

# Coming Home

## Melvin Burgess

### Teachers' Notes

#### Introduction

This BritLit kit is the first of an experimental kind in which video, audio and text are all used to create the full narrative; in fact, all three media need to be used for the story to be told.

Teachers are encouraged to use this key to follow the sequence of activities required to tell the story. The order of activities ((Video 1; Text 1; Video 2; Text 2; Audio; Text 3) should not be altered.

Because of the experimental nature of the materials we are especially keen to get feedback from users. Please contact [brit.lit@pt.britishcouncil.org](mailto:brit.lit@pt.britishcouncil.org)

The original story, 'Coming Home', by Melvin Burgess has been adapted for video and audio by the original author. The classroom activities were devised by Fitch O'Connell and the video and audio made in conjunction with John Green of EFL Audio, London.

#### Key

##### Pre-Reading and While Reading Activities

###### 1. Imagine.

The purpose of this activity is to allow students to speculate freely on the information given. There can be no right or wrong answers. As a result students will have created the beginning of their own narrative which will act as a measure for what they will see, hear and read later.

The words in the box may be of help: explain the meaning, if required (see glossary later in this section)

Students can work in pairs or threes. Once they have been given sufficient time to answer the questions, they should share their answers with another pair.

###### 2. Watch and listen

Students can compare what they imagined might have happened with Lawrence's account.

- He saw his mother and a man she works with kissing passionately.
- He knows he couldn't blackmail anyone; but he fantasises anyway.
- He thinks his mother should talk to him first; "She's is the adult"

###### 3. Read

You might choose to read this part of the story aloud, if you want.

**Ask:** In the first paragraph 'Who is Lawrence talking about?' (*his mother*).

What does 'chicken' mean in this context? (*scared*)

Does this sound like a normal brother/sister relationship? (*probably yes!*)

###### 4. Imagine

Like the first activity, students are free to speculate. Now they have more information as they know the situation at home so their speculation should be more directed or focussed. However, any answer must be considered correct as long as it takes into account the information given. No doubt students will speculate that Lawrence saw her and her lover together, that Nigel is her lover and that she can either choose to talk to Lawrence or not, or choose Nigel over her family or not ..... but accept any fantasy!

### 5. Watch and Listen

- Lawrence seems to be unreachable - he's like an alien.
- Emmerdale is a popular British 'soap opera'. The reference here suggests that Lawrence lives in a fantasy world as depicted by a 'soap'.
- 'seething cauldron' is a reference to a witches brew or magic potion. Lawrence is being influenced by his adolescent hormones which are behaving like ingredients, perhaps, in the cauldron of the witches in Macbeth  
 Double, double toil and trouble;  
 Fire burn and cauldron bubble

### 6. Read

Students should read this part of the story quietly to themselves, with a copy of the glossary, if necessary.

**Ask:** Is it surprising that Lawrence was finding it hard to think of his mother as something other than his mother? Is this a normal part of growing up?

### 7. Listen

Before listening, ask the students to predict what happens in this section. Explain that a climax of the story is reached when the four members of the family are gathered round the table. Ask them to gauge how people are feeling: Lawrence, mum, dad, Gill.

After listening, write the following on the board (contents of first 2 columns) and ask the students to fill it in by deciding which words were said by which characters. When they have done all they can, play the recording again to check:

Delicious home made fish pie Don't you speak to me like that! Enough? Happy now, Lawrence? I kept my mouth shut I'm giving YOU the creeps? I've things on my mind Nice home made fish pie Planet Zarg Real life Shut up, Gill Someone has to work. Stop it, Lawrence Turn into a nag What? Who is it? Wow! Yes, please. You haven't got a mind You shouldn't have said that	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Lawrence</td> <td>           I kept my mouth shut            I'm giving YOU the creeps?            Yes, please.            What?            I've things on my mind            You shouldn't have said that         </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mum</td> <td>           Shut up, Gill            Stop it, Lawrence            Don't you speak to me like that!            Happy now, Lawrence?         </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dad</td> <td>           Nice home made fish pie            Real life            Planet Zarg            Enough?            Who is it?         </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gill</td> <td>           Delicious home made fish pie            Someone has to work.            Turn into a nag            Wow!            You haven't got a mind         </td> </tr> </table>	Lawrence	I kept my mouth shut I'm giving YOU the creeps? Yes, please. What? I've things on my mind You shouldn't have said that	Mum	Shut up, Gill Stop it, Lawrence Don't you speak to me like that! Happy now, Lawrence?	Dad	Nice home made fish pie Real life Planet Zarg Enough? Who is it?	Gill	Delicious home made fish pie Someone has to work. Turn into a nag Wow! You haven't got a mind
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### 8. Predict

Another prediction, but the focus should be fairly tight, with decisions being made mainly between whether the family will stay together or not.

## 9. Read

Let students read this quietly to themselves, but before they start tell them that when they have finished they will be asked to consider alternative endings so if they finish before others they can start to think about that. When you think most have reached or gone beyond line 64, interrupt and ask 'Does it sound fair that dad can have had 'casual' affairs which don't seem to matter and yet mum's 'serious' affair does?'

