The Wish List
By Eoin Colfer

Introduction

New Windmill titles are supported with student and teaching resource sheets to engage students with the novel and to help you with your planning. Each set of resources includes a series of self-contained lessons with photocopiable worksheets, teaching notes and suggestions for guided reading. Each activity is mapped against the Framework for teaching English to help you with your planning. There are also suggestions for further study areas including speaking and listening, writing and reading activities. If your students have enjoyed studying this novel there are suggestions for other New Windmills they may like to read for pleasure.

Resources for The Wish List:

- Synopsis
- Activate prior learning
- Activities
  - Writing a play script
  - Producing a leaflet about Heaven and Hell
  - Analysing the character of Meg Finn
- Guided reading
  - Inferential reading
  - Reading for information
  - Responding to characters
- Further study areas
- Reading for pleasure

Activities by Alan Pearce

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Synopsis

This is an irreverent, but extremely humorous focus on the afterlife. Two teenagers, Meg Finn and Belch, attempt to rob pensioner Lowrie McCall’s flat, but a gas explosion kills both Meg and Belch. Belch’s spirit is destined to spend eternity in the underworld but there is a chance that Meg’s spirit could go to Heaven. St Peter and the Devil fight over Meg’s soul, but if Meg can help Lowrie McCall achieve his last four wishes (his ‘wish list’) then her soul will be saved.

This novel is a very light-hearted look at the way our good and bad actions can be measured and balanced against each other. It is an optimistic novel, as the message is that people who have committed bad acts should not automatically be condemned, as they can show remorse, and offer restitution. Although some people with strong religious beliefs may be offended by the symbolism of Heaven and Hell, the novel is never blasphemous.

Activate prior learning

The students need to know about the symbolism of the Devil, St Peter, Beelzebub, Heaven and Hell. Obviously, many students will not be familiar with these symbols. In The Wish List the symbols roughly represent the following:

- Heaven: a good place where God and the angels live. Souls of worthy people also live there.
- Hell: a bad place where the Devil lives. It is also the place where the souls of wicked people live.
- St Peter: he decides whose souls can enter Heaven.
- Beelzebub: he is the second most powerful being in Hell.
- The Devil: The symbol of everything evil. He rules in Hell.
Activity 1 Writing a play script

Framework Objectives

Year 7: S&L13 Group collaboration; S&L16 Collaborate on scripts.
Year 8: S&L10 Group hypothesis and speculation; S&L16 Collaborative presentation.
Year 9: S&L10 Group organisation; S&L14 Convey character and atmosphere.

Activity aims:
- To create a drama script.
- To create character through dialogue.

Provide the students with Resource Sheet 1. The students’ task is to work in pairs annotating the play script extract. An appropriate section of dialogue is identified, and the students are provided with notes about the conventions of script writing:

1. A new line is started each time a character begins speaking.
2. The way that the characters speak their lines is placed in brackets immediately after their names.
3. Notes about the way that characters speak are always written in the past tense.
4. Notes about the way that characters speak are always written in italics.
5. Stage directions, that give the actors information, are written in the present tense.
6. Stage directions are always written in italics.
7. At the beginning of a scene, notes are always provided that describe the setting and what is happening.

If pupils are not familiar with these conventions, then you could provide an example of a play script and teach these conventions. Resource Sheet 2 provides a possible response to the activity on Resource Sheet 1.

If there is time the students could continue developing this piece of script from pages 3–4 of the novel.

Provide the students with Resource Sheet 3. An appropriate section of dialogue from the novel is identified and the students are challenged to transform it into a play script. The resource sheet also reminds students about the conventions of script writing. It might be necessary to remind the pupils of the script conventions that they explored in activity 1.

