

DANNY CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

TEACHERS' NOTES

INTRODUCTION: TOWN OR COUNTRY?

One of the main issues in *Danny the Champion of the World* is the preservation of rural life, something the film tends to glamourise.

The study pack points this out and attempts to make pupils aware of the one-sided presentation.

Linked to this, Hazell - representing the evils of town developers - wishes to turn the area into a New Town, whereas Danny and Co. fight for the conservation of nature. Applaudable though their determination is, the issues involved in such a debate are largely over-looked.

The following drama scheme asks pupils to reconsider their own reactions to the rural battle and to weigh up more fairly the pros and cons of development. The work outlined allows the subject to be explained and illuminated through drama - it should be used to help pupils think beyond what they already know.

Pupils will be asked to take on the roles of different villagers. Their chosen characters might be based on those in the film - but should not be their mirror images.

Later on, some pupils will be required to change role - becoming town developers. The rest, still villagers, work on taking their arguments a step further.

The role of chief councillor is allocated to the teacher leading the work - it is a role which carries natural authority and can be used as an effective means of regulating control.

The scheme is designed to take place during 3 x 30 minute sessions.

SESSION I: URBAN AND RURAL LIFE

Exercise One

- a) Pupils sit in a space, with eyes closed. Ask them to imagine where they live - to picture their home and it's surroundings in detail.
- b) Think of 3 good things about living where they do, e.g. if in a town, the convenience of living near shops. If in the country, the peace and quiet.

c) Next, imagine what it would be like to live somewhere quite different. If city based, imagine a farm in the middle of the country, and vice versa.
Can they think of 3 good things about living in a different environment.

Discuss their thoughts, so that the points arising from b) and c) become apparent.

Introduce pupils to the fact that, in the film, the countryside is seen as 'a good thing' and nobody in the village wants the area to be developed.

Exercise Two

Explain that they are going to create an imaginary village of their own - and to create the people who live there.

a) Select a suitable name for the village.

b) List the types of people who might live and/or work there. Use the film as a stimulus - but try to come up with some original ideas e.g.;

Village school teacher

Policeman/woman

Shopkeeper

Newspaper boy/girl

Farmers

Publican

Residents... and so on

Allocate a role each.

c) Give pupils starting points for considering their characters e.g. age, sex, occupation, personality, degree of fondness for the village, special role in the village.

Ask everyone to introduce themselves in role (encourage character voices) — either one by one, or walking around the room simultaneously, introducing themselves to anyone they meet.

Exercise Three

Explain that 'intimacy' and knowing what is going on are two elements of village life that the film portrays. Together, recreate this feeling in the following exercise.

a) Divide the class into 3 groups. Give each group a setting e.g. in the post office; outside the village shop; someone's home.

Discuss what local people might chat about, e.g. the village fete coming up soon; the harvest; the Christmas celebrations.

- b) Start with 2 from each group chatting together. Feed in the others, one by one, until all 3 groups are complete. Circulate between the groups listening to their conversations — introduce fresh ideas if necessary.
- c) Freeze all groups and ask them to describe what they chatted about, and what they found out about each other's characters.

Select brief snippets of conversation; ask a few from each group to act out a little of their conversations. Having created a unified feeling, the first session ends.

SESSION TWO: THE VILLAGE IN TURMOIL

Recap on the first session; characters played, sense of community.

Exercise One

- a) Gather the village together - find a reason for everyone being together - and redevelop the casual chatter of session one.
- b) As soon as this is established, infiltrate the gathering in role as chief councillor. Find a means of getting everyone's attention, then introduce yourself, indicating clearly that you are from a nearby town council. You are sorry to have interrupted their conversations, but have an important piece of information for them — something that will affect each one of them.

Explain that the council has been approached by a Development Company called 'Urban Limited', which is interested in acquiring nearby land to build on.

Without giving away details, convey the sense of upheaval such a scheme would demand.

Exercise Two

- a) Out of role, ask pupils to imagine how each of their characters might react to such news.
- b) In pairs, pupils disclose their feelings to each other.

Discuss these all together, perhaps sharing some of the conversations amongst the group. Pick up on and comment on the general reaction — it will probably have been quite negative.

