"I know how easy it is to be swept away by stories, by things that you wish were real."

Skulduggery Pleasant

Skulduggery Pleasant's fast and furious action, cracking dialogue and supernatural themes captivate readers of nine and more. Its strong central relationship and cinematic style appeal to boys and girls alike. Oh, and it's dead witty too.

Here you'll find five flexible resources with activities aimed at pupils in Years 5 and 6. Each resource explores a different aspect of Skulduggery Pleasant, Book I. All support the KS2 English curriculum requirement to develop understanding and appreciation of literary texts, including modern fiction by significant children's authors. Some activities also offer cross-curricular links to art and design and geography. The resources offer a wide choice of tasks teand challenges to develop children's skills and understanding in literacy. There's plenty of scope for creative and imaginative work.

Above all, they are meant to be fun.

These resources can be used on their own, or in a sequence of work over several weeks. Mix and adapt them according to the needs and interests of your class. Each resource starts with an overview and a reading recap section to support your planning.

Get started by introducing Skulduggery Pleasant into your free or group reading sessions.

Alternatively, adopt the novel as your read-aloud serial for the whole class. It's a great way to set the scene for your Skulduggery activities. You'll really enjoy reading it aloud. And they'll be right where you want them. On the edge of their seats.

Resources at a Glance

Resource	Activities	Use to
Exploring Character	Skulduggery Pleasant abounds with strong, sharply-drawn characters that leap off the page and linger in the mind. Explore character in several ways, from simple descriptions and illustrations of the Skulduggery crew, to making relationship maps, identifying descriptive techniques and putting them into practice to create Skulduggery-style characters and stories of your own.	Develop understanding of the text, practise imaginative writing, to develop oral literacy and create displays.
Investigating Names	Names are powerful in Skulduggery Pleasant. In fact they are a matter of life and death. Explore the meanings and dramatic effects of names in the book, with the help of reference tools. Devise your own Skulduggery-style names, and explain what they mean. Then play the Skulduggery name game.	Extend and develop vocabulary, practise dictionary skills and develop oral literacy.

Skulduggery Pleasant

Resource	Activities	Use to
On Location	Haggard, Stephanie's home town, is made up. But Dublin, where Skulduggery Pleasant is set, is very real. Become Dublin detectives to create a Fact File on the city. Explore Derek Landy's imaginative use of place and setting, and suggest a future location for a Skulduggery story.	Ask and answer geographical questions, develop research skills, to look at how to present information effectively, and writing for a purpose.
You, the Reviewer	Why is it so hard to sum up Skulduggery Pleasant in one sentence? Identify and describe different genres of writing, and look at the purpose and style of reviews. Write a review of your own, either of this book, or another that you've read, for a new school book club display.	Explore the characteristics of different writing styles, express opinions supported by evidence, and practise writing for an audience and purpose.
Publishing Skulduggery	Behind every great story is a great author. But who else is involved in making a book? Look at the behind-the-scenes work of the design, editorial and marketing teams in packaging books like Skulduggery Pleasant. Then take on these roles to create new designs and copy for the cover of Skulduggery's latest adventure.	Design a book jacket, thinking about how words and images can be combined to create meanings, moods and impressions and writing for a purpose.

"You can't be around our Mr Pleasant without liking him, without wanting to fight alongside him."

Skulduggery Pleasant

At a glance

Skulduggery Pleasant abounds with strong, sharply-drawn characters that leap off the page and linger in the mind. This resource invites children to explore character in a multitude of ways, from simple descriptions and illustrations of the Skulduggery crew, to making relationship maps, identifying descriptive techniques and putting them into practice to create Skulduggery-style characters and stories of their own.

Curriculum fit

The activities in Exploring Character can be used to meet the NC requirements in KS2 English to develop an understanding and appreciation of literary texts, including modern fiction by significant children's authors.

And in particular it can help children to:

* recognise the choice, use and effect of figurative language, vocabulary and the effects of language

* identify how character is created

* respond imaginatively, drawing on the whole text.

Learning points

Through these activities, children will:

* understand how the characters in Skulduggery Pleasant are created through descriptive language, their words and actions, and how they are shown in relation to each other

* describe the techniques and language that Landy uses

* put these techniques into practice in developing a character in a piece of creative writing.

