



**BEAVER  
TRUST**

# KS2 Guided Reading: Teacher notes



This scheme of learning offers a range of reading learning opportunities and activities, linked to the story 'Song of the River' by Gill Lewis.

Teacher notes accompany each activity with prompts to facilitate reading discussions and also notes with ideas for analysis.

## These lessons/activities are appropriate for

- **KS2 pupils: the text is written at a level that could be accessed from Year 3 upwards.** The character is about to start Year 6 in the story and the issues and themes addressed in the text are also relevant for upper KS2 pupils.
- Use in conjunction with cross-curricular learning (**see other subject/lesson packs from Beaver Trust**)

## Song of the River by Gill Lewis

### Synopsis

As Cari and her mum try to rebuild their home and lives after a devastating flood, they hear of a plan to reintroduce beavers into the area. The changes these amazing animals make to waterways could prevent further flooding and Cari knows that she has to get involved.

But with the project facing resistance from other locals, can she convince them to give the beavers a chance - and will it be enough to save her home from being destroyed a second time?



## This pack contains 10 activities:

<b>Activity 1</b>	Poetry
<b>Activity 2</b>	Key Characters
<b>Activity 3</b>	A Change of Atmosphere
<b>Activity 4</b>	Examining Vocabulary
<b>Activity 5</b>	A Sense of Hope
<b>Activity 6</b>	Reading Comprehension
<b>Activity 7</b>	Setting Description
<b>Activity 8</b>	A Tense Discussion
<b>Activity 9</b>	Setting Description
<b>Activity 10</b>	Writing a Diary Entry

# Activity 1: Poetry

## The story begins with this poem:

### Song of the River

*Sometimes I feel like a river.*

*Sometimes I feel like I'm drowning in its sound.*

*The river rages deep inside of me  
and I can't make it stop.*

*How can you stop a river?*

*How can you change its song?*

## Points for discussion/class analysis

- 1 What is a river like? Can a river behave in different ways?**  
If someone felt like a river, how might they feel? They could feel serene, relaxed, chaotic, destructive...
- 2 What does it mean by "drowning in its sound"?**  
What does a river sound like? Can its sound change?
- 3 If "a river rages deep inside of the narrator", how might they feel?**  
The word "rages" is important here because it suggests fury, pace and something possibly being out of control.
- 4 The end of the poem is a series of rhetorical questions.** These are questions, which do not necessarily have an answer but make the reader think. These questions have relevance to the rest of the story.
- 5 Pupils could share ideas** about how a river could be stopped and also why a river might need to be stopped.

## Questions for wider group discussion

- 1** How does this poem make you **feel**?
- 2** This poem is narrated in the first person. Who is the narrator of this poem?
- 3** **Why** did Gill Lewis choose to add this poem to the start of the story?
- 4** What clues does this poem give us about the rest of the story?

# Activity 2: Key characters

**Who are the characters in Song of the River and what are they like?**

In Chapter 1 of Song of the River, we are introduced to Cari and her mum.

**What do we know about Cari so far? What do we know about her mum?**

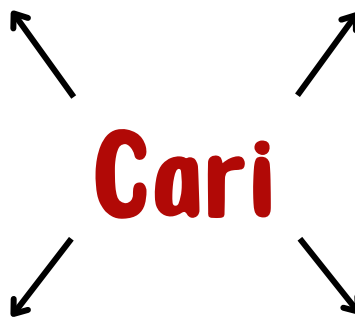
Make a spider diagram with each character's name in the centre. Write any information about the character or character traits around their name.

You can add to this as you read the story, to build an idea of what each character is like.

## Example

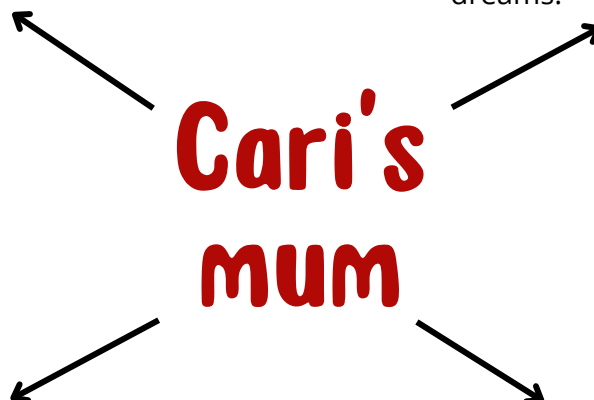
**Cari didn't want to move away from the city**

"I never wanted to live here. Before we moved... we lived in the city."