Exercise Three

Introduce the idea that some people might like the plan.

a) List the type of people who might welcome development. Consider the following:

Local shopkeepers
Landlords of pubs
Villagers who find rural life rather too quiet.

b) Discuss why these people might be attracted to the scheme. Are there any others?

c) Discuss why some people *like* changes to their lives and others don't.

SESSION THREE: THE CONFRONTATION

Before the session starts, explain that you are leaping forwards in time - the action happens 2 weeks after the councillor has delivered the ominous news. The villagers have had time to consolidate what they feel.

Exercise One

The council has had a lot of negative feedback and has decided to call a meeting to hear what questions/complaints/ ideas the locals have.

In order that the meeting represents both sides of the case, some pupils will have to change roles:

a) 2 pupils change to councillors
3 pupils become reps from the company 'Urban Ltd'
3 pupils become potential house buyers - people from the town, who have heard about the plans.

b) Before the grand confrontation takes place, each group needs to establish exactly what it wishes to achieve at the meeting.

Discussions, in role, take place — in a given location.

Residents - make a list of questions you wish to ask e.g.:

will any houses have to be demolished?

what is the size of the proposed development?

how much natural land will be lost?

will there be more amenities? what type?
will there be jobs for locals?

House buyers — will sit with residents at the meeting, but will have specific questions of their own. They will have to create new names and personalities for themselves, and will need to establish the following:

where they live now, and why they wish to move to the country
what they want to know about the plans - size; costs; availability; amenities; opportunities.

Councillors and property developers - will also need to create new roles. Work out a team for discussion, establishing what the new development will be like.

Make notes on, for example:

number of and size of new houses
extent, if any, of demolition
extent of land to be claimed and converted
roads to be built or extended (with loss of land?)
amenities to be included e.g. new school; leisure facilities; shops.

Create facts and figures to use at the meeting.

c) Allow 15 minutes for thorough preparation — it will help give the meeting a sense of purpose and direction.

Exercise Two

In role, call everyone together; it is time for the meeting to start. Arrange the room accordingly, positioning each faction clearly.

a) Welcome everyone to the meeting, and outline it's purpose. Allow newly created characters to introduce themselves.

b) Monitor the debate in role, using the formality of the meeting to gain control when necessary.

According to the level of enthusiasm amongst the residents, the meeting might be amicable, but be prepared for heated debate.

If ideas run short, use your authority as a councillor to introduce fresh ideas, however antagonistic (e.g. eviction of unwilling residents).

c) End the meeting once information has been conveyed and views aired. Out of role, discuss how it went, and whether it was successful.

d) Now that they know the facts, ask each pupil to reconsider their character's

feelings towards the scheme. Have any of them changed their views? If so, why?
Have they been swayed or pressurised by others?

Those with a second role should reflect on these questions in relation to their original character. As well as this, they might consider their second role; have the residents made them more/less inclined to adopt the scheme?

e) Take a final vote, as a means of bringing the action to a close.

DANNY CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

We are sure that you will agree that Danny is a special person. What makes Danny different to most children of your age? Think in particular about what Danny likes doing and what he's allowed to do.

Most of all, he has a special father.

What are the things that William does that make him an unusual parent?

Danny and William undoubtedly have a very special relationship. Danny hero-worships his father; what is it about William's character and behaviour that makes Danny look up to him?

Do you hero-worship or admire anyone? If so, is this person someone you know such as a friend or relation? Or is he/she famous — a star?

What is it about other people that sometimes makes us admire them? In particular, what is it about the person that you hero-worship that makes you look up to them? Do they have a skill they are good at, e.g. singing, or playing a sport, or is it their personality that you admire? Have a go at writing a letter to a friend (real or imaginary) in which you tell them all about your hero. You will have to describe clearly why your hero is so special.

You have probably realised already that one of the main reasons why Danny admires his father is because William teaches him interesting and often unusual skills, e.g. how to make a fire balloon. Can you remember what else Danny learns from his father?

If you were allowed to learn any skill that you wanted to, what would you choose to learn? Why? Perhaps, like Danny, you would like to be a champion at something.