Skulduggery Pleasant

Reading recap

Read or revisit chapters 1-4 to identify the techniques used to establish the two main characters.

For each chapter, as a class or in pairs, make notes on how the characters are revealed by:

* How they are described; their appearance, history, attitudes and relationships.

* What they say; their speech.

* What they do; how they move, the actions they take.

* What others say about them; how they are seen through the eyes of other characters.

To demonstrate the task you could model this using examples for Skulduggery and Stephanie in chapter 1. E.g.

Chapter	Description	What they Say	What they Do	What Others Say
1	Skulduggery: The 'gentleman in the tan overcoat' is mysterious. He has a scarf round his face, 'wild frizzy hair', a 'wide brimmed hat' & 'gigantic sunglasses'. His voice is 'so smooth it could have been made of velvet'. He has an old-fashioned gold pocket watch.	That his writer fantasies must make him seem odd – which suggests he thinks he's otherwise normal. He knows more about Stephanie than she does about him. He wishes Stephanie luck - not expecting to see her again.	He is unnaturally still. He suddenly appears and disappears without warning.	Stephanie is intrigued by him. So are we. When they speak she does think he is odd - because of the way he looks as much as what he says. Though his conversation is a bit unusual too.

Chapter	Description	What they Say	What they Do	What Others Say
1	Stephanie: We see the scene through Stephanie's eyes - this makes us 'on her side'. She was imaginative and curious as a little girl so probably still is. She's ignored by her cousins Carol and Crystal and described as their opposite. (They are 'sour and vindictive', 'bottle-blonde', 'stumpy', overweight and badly dressed.) This emphasises the fact that she's tall, slim and dark.	She asks herself, 'Who was he? She didn't even ask his name.'	She leaves the crowd - she might be quite independent.	Her uncle called her 'strong-willeds intelligent, sharp-tongued, doesn't suffer fools gladly'.

Discussion points

Which bit of the description in chapters 1-4 do you find most effective in helping you to imagine the character and why? Use examples to support your view.

Do any particular words or phrases stand out to you? If so what are they and why?

Why do you think that Derek Landy builds these characters and their relationship over the first four chapters, rather than telling us how it is from the start?

In the descriptions of Skulduggery, it's interesting to note how we almost learn as much by what Stephanie can't see, than by what she can. E.g.

Visible: 'The scarf was still wrapped, the sunglasses still on, the fuzzy hair still poking out. His hands were gloved.'

Hidden: 'She felt the man smile, though she could see no mouth.'

Landy uses this technique throughout to humanise his supernatural creation, and to give us a sense of his personality and emotions. E.g. 'If Skulduggery had had eyebrows, they would most likely be arched.'

1. Create a character profile

Ask children to draw a picture of a character that interests them from Skulduggery Pleasant. This could be Stephanie, Skulduggery or a character from later in the book, such as China, Meritorious or Tanith, or a relatively minor character like Stephanie's uncle Fergus or Mr Fedgewick. Encourage the class not to all do the same thing and create the range of characters between them.

Ask pupils to add labels to their finished drawing to describe what the character is like. Direct them to use quotes from the book and WOW words to convey their chosen character's essential qualities.

2. Make a Dead Famous display

Mount children's artwork and labels. Use sticky tack or velcro to attach them to the wall so that they can be subsequently moved around as part of different learning activities, or to ensure that your display can evolve with your exploration of the book.

Start your display with your character study work. Add phrases that will help children think about the range of descriptive techniques that are at their disposal, and some of the key words from your analysis.

Use the characters on display to develop children's understanding of the relationship of the characters to each other, by inviting children to move them around, and linking them with a set of lines. On these lines, write things like 'brother of', 'enemy of', 'mentor to' etc.

As your exploration of the book progresses add in key words and phrases and new elements of children's work to the display.

3. Create your own character

Use the techniques that you've identified in Skulduggery Pleasant to create a character for Stephanie and Skulduggery to meet in their next adventure. Make up a name, age and describe their appearance, what they do, and what magical powers they have. Create a past for them that explains why they are like they are today.

As part of the introduction to this activity, ask children to work in small groups to brainstorm some rich vocabulary or **WOW** words that they might like to use to help them to create vivid character descriptions. E.g.