**She follows her dreams**

"She said life was short and you had to follow your dreams."



# Activity 3: A change of atmosphere

On Pages 18 and 19 (Chapter 3) autumn is on its way - "The leaves on the trees are starting to turn yellow and there is the smell of autumn in the air".

With this also comes a change in atmosphere.

## 1 Literary device: personification for description

Draw the pupil's attention to the following paragraph on page 18:

*As if in response, a grumpy wind snatches the fallen leaves and whips them around.*

This is an example of personification.

**Can they find any more examples of personification on pages 18 and 19?**

They might find:

- *...the river has risen higher. It sounds angrier than normal.* (Page 18)
- *A sudden gust of wind flips some of the chairs...* (Page 19)

## 2 What is the atmosphere of this chapter?

It's dark and unsettling and is possibly foreshadowing something bad to come...

## 3 Drawing from description

**What can Cari see?**

Sketch the landscape described in Chapter 3, using the descriptions in the text.

Extension: Label your drawing with direct quotations from the text.

# Activity 4: Examining Vocabulary

**Chapter 4** is a dark, dramatic and fast-paced chapter. It is where the river rises and the flood begins.

This activity encourages pupils to gather words and phrases that describe how the rain, river water and sky act and look in Chapter 4. The tables below provide an opportunity for pupils to sort words (and phrases) collected into their word class.

## 1 Describing the rain

Adjectives	Verbs
	<b>For example:</b> Bouncing - " <i>...the raindrops bouncing on the patio and path</i> "

## 2 Describing the river water

Adjectives	Verbs
	<b>For example:</b> Rushing - " <i>Lots and lots of rushing water.</i> "

## 3 Describing the sky

Adjectives	Verbs
<b>For example:</b> Dark - " <i>The sky is so dark.</i> "	

# Activity 5: A Sense of Hope

**Chapter 5** is about what happens after the flood. This reading activity encourages pupils to examine how a sense of hope is created by Gill Lewis in the aftermath of the flood.

Pose question the following question to the class and provide the class with an extract of text (either the whole chapter or specifically pages 33 and 34).

## How does Gill Lewis create a sense of hope, despite the flood, in Chapter 5?

The question in this activity focuses on pages 33 and 34, where there is a description of the landscape after the flood and water voles that Cari spots.

The pupils can find sentences or elements of Chapter 5 and specifically pages 33 and 34 that they feel communicate a sense of hope.

**Specific sentences for discussion**, which could communicate a sense of hope are:

- *"Moss on a stone looks like a forest. The world is beautiful even after this storm."* (Page 33)
- *"It's almost like Dad's showing me that if water voles can clear up and survive after the storm, then so can we."* (Page 34)

### Extension: Prediction

- In Chapter 5, Gill Lewis creates **a sense of hope**, despite the flood. With this in mind, what might happen next in the story?

# Activity 6: Reading Comprehension

Answer the following questions using information/quotations from Chapter 6.

- 1** What do beavers look like?
- 2** Why does Jenny suggest reintroducing beavers to the river? What benefits will beavers bring?
- 3** Jenny is a confident and knowledgeable character. How do we know this? Select evidence from the text to support this statement.
- 4** Why does Jenny invite Cari and her mum to the village hall the next day?

## Answers (quotation suggestions):

- 1** What do beavers look like?

*"It looks a bit like a giant guinea pig"*  
*"leathery tail in the shape of a paddle"*  
*"a pair of huge orange front teeth"*

- 2** Why does Jenny suggest reintroducing beavers to the river? What benefits will beavers bring?

*"Beavers can change rivers"*  
*"They can slow rivers" by building dams.*  
*"They're great for wildlife too"*

- 3** Jenny is a confident and knowledgeable character. How do we know this? Select evidence from the text to support this statement.

She corrects Cari when she says *"You really think they can stop the flooding?"* and says *"I know so"* confidently.

Jenny continues by saying *"I've seen it happen in other countries"*, which supports her argument because she had evidence of reintroductions working well elsewhere.

She also says *"I've studied these creatures for a long time"*, which suggests that she is very familiar with and knowledgeable about them.