Extension activity

It is important that students see drama scripts as vehicles for live performance. Once students have written their final draft scripts, they should organise themselves into groups to prepare presentations of their written scripts. These presentations might be to the rest of the class, or purely prepared as an opportunity for groups to reflect on the quality of their scripts.
Guided reading – Inferential reading

Select a small group of students who would benefit from some help with inferential reading. First, ask the pupils to talk about any incidents of bullying that they or their friends have experienced. Then re-read pages 119–123, beginning at ‘Good evening, Mr McCall’ finishing with ‘And the sound of their laughter still echoes inside my head’. Ask the pupils to judge how well Lowrie dealt with the bullying incident, using examples from the text to back up their views. Ask students to explain why Lowrie was finally persuaded to address the bully as ‘Sir’ and whether, in light of their own experiences and feelings about being bullied they would have done the same.
Imagine that a publisher wants you to change the novel *The Wish List* into a play. First of all the publisher wants to see whether you know about writing play scripts. To show that you do, you have to write each of the following notes into the appropriate box on the script.

1. A new line is started each time a character begins speaking.
2. The way that the characters speak their lines is placed in brackets immediately after their names.
3. Notes about the way that characters speak are always written in the past tense.
4. Notes about the way the characters speak are always written in italics.
5. Stage directions, that give the actors information, are written in the present tense.
6. Stage directions are always written in italics.
7. At the beginning of a scene, notes are always provided that describe the setting and what is happening.

**Scene 1**

*A musty room that smells of medicine. Tins of pills are scattered on shelves. Dirty clothes hang over the old-fashioned furniture. Belch, a sixteen-year-old boy, and Meg, a fourteen-year-old girl have just broken in. They are accompanied by Belch’s pit bull terrier.*

*Belch picks up a tin of pills and puts them in his pocket.*

*MEG:* *(Angrily)* They could be heart pills!

*BELCH:* So what? One less crusty in the world. Oh the pain of it. Anyway, I don’t know what you are whining about. Seein’ as you’re an accessory and all. So give up your moaning and go through the dresser. This old coot’s got cash somewhere.

*Before Meg can move the light is turned on. At the top of the stairs is an old man in a dressing gown, holding a shotgun. He looks startled and angry.*

*MCCALL:* What are you two at? Well? I asked you a question.

*BELCH:* *(Arrogantly)* We’re robbin’ the place, crusty. What does it look like?
Scene 1
A musty room that smells of medicine. Tins of pills are scattered on shelves. Dirty clothes hang over the old-fashioned furniture. Belch, a sixteen-year-old boy, and Meg, a fourteen-year-old girl have just broken in. They are accompanied by Belch’s pit bull terrier.

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Before Meg can move the light is turned on. At the top of the stairs is an old man in a dressing gown, holding a shotgun. He looks startled and angry.

MCCALL: What are you two at? Well? I asked you a question.
BELCH: (Arrogantly) We’re robbin’ the place, crusty. What does it look like?
3 Writing a play script

Many of the scenes in The Wish List are very visual. It is easy to imagine them being acted on the stage. You have been given the task of writing a scene for the play script of The Wish List. The passage you have to adapt is when Brendan Ball bullies Lowrie down by the river at school (pages 118–123). Read the passage again to refresh your memory before you write the scene. The first two lines of the play script have been written for you. The final line of dialogue will be from Lowrie: ‘Let me up – Sir’.

Dramatisation of The Wish List by Eoin Colfer

Scene 38

On the riverbank, at school. A number of boys are hanging around on the riverbank. Some are smoking. Some are skimming stones on the water. Lowrie is standing on his own. Brendan Ball arrives.

BALL: (Sarcastically, spoken loud for everyone else to hear) Good evening, Mr McCall. And how are things among the farming community?

Lowrie tries to ignore Ball. Ball kicks Lowrie’s foot.

BALL: (Aggressively, but still loudly) Well? How’s life in your squalid little cave? Has your mother stripped any more sheep?