Eyes: hollow, sharp, piercing, misty, deep, limpid, manic, burning, intense, wide, narrow, flickering, startling

Hair: straggling, abundant, frizzy, sleek, wild, sparse, sleek, bubbly, shaggy, neglected, well-groomed

Teeth: snaggled, vampiric, rotten, crumbling, gleaming, dazzling, even, pointed, pearly

Colours: chalk-white, eggshell-white, slate-grey, mud-brown, ruby-red, wine-dark, sky-blue, winter-grey

Skin: sallow, rosy, deathly-pale, papery, rough, wrinkled, unblemished, taut, saggy

Mouth: cruel, generous, curling, laughing, gaping, lazy, playful, pensive

Movement: darting, lumbering, swaggering, slouching, sliding, sidling, swift, languid, graceful, waddling, scuttling, bold, decisive, lunging, tentative, effortless

Voice: booming, silky, gentle, rasping, solemn, musical, singsong, lilting, thick, slurred, grating, chocolatey, lisping

Remind children too of the impact of figures of speech such as similies, where you describe something by comparing it to something else, e.g. Skulduggery's voice is 'as smooth as velvet' or China's hair is 'as black as raven wings'. Another nice example is, 'Silence drifted down like smog.'

Ask children to:

* Imagine a character that might appear in a Skulduggery adventure.

* Write a description.

* Draw the character and add labels to identify their key features.

* Plan, draft and write a short story featuring your character.

4. Characters in conversation

We read or watch interviews to discover more about what people are like; how they speak, their opinions, their likes and dislikes, and what motivates them.

Look at the online interview with Derek Landy at www.skulduggerypleasant.co.uk

Discussion points

* What did you think of it?

* Was Derek Landy like you expected him to be?

* Were the questions and answers interesting?

* Were there questions that you want to ask that didn't come up?

Now, imagine that you have been invited to interview one of the characters from Skulduggery Pleasant for this website.

Ask children to decide what they are going to be, or to ensure variety, get each pair to pick character names out of a bag.

Once you have established who you are going to interview, what do you, or what do you think other people, want to know about them?

As a group, brainstorm the kinds of questions that children could use.

Ask children to:

* Work individually or in pairs to create a set of questions.

* Put the questions into action in role plays, taking it in turn to be interviewer and interviewee.

* Practise the role plays and perform them for the class.

An extension activity could be to film and edit the role plays into finished pieces.

"Do you have a name?" he asked.

"Not yet," she admitted.

"Better make sure that you really want one before you think any more about it. This life isn't for everyone."

Skulduggery Pleasant

At a glance

Names are powerful in Skulduggery Pleasant. In fact, they are a matter of life and death. Explore the meanings and dramatic effects of names in the book, with the help of reference tools. Invite children to devise their own Skulduggery-style names, and explain why they've chosen them. Then play the Skulduggery name game.

Curriculum fit

The activities in Investigating Names can be used to meet the NC requirements in KS2 English to develop an understanding and appreciation of literary texts, including modern fiction by significant children's authors.

And in particular it can help children to:

* recognise the choice, use and effect of figurative language, vocabulary and the effects of language

* identify how character is created, and how plot, narrative structure and themes are developed

* evaluate ideas and themes that broaden perspectives and extend thinking

* respond imaginatively, drawing on the whole text.

Learning points

Through these activities, children will:

* explore the use and significance of names in Skulduggery Pleasant

* extend and enrich vocabulary and enjoy playing with words and their meanings

* develop dictionary and research skills

* demonstrate understanding of Landy's themes by creating a new name, and explaining its meaning

* develop oral literacy through discussing and explaining choices.

Reading recap

In chapter 5, when Stephanie meets China Sorrows for the first time, Skulduggery cautions her,

"No matter how much you might want to, do not tell her your name."

Skulduggery goes on to explain, "There are three names for everyone. The name you're born with, the name you are given and the name you take. Your taken name seals your given name and protects it."

Re-read this section with the class to establish that everyone understands the differences between each of the names that Skulduggery describes.

You could also consider how this section links with the wider themes of the book, as seen in the game that Tanith plays with the troll in chapter 9, and in the centrality of the Book of Names to the plot.

Discussion points

* What do the taken names that Derek Landy creates for each of the characters actually mean?