NO ONE LIKES VICTOR HAZELL

No one likes Victor Hazell! Not even the other wealthy landowners seem to care for him. What is it about him that people dislike? Now that you have seen the film, imagine what it is about him that each of these people dislike

Well, well, what I dislike...." said the village policeman

"I just can't stand the way..." said William.

"I really dislike the way he..." said Danny

"Up at the Housing Authority We don't like..." said the man from the Housing Authority

*"Well, I must confess,
I really dislike..." said Lord Cla ybury*

*"Although he's our boss,
we ain't too keen on..."
Complained Rabbits and
Springer, the gamekeepers*

You will probably have noticed by now that Roald Dahl does not want us to like the character of Victor Hazell.

On the other hand, William is someone everyone seems to like.

By making a list of the differences between the life-styles and behaviour of Hazel and William, see if you can work out what makes William more appealing.

You will probably need to have a class or group discussion once you have completed the list.

WILLIAM

HAZELL

Type of house he lives in

Type of clothes he wears

Type of food he eats

Behaviour to other people

Treatment of the countryside

CAPTAIN LANCASTER AND MR SNODDY

Early in the film, we learn that Danny has been educated for most of his life at home, by his father.

Can you think of anything he might have missed out on by not going to school until he was seven?

At school, neither of his teachers seem ordinary. In what ways is Mr. Snoddy an unusual headmaster? In what ways is Captain Lancaster unsuited to the school?

Why does Mr. Snoddy disapprove of Captain Lancaster?

You are Captain Lancaster; try to imagine what you feel about Mr. Snoddy, your class and your new job.

Write your answer in the form of a diary. You might like to write your entry the

evening after Danny is late for school, or perhaps later on, after your resignation.

TURNING RIGHT AND WRONG UPSIDE DOWN

In the film, what is right and what is wrong seem to be turned upside down.

For example, the local policeman makes up the statement which ought to be given by William, and even the vicar is shown approving of Danny's plans to poach Hazells pheasants.

What are some of the other unlikely — and sometimes irresponsible — things that other people do? Think for instance about the following people:

Mr. Snoddy

William

Danny

The Village Postman

Imagine that you have been asked to design a large "Wanted!" poster for one of the 4 people above. Perhaps Victor Hazell is paying you to draw one so that he can get his own back on some of the villagers!

Remember, your poster will need to include the name of the wanted person. You will also need to state clearly on the poster what it is that they have done wrong.

Perhaps you could offer a reward - you will need to mention this somewhere on the poster. However, there is more to 'right and wrong' than this. Have a look at the chart below and fill in each box with a tick or a cross. So, if you think "Driving when you are only 9" is not against the law, then tick the box in the top left hand corner.

You might like to talk through some of these ideas with your classmates first, and then fill in the boxes.

	NOT AGAINST THELAW	AGAINST THELAW	A BAD THING INTHEFILM	A GOOD THING INTHEFILM
Driving when you're only nine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rearing pheasants to shoot them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poaching pheasants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Giving false Evidence to a policeman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buying property to make a new town	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you notice how, sometimes 'good' things in the film are actually against the law and 'bad' things are not against the law?

Poaching is illegal, yet William defends it and enjoys it. Can you remember how he defends the 'sport' when he is talking to Danny? Do you think he is right to defend it? Explain your answer carefully. How does Danny feel about poaching at the start of the film? Does his view change at all?

TOWN OR COUNTRY?

As you will have noticed, the film portrays a stereotyped view of country life, which is seen as a 'good' thing, and the development of towns, which is seen as 'bad'. Is it really so simple?

Work out your answer by filling in the chart below.

	LIVING IN A TOWN	LIVING IN THE COUNTRY
ADVANTAGES		
	LIVING IN A TOWN	LIVING IN THE COUNTRY
DISADVANTAGES		

In the film, a certain way of living is associated with living in the country e.g. everyone seems to know each other; everyone has plenty of space to live in.

As we have already discovered, Victor Hazell does not fit into the rural community.

What are the sorts of things he does that tell us he is someone who does not really love the country?

Have you heard of the Country Code? (Victor Hazell obviously hasn't!) You can find it in most libraries — it tells you how to behave in the country. You might like to make a poster for your classroom listing some of the points in the code.

TOWN OR COUNTRY?