Things to remember about play scripts

1 Play scripts are set out so that each speaker starts a new piece of speech on a new line.

2 The way that the characters speak their lines is placed in brackets immediately after their names; this information appears in italics. Notice that these pieces of information are written in the present tense.

3 It is possible to give the actors instructions about the way they should act. These are called stage directions and appear before the words that they speak. Stage directions are written in the present tense and are usually written in italics.

4 The words that the actors speak have been taken straight from the novel.
Activity 2 Producing a leaflet about Heaven and Hell

Framework Objectives

Year 7: S13 Stylistic conventions of non-fiction; S15 Vary formality of language; R2 Extract information; R4 Note-making; R10 Media audiences; Wr11 Present information.

Year 8: Wr10 Effective information; Wr12 Formal description; S12 Degrees of formality; R1 Combine information; R3 Note-making formats; R8 Transposition.

Year 9: S3 Degrees of formality; S8 Conventions of ICT texts; Wr9 Integrate information; R2 Synthesise information.

Activity aims:
- To extend research skills.
- To produce an informative leaflet.

This activity helps the students to engage in some independent research. The focus of their research is different representations of Heaven and Hell from the perspectives of different world religions. The students’ task is to produce a booklet that presents these different representations for an audience of Year 7 students.

Provide the students with Resource Sheet 4. This Resource Sheet defines the research task and helps the students with their planning. The students will need access to the library or the Internet for this task. The students might need help to identify two different religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are obvious examples. The students might also need help with research skills. Some students, for example, might not know how to use key words to find appropriate sources. Less able pupils might be able to identify appropriate sources, but might not be able to isolate the necessary information for this task. You might need, for example, to support students to skim and scan appropriate sources.

Once the research activity is complete, provide the students with Resource Sheet 5. This resource sheet outlines the students’ design brief. The students should use it as a guide while they are designing their leaflets, and as a checklist once they have completed their work.

Guided reading – Reading for information

Select a small group of students who would benefit from some help with reading for information. First, ask the students what they understand about Heaven and Hell, then ask them to re-read pages 12–17. Once they have read the extract they should answer the following questions:
1. Who is Beelzebub? (The Devil’s assistant)
2. Who is Myishi? (The Devil’s technology expert)
3. What is a trident used for? (Vaporising the souls of drones)
4. Who is St Peter? (He decides who can enter through the gates of Heaven)
5. What is St Peter’s points system? (Good and bad behaviour is balanced in a ledger)
6. Did St Peter intend to allow Luigi Fabrizzi through the gates of Heaven? (Not at first because his membership of the Mafia counted against him)
4 What happens when we die?

In The Wish List we are presented with a representation of Heaven and Hell. The Devil and St Peter fight over Meg Finn’s soul because the Devil thinks that Meg is evil and her soul should go to Hell, whereas St Peter thinks that her soul deserves to go to Heaven.

While this representation of Heaven and Hell is based on a Christian view, very few people would recognise it as a serious representation. Your task is to research different world religions and to present their views about what happens to us when we die. You have been given the following brief:

- research at least three different sources
- write about at least four different religions (you need to decide which religions to write about)
- the Humanists are people who do not believe in any religion. Include their views about what happens to us when we die.

A good place to start your research would be a website about world religions. You can find a link to one at http://www.heinemann.co.uk/hotlinks. Just type in express code 0552P.

However, remember that you need to read at least three different sources. There will be many more interesting websites. In addition, your library or Religious Studies department will have a number of relevant books that you should refer to.

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<thead>
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<th>What they say about Heaven</th>
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<td>The Humanists</td>
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5 A leaflet about Heaven and Hell

You are now going to create a leaflet which explains what different groups think happens when we die. You will use the information that you researched in Resource Sheet 4.

You should:

- Produce a booklet of at least six A5 pages. Include illustrations if they are relevant.
- Aim your booklet at students in Year 7 who will be studying world religions as part of their religious studies lessons.

In your leaflet you must provide information from the Humanist perspective, plus at least two different religions.