When everyone has finished reading ask them if they think dad's line '**Right. Coped with that pretty well, then, didn't I?**' was being used ironically or not. If 'not' can anyone explain the children's reaction, and the sudden change of mood?

You may now read them this alternative end. Ask students to compare and discuss.

**Mum went about teatime. She said she'd see us tomorrow at her new place for tea. 'It's just up the road, we can see each other whenever we want,' she said. Then she drove off to Nigel. Later, Gill came home and we went out to the garden to see Dad. He stood at the bottom of this trench. It was amazing; it was so deep. I hung around by the shed while Gill talked to him.**

**'What are you doing, Dad?' she said.**

**'Has she gone?'**

**'She's gone. What are you doing?'**

**He ignored her and turned to dig a bit more. He was standing at the bottom of the trench, all streaked with mud. He looked hopeless. Pathetic. I'd have liked to fill the earth in on top of him, he was so useless. Me and Gill stood there looking at him.**

**Suddenly Gill bent down and pulled the ladder up and out of the trench and held it up. I don't know why but I found that I was holding the ladder too. Then we threw it away from the trench, as far as we could.**

**'Hey! What are you doing?' came a voice from the trench.**

**As Gill and I walked back to the house we could here Dad calling. By the time we had reached the house and gone into the kitchen he was beginning to sound quite hysterical.**

## 10 Choose

Students can now work in small groups to devise their own alternative ending to the story.

- First they must decide if there was anything that they would rather have happened at the end of the story (relations between dad and children? happier/sadder ending? more drama?)
- Second they must decide at which point the story will be diverted - the later in the story, the less they will need to invent but the less room they will have to develop a new idea.
- Third they will need to retell their ending and make notes. They don't have to write it all down word for word, but they must be able to construct an effective narrative.
- Finally they will tell their version of the end of the story to the class. The class will choose the most effective ending and may elect to send it to the BritLit team who will publish the best ones on the website, along with comments from the author Melvin Burgess.

## Glossary

Note that the definitions given here are correct for the context of 'Coming Home' but may have other meanings in different contexts.

<b>Text</b>	
affair	<i>Illicit romantic attachment</i>
blackmail	<i>(attempt) to extract money in exchange for keeping a secret</i>
snogging	<i>kissing and hugging</i>
nightmare	<i>bad dream</i>
weird	<i>strange</i>
Chicken	<i>scared or frightened</i>
a huff	<i>bad mood</i>
bloke	<i>man</i>
turned on	<i>made (sexually) excited</i>
peep	<i>(secret) look</i>
shrugged	<i>move shoulders to show you don't care</i>
scowled	<i>facial expression showing anger</i>
mucking about	<i>having fun/ not being serious</i>
trench	<i>deep, rectangular hole</i>
snorted	<i>noise showing contempt</i>
shattered	<i>exhausted</i>
<b>Audio</b>	
give me the creeps	<i>makes me feel uncomfortable</i>
a nag	<i>someone who always complains</i>
banana fritters	<i>fried banana dessert</i>
<b>Video: Lawrence</b>	
craggy	<i>rough, strong features</i>
wrinkly	<i>lines in skin</i>
<b>Video: Lawrence's mum</b>	
Emmerdale	<i>Emmerdale Farm – a popular TV soap opera in the UK</i>
blow ..... to bits	<i>destroy</i>
seething	<i>bubbling (angrily)</i>

## Follow Up Activities

### Happy Families

#### *Survey*

1. They ran a survey amongst teenagers at schools. Students had to answer multiple choice questions
2. The larger group (one third) ate infrequently together.
3. Those that ate regularly with their families benefitted most, and girls especially.
4. Opinion. Prompt question if needed - does it have anything to do with slimming habits?
5. Don't ask!

#### *Italians & Brits*

1. b) ironic (with a serious message)
2. Italians eat together at the same time; British have separate meal times to fit around other activities.
3. Salsa lessons; 5 aside football; book club; Pig & Whistle (pub). Add any hobby, interest or study.
4. Post-it notes (little - yellow? - stickers) stuck in places which other members of the family will look at frequently.
5. Look of incomprehension and unintelligible replies.

You may want to finish by asking students how the pictures on the final page relate to the article (*eating alone; leaving messages on a fridge*) and relating this to their own experiences.

### Family Dilemmas

A game, for which the instructions are given on the students' worksheets. After playing the game once, students should be encouraged to invent some additional 'situation' cards to add to the pile.

## Scripts

### Video 1

#### Lawrence

*(Lawrence settles himself in front of the camera and addresses it as if he's talking to a real person. Lawrence is on Fantasy Island.)*

So. Mr Turner. Nigel. *(Pretends to look at notes.)* Mid forties. Dark hair, baggy suits. Good looking in a craggy, rather wrinkly sort of way. Married, kids. Teacher – senior management, I see. Having an affair. It's no use denying it. You were seen snogging a middle aged married woman in a suburban sitting room only yesterday. One Sandra Brown. Died blonde hair, teacher like yourself. Head of department. Well built in the chest compartment. Not generally known for her sexual exploits, as far as is known. With children of her own, of whom I happen to be one. My mother. Yes. Oh dear. In the absence of any, eh, photographic evidence to date I shall be sending a typed account of what went on in the sitting room of 42 Wayfarer's Row yesterday to both your wife and my dad. Unless of course you can persuade me otherwise with – ah! I'm sorry. I'm afraid I don't take Visa.