- 4** Why does Jenny invite Cari and her mum to the village hall the next day?

Jenny invites them to the village hall the next day because *"not everyone here wants beavers"* and *"we need some support"* to *"make the local council realise it's a good idea to introduce the beavers"*.



# Activity 7: Setting Description

In Chapter 7 Alfie and Cari draw two pictures to show how beavers change rivers.

**Use the descriptions on Page 52 to draw each landscape.**

You can label your drawings using direct quotations from the text.



*"In the first picture, Alfie draws hills and a fast-flowing river and a flooded village. For more impact, I added people being washed away too, with their arms in the air calling for help."*



*"In the second picture, Alfie draws the same hills, but now with beavers and their dams. He draws ponds and wide pools. I add wildlife, drawing a heron, some toads and dragonflies. I added flowers like marsh marigolds."*

# Activity 8: A Tense Discussion

Chapter 8 depicts a discussion at a village hall meeting, where the topic is beavers.

**1** On Page 59, Jenny outlines some benefits or reasons why beavers should be reintroduced to the local area.

Why does Jenny think beavers should be reintroduced? Use quotations from the text to support your answer.

**2** Some local people have concerns about reintroducing beavers to the local area. Jenny, Cari and Alfie provide solutions to the concerns raised.

In the table below, make a note of a concern raised by the public in the left-hand column and write down Jenny's solution in the right-hand column.

Concern	Solution

## Answers:

1

**On Page 59, Jenny outlines some benefits or reasons why beavers should be reintroduced to the local area.**

Why does Jenny think beavers should be reintroduced? Use quotations from the text to support your answer.

- *"These creatures were once widespread in this country, but they were hunted to extinction" so have a sense of belonging.*
- Beavers are *"keystone species because they support lots and lots of wildlife".*
- *"They can change rivers. Beavers can hold back floods".*

2

**Some local people have concerns about reintroducing beavers to the local area. Jenny, Cari and Alfie provide solutions to the concerns raised.**

In the table below, make a note of a concern raised by the public in the left-hand column and write down Jenny's solution in the right-hand column.

Concern	Solution
<i>"They do lots of damage to farmland..."</i> (Page 60)	<i>"The beavers will be in a fenced enclosure"</i> (Page 60)
<i>"We must listen to our farmers, as they have been looking after the land for hundreds of years"</i> (Page 61)	<i>"Beavers were here long before these farmers"</i> (Page 61)
<i>"I'm a keen fisherman, so you tell me, what about the fish?"</i> (Page 62)	<i>"Beavers don't even eat fish... Beavers are vegetarian"</i> (Page 62)
<i>"If the beavers escape, they'll ruin our farmland and be bad for business..."</i> <i>"Fields could become waterlogged due to beaver activity..."</i> <i>"Beavers will damage our livelihoods"</i> (Page 62)	<i>"What about our livelihood?... if there's another flood we will lose our house forever"</i> (Page 63)

# Activity 9: Setting Description

**Chapter 10** describes a beaver reintroduction and the changes that the new beaver population has on Cari's local river.

It will be helpful to highlight how the word choices/vocabulary used by the author Gill Lewis contrasts significantly with scenes earlier in the story.