You will need to think about:

- what information you are going to use from your research
- what presentational devices you are going to use
- what style you will use when you write.

Things to remember when writing an information leaflet:

- write in the present tense when you explain what different people believe
- avoid using too many adjectives and adverbs when you are presenting factual information
- use connectives to link ideas together, for example, *What is more; in the same way; for example; however; despite this; as a result; in addition; above all; more importantly.*

Presentational devices

Try to make the leaflet as attractive as possible. Think about:

- different font sizes
- different colours
- illustrations
- headings and sub-headings
- bullet points.
Activity 3 Analysing the character of Meg Finn

Framework Objectives

Year 7: S15 Vary formality of language; R2 Extract information; R8 Infer and deduce; Wr10 Organise texts appropriately.
Year 8: S12 Degrees of formality; R4 Versatile reading; Wr6 Figurative language; Wr7 Establish the tone; Wr10 Effective information.
Year 9: Wr9 Integrate information; Wr16 Balanced analysis.

Activity aims:
- To extract appropriate information.
- To produce a piece of analytical writing.

This activity helps the students to produce a piece of analytical writing. They are supported in making notes about Meg Finn’s behaviour. Afterwards, they need to imagine that they are St Peter. Their task is to write a report on Meg Finn’s life to explain why her spirit was allowed to enter Heaven.

Provide the students with Resource Sheet 6. The students are asked to explore Meg’s character by annotating a passage from the novel. The pupils are asked to infer meaning from a series of phrases that have been highlighted in an extract from the novel. Some of the students might need support in moving from the literal to the inferential. For example, we are told, about Meg, that ‘The decision was hers.’ At a literal level this means that she had a decision to make. However, the reader might also infer that Meg had to decide whether to act honourably or not. In the context of the passage the sentence implies that Meg is weak because she does not make the ‘correct’ decision, although it had been in her power to make the ‘correct’ decision.

Then provide the students with Resource Sheet 7. This resource sheet asks the students to re-read sections of the novel in order to judge Meg’s character. They then write their report as St Peter explaining why Meg is allowed into Heaven.

Guided reading – Responding to characters

Select a small group of students who would benefit from some help with responding to characters in literature. First, ask them what they think of Meg. Is she someone they judge to be good or bad? Ask students to give reasons for their answers. Then ask students to read one of the following extracts from the novel:

| Meg behaving predominantly badly | 1–11, 150–156 |
| Meg behaving predominantly well  | 33–41, 56–79, 88–103, 167–179 |

Encourage students to judge Meg’s personality, but insist that they refer to the text for evidence to support their opinions. At the end of the exercise take group feedback. Have the students changed their opinions of Meg? Why?
6 Analysing Meg’s character

Look at the following passage from The Wish List. It appears at the beginning of the novel and describes the moment Belch and Meg break into Lowrie’s house. A number of words and phrases have been highlighted. Your task is to write some notes in the boxes at the side to say what these words and phrases suggest about Meg. One of the boxes has been completed for you.

Belch hoisted his considerable bulk over the sill, exposing a drooping belly in the process. Meg shuddered. Disgusting.

Her partner’s face appeared from the darkness.

‘Are you coming, Finn?’

Meg paused. This was it. The line between bold and bad.

The decision was hers.

‘Well? You’re not chickening out on me, are you?’

Meg bristled. ‘I’m not afraid of anything, Belch Brennan!’

Belch chuckled nastily. ‘Prove it.’

He was manipulating her, and she knew it. But Meg Finn could never resist a dare. Placing her palms on the ledge, she vaulted nimbly into the room.

‘That’s how to break and enter, you big clod,’ she said primly.

That remark could cost her later. But even Belch wouldn’t waste time wrestling when there was robbing to be done. Luckily, he had the memory span of a particularly thick goldfish, so with any luck he’d have forgotten all about the comment by the time they’d completed their mission.