In the story, Danny has the idea of using Doc's pills to capture Hazell's birds. In the film, we never see the conversation between Danny and William in which he explains his idea.

So, now is your chance to invent this missing link - to work out what might have been said. Either in script form, or as a comic strip, write out the dialogue as it might have happened.

Try to show William's reactions clearly. Does he agree to the plan straight away? Does he seem worried about any part of it?

If you want to draw a strip cartoon, you will find ready made boxes on the next page. If you want to write out a dialogue, remember to set out the characters' names in the margin.

Danny: Dad, I think I've got an idea.

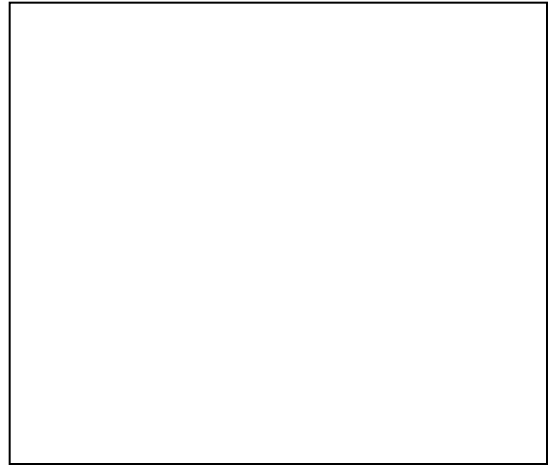
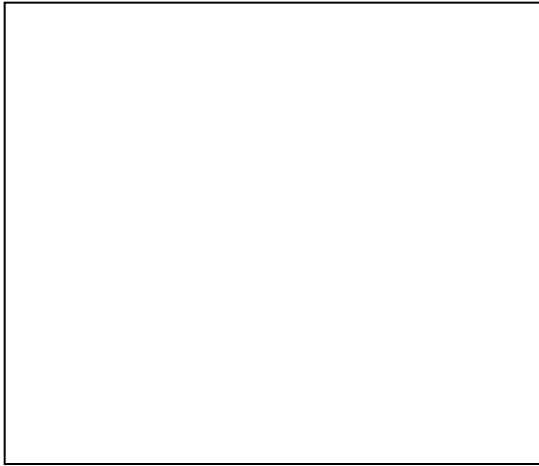
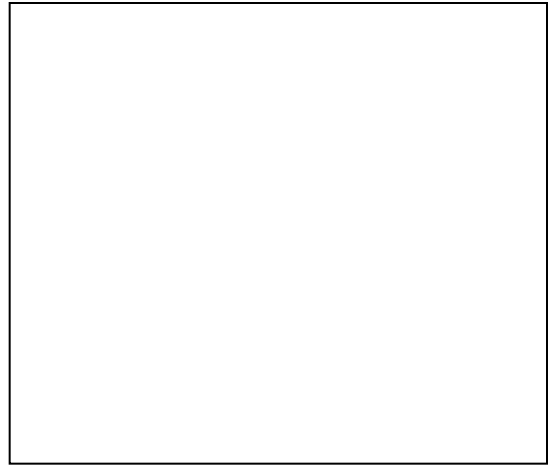
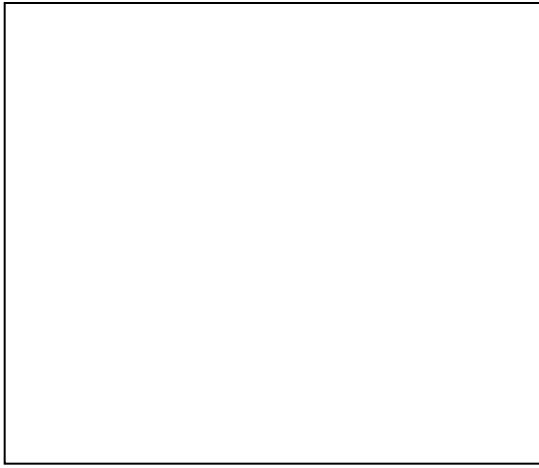
William: Yes, Danny?

Danny: Well, I reckon

And so on....

When you have written the missing scene, you could try performing your script with another person.

The Missing Link: Strip Cartoon.