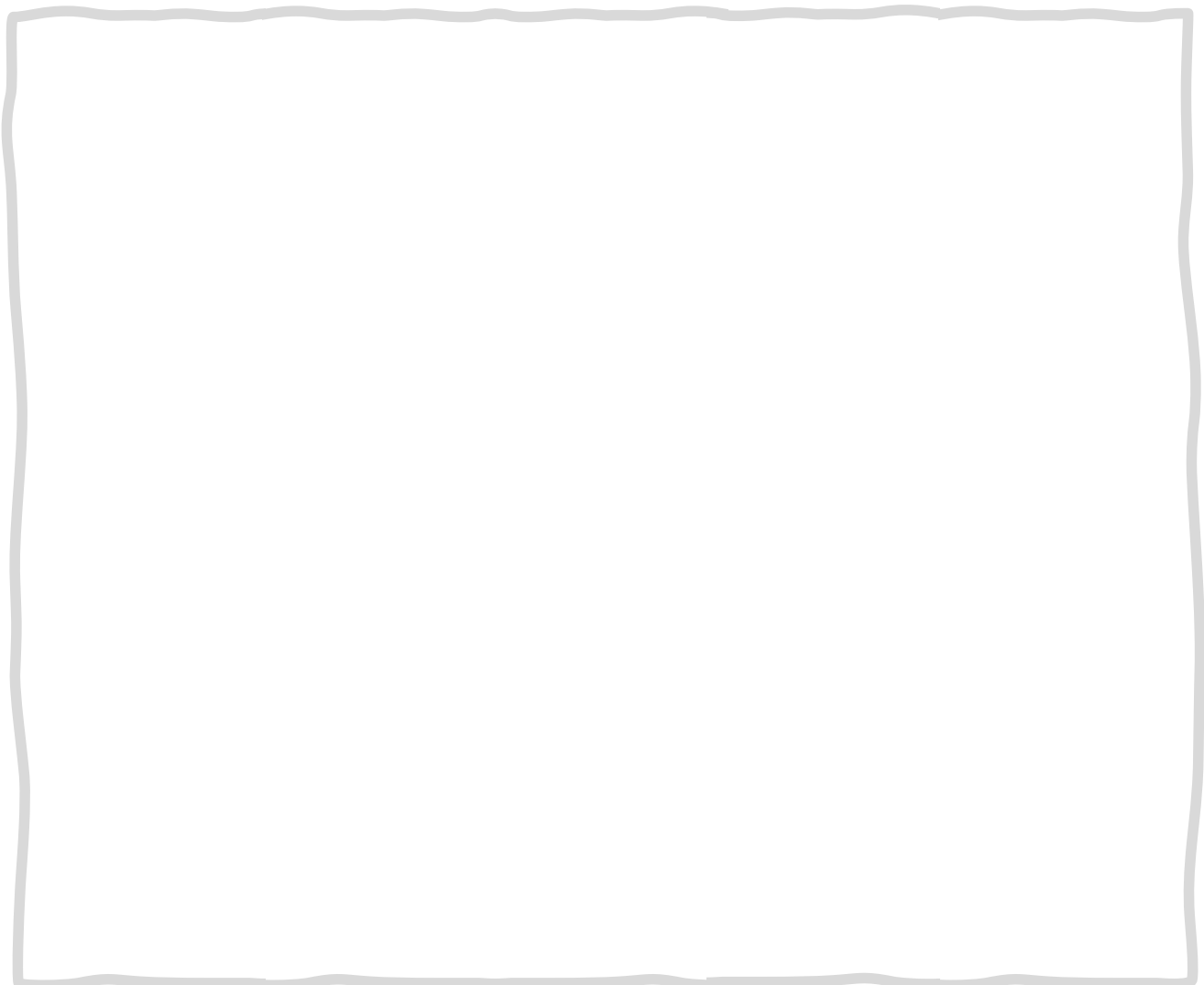
The atmosphere of this chapter is brighter and more hopeful and this is communicated instantly through a description of the weather: *"The beavers arrive on a cold March day with blue skies and bright white clouds"*.

This is very different from the dark and looming weather of previous chapters.

**Use the setting description on these pages to draw the river and the wildlife that is living in and around it.**

Pages 78 and 79 describe the impact of beavers on the river and its surrounding landscape.

Label your drawing with direct quotations from the text.



# Activity 10: Writing a Diary Entry

There are various opportunities throughout the story to write diary entries for pupils to consider Cari's thoughts and feelings.

## Diary Writing Prompts:

**1 Chapter 1:** Write a diary entry from the perspective of Cari about the day she moved away from the city, to this new life in the "valley".

It should include:

- How Cari was feeling in comparison to her mum that day
- What Cari thinks of the new place she has to live

**2 Chapter 2:** Write a diary entry from the perspective of Cari about the day of the "grand opening of mum's cafe".

It should include:

- A description of the cafe (what Cari could see, hear and smell!)
- How Cari was feeling that day
- Whom she met at the cafe (and what they were like)

**3 Chapter 4:** Write a diary entry from the perspective of Cari recounting the day that the flood started.

It should include:

- A description of the rain and river water rising
- How Cari was feeling throughout the flooding

**4 Chapter 8:** Write a diary entry from the perspective of Cari recounting the meeting at the village hall.

It should include:

- Details about Rufus Grub
- Jenny's presentation
- Jenny and Rufus Grub's disagreement about beavers.