The room was musty, with a medicinal smell. Meg recognised it from the night she’d spent on the couch outside her mother’s hospital room. The odours made what she was doing seem all the more terrible. How could she? Steal from a helpless pensioner?

She could because she needed the money to run away. Escape from Franco once and for all. Get on the ferry to Fishguard and never come back.

Even though Meg knew that what she was doing was wrong, she went ahead. Nobody forced her.
Measuring Meg

At the end of the novel Meg Finn presents herself to St Peter, who has to decide whether Meg's spirit should be allowed into Heaven. St Peter has to weigh Meg's behaviour at the beginning of the novel, helping Belch to break into Lowrie's flat, against her behaviour throughout the rest of the novel, as she helped Lowrie to complete his Wish List.

Imagine that St Peter has to fill in a report to explain why he accepts or rejects each person's spirit. In his report he has to weigh all the good that a person has done, against all of the bad that they have done. He then has to decide whether the good outweighs the bad. Imagine that you are St Peter and write your report on Meg Finn.

To help you, use the table on the next page and make notes on Meg's behaviour. When you have finished writing your notes, you will then write your report. Your report needs to have the following sections:

Section 1: An introduction to briefly explain Meg Finn's circumstances. Why was there some doubt about letting her spirit into Heaven?

Section 2: An account of the bad deeds that Meg committed. Was she entirely to blame for her behaviour? Was her behaviour entirely bad?

Section 3: An account of the good that Meg achieved. Did she carry out her mission cheerfully?

Section 4: A conclusion. You need to explain why you finally allowed Meg Finn's spirit into Heaven.

When writing your report, remember to think about the language you are going to use in your report. You will need to write in a formal style.
# Measuring Meg

My notes for final report on Meg Finn

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Heavenly Report on Meg Finn

by St Peter

Introduction

The bad

The good

My conclusion
Further study areas

This novel is a very light-hearted look at the way our good and bad actions can be measured and balanced against each other.

The following study areas provide ideal opportunities for creating interesting and stimulating activities:

**Writing to imagine, explore, entertain:** Belch’s spirit is destined to reside in Hell. Write a piece, in the character of Belch, pleading against the decision.

(Writing to imagine, explore, entertain: Yr7 Wr5; Yr8 Wr5; Yr9 Wr5)

**Writing to imagine, explore, entertain:** Write two letters from Lowrie McCall to each of Cicely Ward and Brendan Ball. One letter should be written to each character before they meet Lowrie again, explaining to them what an influence they have had on Lowrie’s life. Another letter should be written after they meet Lowrie again, explaining how Lowrie feels afterwards.

(Writing to imagine, explore, entertain: Yr7 Wr5; Yr8 Wr5; Yr9 Wr5)

**Collaborative drama:** Act out any of the conversations between St Peter and Beelzebub. The focus should be on maintaining character.

(Collaborative drama: Yr7 S&L16; Yr8 S&L15; Yr9 S&L14)

**Author’s Craft:** Although the novel has been written in the third person, many of the pieces of dialogue retell events in the first person. The students could consider the advantages and disadvantages of using these different perspectives.

(Author’s craft: Yr7 R12; Yr8 R10; Yr9 R7)

**Reflective writing:** The students could write a piece offering their opinion of Lowrie McCall.

(Writing reflectively: Yr7 Wr19; Yr8 Wr16; Yr9 Wr16)

**Persuasive writing:** We do not know what happens to Lowrie McCall’s spirit. Write a piece to persuade an audience that McCall’s spirit should go to either Heaven or Hell.

(Persuasive writing: Yr7 Wr15; Yr8 Wr13; Yr9 Wr13)

Reading for pleasure

If students have enjoyed *The Wish List*, they may also enjoy *Artemis Fowl* by the same author. *Artemis Fowl* contains the same irreverent humour with similarly strong characters and an imaginative plot.