Pantomimes are a) reassuringly traditional b) experimental theatre c) a fusion of modern and traditional
3. The choice of Principal Girl reflects a need to a) provide professional input b) give the show a glamorous angle c) maintain a centuries-old tradition.
4. In the final paragraph the author is being a) honest b) provocative c) deceitful

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After Reading Activities

Pantomime (2)

Pantomimes are a form of traditional theatre which are usually performed at Christmas. They contain a number of elements that audiences expect to see: they are based on traditional stories; they are entertainment for the whole family; they have traditional elements like the 'hero' being a woman dressed as a man, and a 'dame' – often the hero's mother – being played by a man dressed as a woman; audiences participate in the performance at the request of the actors; reference to recent events and contemporary, famous people; contemporary songs; it always ends happily, after the obligatory 'transformation scene'.

In 'Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie' the Henderson family go to see a pantomime based on 'Peter Pan'. Other popular themes for pantos include 'Cinderella', 'Aladdin', 'Jack and the Beanstalk' and 'Robin Hood'.

The main characters in a pantomime of 'Robin Hood', for example, might look like this:

Robin Hood	(played by a young woman)
Maid Marion	(played by a young woman)
Maid Marions' Nurse	(played by a middle-aged man, preferably with a deep voice)
Little John	(A very tall man)
Friar Tuck	(A very fat man)
Other Merry Men	(Singers and dancers)
Sheriff of Nottingham	(Cruel looking man)
Captain of Guard	(An idiot, always making mistakes)

There are various versions of the story of Robin Hood, but all of them involve Robin and Marion falling in love, the Sheriff trying capture Robin, an archery contest, and Robin eventually rescuing Marion from the Sheriff. One scene from the pantomime might look like this:

Marion: Oh, Nursey, why can't I go and see the archery contest. I'm sure that Robin will be there.

Nurse: Don't be silly, Marion, you know that the Sheriff (*audience boos*) will be looking for him, and wants to capture him and kill him (*audience boos*)

Marion: I know that, but – oh he's so handsome! – and he is very brave and I am sure that he won't want to miss the games. He's such a good sportsman, and he never hits the referee....

Nurse: Oh you mean like that, what's his name....?

Marion: I'm sure Robin will come in disguise.

Nurse: In disguise? How can you know that, Marion?

Marion: I can just feel it. You see..... (*sings*)

Every breath you take
Every move you make
Every bond you break
Every step you take
I'll be watching you

During the song, we see Robin coming near. He remains hidden and can't be seen by Marion or Nurse.

Robin: (*to audience*) Today I will win the games and win Marion's hand. Oh what a lively girl she is. Such a lovely voice. And such lovely.....assets. I'll win the games if you help me. Will you help me?

etc, etc, etc.....

Decide on a traditional tale from your own country and tell the story to each other in English.

Now decide how this might be made into a short scene in a pantomime. Who are the characters? Who speaks, and who might just appear without speaking. How could certain parts of the story be made funny? Remember that in traditional folk stories like this many of the details have been missed out – you can add what you want!

Also remember the traditions of pantomime: men dress as women, women dress as men - plus comedy, mention of famous, living people and the use of modern popular music.

Write your scene, and act it out for the rest of the class!



After Reading

Consolidation

The following is a summary of the story 'Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie' by Beryl Bainbridge. However, the paragraphs are not in order. Work in pairs to decide which order you think the information should come in. (There may be more than one correct version. Be prepared to justify your answer)

- A** In the car park near the theatre, Alec deliberately drives the car at Charles, and runs over his foot. Charles' protests about this behaviour are ignored by his wife, who always takes her son's side in the disputes between father and son.
- B** The reader understands that the relationship between Alec and his father, Charles, isn't a good one. Alec is always trying to argue with Charles. He calls him 'Charlie' which annoys Charles.
- C** In the last part of the play, Peter Pan asks the children in the audience to clap their hands together if they believe in fairies. Only this will help save the life of Tinkerbell, who has taken some poison to save Peter's life.
- D** The Henderson family receive some tickets for a performance of 'Peter Pan' at the theatre. These tickets are from Mrs Henderson's employer, and are instead of a Christmas cash bonus.
- E** In the interval, Alec makes the point that Mr Darling/Captain Hook is like all fathers – they want to destroy their children.
- F** As the audience applaud, we realise that Charles is having a heart attack. He asks his wife for help and she, clapping hard to save Tinkerbell's life, tells him to shut up.
- G** Before going to the theatre, the Henderson's son, Alec, tells his father and mother that 'Peter Pan' isn't a real pantomime, but an allegorical story.
- H** When they go to the theatre they take Moira, Alec's sister and her two children. They all travel in Alec's car, a mini. Charles isn't pleased about having to travel in the front seat next to his son.
- I** After the interval, Charles starts to feel more and more ill. He finds it hard to concentrate on the play, and starts to get strange ideas about flying.
- J** They start to watch the play. We are reminded that many parts in the play are 'doubles' – for example the father, Mr Darling (a kind man) is also Captain Hook, a symbol of evil.
- K** Just as the play starts, Charles starts to feel ill.

Now link the extracts from the story (below) with the appropriate part of the summary (above). For example *“In the interval, Alec makes the point that Mr Darling/ Captain Hook is like all fathers – they want to destroy their children”* is represented in the text by *“‘The point,’ said Alec, ‘is obvious. Mr Darling longs to murder his offspring.’”*

1. ‘The point,’ said Alec, ‘is obvious. Mr Darling longs to murder his offspring.’ (E)
2. ‘What are you on about?’ asked Charles Henderson. ‘That pirate chappie was never Mr Darling.’
‘Yes it was, Dad,’ said Moira. ‘I didn’t cotton on myself at first, but it was the same man.’
3. ‘You’re imagining things,’ said Mrs Henderson, but when he looked down he saw quite clearly the pattern of the tyre on his shiny shoes.
4. ‘Don’t talk rubbish,’ said Charles Henderson angrily. ‘They’ve seen them on television.’
‘Shut up, Charlie,’ said Alec. His father hated being called Charlie.
5. When the curtain went up, he was beginning to feel the first twinge of his indigestion coming on again.
6. Every time Alec accelerated going around a corner, Charles Henderson was swung against his son’s shoulder.
‘Get over, can’t you?’ cried Alec. ‘Stop leaning on me, Charlie.’
7. ‘Anybody can give money. Somehow the whole process is degrading Taking it giving it. They’re reopening the Empire Theatre for a limited season. I wanted to give you a treat. Something you’ll always remember.’
8. ‘Of course, there was a fairy-tale element to the story, dealing as it did with Never-Never land and lost boys, but there was more to it than that. ‘It’s written on several layers,’ he informed them.
9. ‘Help me,’ he said, using his last breath.
10. ‘.....she says she thinks she could get well again if children believed in fairies.. Say quick that you believe. If you believe, clap your hands.’
11. He had the curious delusion that if he stood up on his seat, he might fly up into the gallery.