* How do they affect the way we see them?

Ask children to work in pairs to explore the following characters' names - you could give each group a set of four names to analyse, and then ask them to share their findings with the class:

China Sorrows	Valkyrie Cain	Ghastly Bespoke
Skulduggery Pleasant	Tanith Low	Nefarian Serpine
Eachan Meritorious	Sagacious Tome	Morwenna Crow
Mr Bliss	Mr Fedgewick	Fergus Edgeley

Use a dictionary, a book of names and the Internet to look up original meanings of each word. If a word is not exactly in the dictionary, but is a variation of one like it, think about what Derek Landy is achieving by adapting it. E.g. Serpine isn't a word, but it is like a mixture of serpent and serpentine, so what qualities does it suggest? If a name, like Valkyrie, is taken from ancient mythology, look at where it comes from, and what it means.

If you have made a Skulduggery character display, add your notes about names to each character.

1. Your Skulduggery name

Reading recap
Chapter 16: Stephanie becomes Valkyrie

Earlier in the book Skulduggery tells Stephanie, "The name you take should fit you, define you and already be known to you." He also suggests that she avoids names like Razor, Phoenix and Jet that might suit a young person but not sound so good when they're older.

When Stephanie looks at the book Three Names in China's library she reads that, "The name you take should fit you, define you, and already be known to you."

Look again at how Stephanie chooses her name, and how it liberates her to take action.

Discussion points

* Do you think Stephanie's new name suits her?

* Why/why not?

* Do you think she has followed Skulduggery's advice?

* Has she followed the advice in the book?

Ask children to:

* Choose their own Skulduggery name. Use books of mythology, books of names, the Internet and your dictionary and thesaurus to find and check the meanings of suitable words.

* Brainstorm as a group the kind of words that they could consider for this activity. e.g. names from myths and stories, powerful adjectives or names that are adaptations of other words.

* Write an explanation of why they have chosen it, how it fits them, and the effect they want the name to have on other people.

2. Play the name game

Ask children to:

* Each print their Skulduggery name on a piece of paper and fold it up and put it into a bag.

* As groups or a whole class take turns to pick out the name, discuss what it means, decide what kind of character the name is for, then try to guess who created it.

* Get the class to vote on their favourite boy's name and girl's name.

"Wow," Stephanie said, "The Sanctuary is here? I used to come here when I was little..."

"Never knowing that beneath your feet was a world of magic and wonder?"

"Exactly."

He tilted his head slightly. "Better get used to that feeling."

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Skulduggery Pleasant

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At a glance

Haggard, Stephanie's home town, is made up. But Dublin, where Skulduggery Pleasant is set, is very real. Invite children to become Dublin detectives to create a Fact File on the city. Then explore the way that Derek Landy uses place and setting creatively, and suggest a future location for a Skulduggery story.

Curriculum fit

The activities in On Location can be used to meet the NC requirements in KS2 English to develop an understanding and appreciation of literary texts, including modern fiction by significant authors.

And in particular it can help children to understand how setting is created.

It can also be used to meet the NC requirements in KS2 Geography to investigate a variety of people, places and environments in the UK and abroad, through using geographical questions, skills and resources. In particular, to:

* identify and describe what places are like

* understand the location of places and describe where they are

* explain why places are like they are

* identify how and why places change.

Learning points

Through these activities children will:

* develop an understanding of Dublin, using geographical questions and resources

* present their findings in an illustrated Fact File

* explore how Derek Landy makes imaginative use of Dublin, and some of the landmark places of the city, as settings in Skulduggery Pleasant

* consider the effects created in the book by combining real and made-up places

* research and recommend a new location for a future Skulduggery adventure.

Reading recap

To introduce the themes of setting and location, recap on the different locations in the book, and write them on the board.

Ask children whether this list can be put into groups or categories. The table below can be a helpful way to distinguish between places in and outside Dublin.

Haggard & the countryside	Dublin	London
Stephanie's House (chapters 9-10)	China's Library (chapters 5, 14 & 16)	Westminster Bridge (chapter 9)
Gordon's Estate (chapters 1, 3 & 20-21)	Ghastly's Shop (chapter 8)	
Haggard Beach (chapter 20)	Waxwork Museum/Sanctuary (chapter 10)	
Serpine's Castle (chapter 17)	Municipal Art Gallery/Vault (chapter 11)	
	Denholm Street Warehouse (chapter 25)	
	Christ Church Cathedral (chapter 26)	

1. Skulduggery locations

Once you have identified the key places in the book, ask children to work in small groups, to discuss each location. Each group should describe:

* What the place is like.