*(Leans back in his chair and considers.)*

Just my luck. Out of all the money making fantasies I've ever had, this is about the only one that could actually work. But it's my own mother! You can't blackmail your own mother. Except of course, in real life, I'd never be able to blackmail anyone. Too risky. In real life – what? What do you do? Tell my dad? I could go and have it out with my mum? I suppose that's the right thing to do.

*The front door bangs. Lawrence almost leaps out of his chair.*

That's her now. Great, she's gone into the kitchen. Probably talking to Dad. She doesn't come to see me, you notice. She's supposed to be the bloody adult.  
END

### Video 2

#### Lawrence's Mum

I don't think he saw us. I'm fairly certain. But I can't be sure! Oh, god, what a nightmare. What is going on in that head of his? I look at Lawrence these days, he could be from Mars. In a world of his own. He might have seen the whole thing and decided it was just another episode of Emmerdale for all I know. Nigel. It's been going on for two years now. I love him. My Nigel. We've talked about living together often but I just can't do it. John and I have been married for all this time – and what about the kids? I can't do it to them. I can't just blow the family to bits like that. It's too much misery for too many people. I was hoping, you know, Nigel could be like, a long term lover? At least two of my friends do it. You know. You've been married for years, kids, all that. The physical attraction, it fades, but the family's like, this institution. So you get a lover. Everyone's happy! And now this. It's my own stupid fault, I should never have let Nigel come round here. It was just so ... convenient.

I'm sure he didn't see us. I'd be able to tell. He's been all weird these past couple of days – so what's new? Lawrence has been weird for years. He's a seething cauldron of hormones, you don't know what's going on in there. Huh. You know what Nigel said when I said that – about the seething cauldron of hormones. He said, "He's not the only one." We're all teenagers when it comes to sex.

I really don't think he saw us. But it if he did. If I had to choose. It's not just choosing between John and Nigel. It's choosing between John and Lawrence and Gill and Nigel. If I had to make that choice, what then? I don't know, I don't know ... I don't know if I could give Nigel up.  
END

## Audio

### The Family

*All four members of the Brown family are at the table eating dinner.*

Dad See? We wouldn't be sitting here eating a nice home made fish pie with banana fritters for afters if we were both at work.

Mum I like my job.

Dad Well, a job's OK. But it's not your life is it? I mean! This is real life – your family. Us four, all together, sitting round the table eating a lovely home made meal.

Gill Dad! Leave her alone. Someone has to work.

Dad Not all the hours god sends you ...

Gill Just 'cos you couldn't hack it.

Mum Gill!

Gill Well. Just because he's turning into a housewife doesn't mean to say he has to turn into a nag as well.

Dad Who wants more pie? Lawrence? Lawrence. Lawrence!

Lawrence What?

Gill Not what, pardon.

Lawrence What?

Dad What's wrong with you, Lawrence? You've been on planet Zarg lately. Do you want more pie?

Lawrence *(Darkly.)* I've got things on my mind.

Gill You haven't even got a mind, let alone things on it.

Mum *(Anxious.)* Your dad asked if you want more pie.

Gill *(Sarcastically.)* Delicious home made fish pie.

Mum *(Very sharp.)* Shut up Gill.

GILL PUTS HER KNIFE AND FORK DOWN WITH A HUFF.

Dad Do. You. Want. More. Pie?

Lawrence Yes, please.

DAD DOLES OUT THE PIE. BEAT.

Dad Enough? More? For God's sake, Lawrence.

Lawrence *(On purpose, now.)* What?

Dad Is that the only word ....

Mum *(Interrupting forcibly.)* Stop it, Lawrence!

Lawrence Stop what?

Mum Stop – staring at me like that. You're giving me the creeps.

Lawrence I'm giving you the creeps? Oh dear, I'm so sorry. I forgot you were some sort of big sex queen.

Gill Wow.

Mum Don't you dare speak to me like that!

Lawrence Give us a kiss. Sandra.

Mum You ...

A FROZEN MOMENT, THEN MUM SUDDENLY LOOSES HER COOL AND SLAPS LAWENCE ROUND THE FACE, HARD.

Lawrence You shouldn't have done that.

Dad Or what? *(Suddenly furious.)* Or what, Lawrence?

Lawrence *(To mum.)* I didn't tell him, did I? I kept my mouth shut. So what was that for?

BEAT

Mum You two can go now.

Gill But we haven't finish ...

Mum Just go.

GILL AND LAWRENCE GET UP AND GO.

Mum *(To Lawrence.)* Happy?

THEY GO OUT. MUM AND DAD ARE LEFT ALONE.

Dad Who is it?

Mum *(Begins to cry.)*

Dad Spare me your bloody tears. Just get it over with, will you? *(Pause.)* It's just sex, isn't it, Sand? Tell me it's just sex.

Mum I'm sorry, John. I'm so sorry. It's not just sex.