Do you remember the chilling moment when Danny first discovers that William isn't asleep in his bunk above?

Danny decides to search for his father outside the caravan. He calls out for William in the dark and goes to the garage, hoping he might find him there. Finally, Danny decides to sit on the steps of their home, to wait for William to return.

Described like this, the scene does not sound very frightening — but for Danny it is probably the scariest moment of his life. Can you remember all the different things that made looking for William so frightening? Try to list them. Here are some clues to help you.

What was the weather like?

What animal noises were heard?

What type of music was played in the background?

Why was the garage signpost so spooky?

Do you remember any other film that created suspense in the same way? Imagine a lonely house on a hill, late at night; the fog is swirling about and an owl hoots. . . .many horror films use the same techniques again and again - the film makers know they will scare us.

There are other scary moments in the film. Do you remember when Danny is being chased by the police, and he can't get the car to work properly?

Did you have the same sort of scary feeling watching this as when William is missing earlier on? Or was this a more exciting feeling?

Think about the different types of suspense feelings we can have. Write a suspense story called "The Race Against Time". Remember to make it exciting and tense.

Perhaps you could be involved in a car chase similar to the one in the film.

Hidden in the word search chart below you will find all of these adjectives (describing words).

GREEDY	SHY	SNOBBISH	TIRED
SELFISH			
BRUTAL	MUSICAL	STRICT	SYMPATHETIC
CURIOUS			
GENTLE	SPARKY	MISCHIEVOUS	

The hidden words go along, down and at an angle. When you find a word, circle it on the chart, and write it out under the name of the character that you feel it describes well on the next page.

But you might find that a couple of words do not fit anyone's character. And you might find that some words can be used to describe more than one person.

A	P	G	D	I	O	Y	S	U	E	B	G	Y
o	U	M	J	A	M	C	H	Q	N	C	R	I
E	V	L	I	D	U	P	Y	W	I	I	E	F
T	T	O	K	S	I	G	Q	T	I	R	E	D
H	O	5	R	T	C	B	E	R	D	S	D	H
S	P	A	R	K	Y	H	Z	N	A	O	Y	C
N	F	A	M	S	T	R	I	C	T	M	H	U
O	B	W	J	A	S	E	B	E	O	L	K	R
B	A	R	P	G	O	O	R	S	V	G	E	I
B	I	M	U	S	I	C	A	L	P	O	W	O
I	Y	D	I	T	S	I	M	A	Z	L	U	U
S	R	E	P	G	A	L	V	C	N	E	F	S
H	O	J	W	S	E	L	F	I	S	H	A	X

DANNY	WILLIAM	DOC	HAZELL	CAPT LANCASTER

Which words have you used more than once that describe characters you don't like? Are there any words in the chart that could fit a nice and a nasty person?

THE CAMERA'S EYE: CLOSE UPS AND LONG SHOTS

Do you realise that when you are watching a film you are looking at the action through the eye of the camera?

Sometimes we see things in 'close-up; this means that we see all the detail, and the object fills the screen, e.g. if we see just a face on the screen, we are seeing in CLOSE-UP.

Sometimes we see things in LONG SHOT; this makes us feel as though we are standing further away, and we see more of the surroundings. In the film, we see much of the countryside; these views are in LONG SHOT.

In the film there are a number of CLOSE-UPS e.g. we see the car keys hanging inside the caravan (just before the scene in which William is caught in Hazell's trap), and later on we see Doc's sleeping pills when Danny has his idea to send the pheasants to sleep. The keys and the pills are both small objects, but we see them so close that they fill the screen.

Can you think why we need to see both these things CLOSE-UP?

We have already said that views are seen in LONG SHOT.

LONG SHOTS are also used for scenes with a lot of people in them - so that you can fit everyone in the picture!

This is a typical example of a long shot.



The photograph below is part of a larger picture - a LONG SHOT.



Cut out the picture and stick it in the middle of a larger sheet of paper.

Try to draw in the rest of the picture - you will have to remind yourself of what else is happening at the time:

Where did the scene take place? Were there any buildings around?

Who else was around at the time?

Should there be any birds or animals in the picture?

Next time you watch a film, look out for more CLOSE-UPS and LONG SHOTS.