* What happens there.

Ask children to feed back to the group so that you can add key actions to the chart and together create a location-based summary of the major events of the book.

Discussion points

Now that you've established where the action in Skulduggery Pleasant takes place, look at how the choices and uses of location link to the themes of the book.

* What does Stephanie's house and bedroom and home town represent? (Normality, her old life.)

* What does her home town's name, Haggard, suggest? (A dull place with no excitement or potential; an unmagical place, old and weary.)

* Why do you think that most of the magical locations are hidden within the City of Dublin?

(Making the familiar strange helps us to imagine and relate to the action. To think that the magical world and the 'real' world co-exist if only you know where to look increases our sense of wonder.)

* The city in literature is a place of anonymity, where anything is possible. In the world of Skulduggery Pleasant, Dublin is somewhere that 'secret communities' can flourish unnoticed and unsuspected by the majority of people.

2. Dublin detectives

Discussion points

* So, what's Dublin really like?

* Has anyone in the class been?

* If so, what did they do and see?

* What are their impressions of the city?

Now we are going to balance our impressions of Dublin as a dramatic location for Derek Landy's work, with what the place is really like through a geographical investigation.

Discussion point

* Do children think that there may be any differences between Derek Landy's account and their own?

* If so, can they predict what these might be?

Individually or in pairs, ask children to become Dublin detectives and create a Fact File about the city. The purpose of the Fact File is not to 'sell' the city as a destination, or to creatively re-imagine it, like a novelist might, but simply to brief readers on the facts about the city, and let them give an accurate picture of the city today.

To research Dublin Fact Files ask children to use a range of different sources including maps, atlases, reference books and ICT to find out:

* Which country Dublin is in.

* Where it is within that country.

* What kind of place it is.

* Approximate population size.

* Key geographical features.

* Climate.

* Industries.

* Its role in the region.

* When it was first noted as a place.

* How it has evolved over time since then.

* Three of its famous landmarks.

* Three of its famous sons or daughters.

* What it is famous for today.

Once research is completed, ask children to write and design their Dublin Fact Files.

Remind them to make sure that their work is:

* Illustrated with maps and drawings and tables as necessary that help to develop readers' understanding.

* Clearly structured, making good use of sub-headings.

* Accessible and easy to read.

* Accurate and reliable; if you have used websites as your sources, how can you check that the information you have discovered is correct and up-to-date?

Discussion points

* Did anything that you discovered surprise you?

* Did you notice anything different between your account of Dublin in your Fact File, and the way it appears in Skulduggery Pleasant?

3. New territory for Skulduggery

Compare and contrast the facts you have discovered about Dublin to the place that you live in.

* Would your home town make a good location for a Skulduggery adventure?

* If so, why? If not, do you know anywhere else that would?

Write a letter to Derek Landy to suggest a new location to him for one of his next books. Make sure that you explain why you think it would be good to include in a story. Such as, by telling him what qualities it has, key buildings and architecture, particularly special or famous places, aspects of its geography or climate, the customs or occupations of its people. Add maps or pictures if they help you to make your case.

"Feel free to call me if you ever stumble across a book or an item you think I might be interested in."

Skulduggery Pleasant

At a glance

Behind every great story is a great author. But who else is involved in making a book? This resource looks at the behind-the-scenes work of the design, editorial and marketing teams in packaging books like Skulduggery Pleasant. It asks children to take on these roles in creating designs and copy for the cover of Skulduggery's latest adventure.

Curriculum fit

The activities in Publishing Skulduggery can be used to meet the NC requirements in KS2 English to develop an understanding and appreciation of literary texts, including modern fiction by significant authors.

And in particular to:

* evaluate ideas and themes that broaden perspectives and extend thinking

* respond imaginatively, drawing on the whole text and other reading.

This activity can also be used as for a piece of practical work in KS2 Art and Design. In particular to use a variety of methods and approaches to communicate observations, ideas and feelings to make images and artefacts.

Learning points

Through these activities, children will:

* analyse the elements of book covers

* design covers of their own, paying careful attention to the effects of combining words, typography and images.

Reading recap

This activity builds upon reading of Skulduggery Pleasant, Book I. It does not require reading the latest Skulduggery adventure, Death Bringer, unless of course, children want to. For everyone else, a synopsis is provided, below.

1. Judging a book by its cover

The old saying that we shouldn't judge a book by its cover is a warning to us not to make judgements on appearances alone. However, most publishers and readers know that the way a book looks is very important. It gives us an immediate idea of what the book is about, who it's by and who it's for. Crucially, it can make the difference between us picking it up or leaving it on the shelf.

In small groups, ask children to look at the cover design of Skulduggery Pleasant, and describe their response to it.
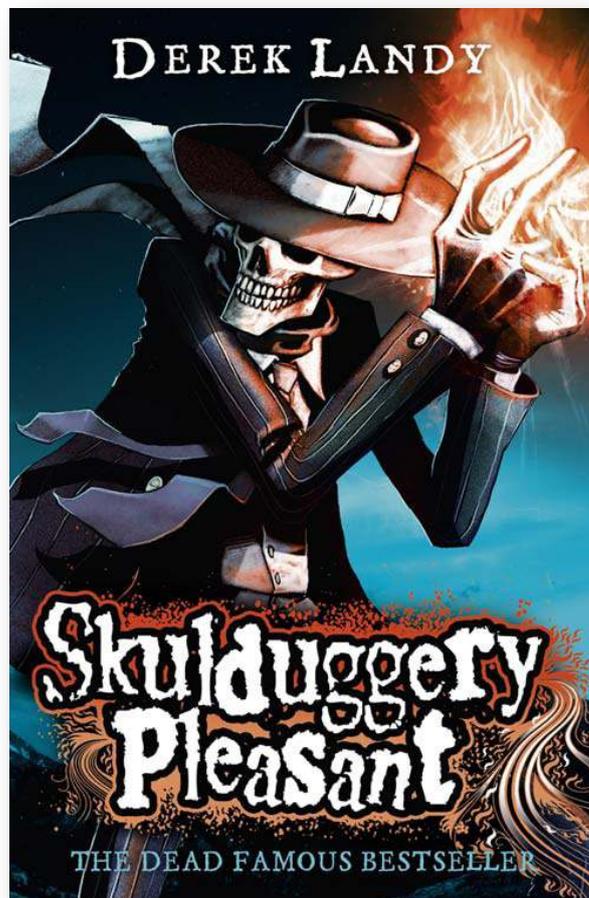
Discussion points

   * What information does it contain?

   * What genre or style of story does it suggest?

   * Do you think that it is aimed at any particular kind of reader? If so, who?

   * When you first saw it, did it make you want to read it or did it put you off?

   * Now you've read the book do you think it's an effective cover?

   * Do you think that the publishers should change it in any way?

Invite each group to feedback to the class and record key information on the board.

As a group, make a list of the different elements of a book cover, and how they work together to create an effect.

As a homework task you could ask children to bring in a book cover to the class that they think is particularly good to share with the group and explain why.

2. The art of cover design

Great book covers don't just happen, they are a team effort. Designing a cover brings together the skills and talents of several people, usually:

   * an editor to write the design brief and explain what the book is about, as well as to write copy to persuade readers to pick it up and start reading

   * an illustrator or photographer to create the images that bring the book to life

   * a designer to get the layout of these different elements just right.

The opinions of authors and their agents are often vital elements in the process too. It's very important that everyone is happy with the finished product and confident that the cover complements and enriches our impressions of the writer's work.

As a class, look at these two versions of back cover copy for the first book in the Skulduggery Pleasant series.

Version 1

Meet the great Skulduggery Pleasant: wise-cracking detective, powerful magician, master of dirty tricks and burglary (in the name of the greater good, of course).

Oh yeah. And dead.

Version 2

Meet Skulduggery Pleasant: detective, magician, warrior.

Oh yes, and dead.

Discussion points

* How are they different?

* Why do you think that the publishers chose the second version?

* Do you agree with their choice?

Now working in groups or pairs, look at these three examples of how the cover was developed for Skulduggery's sixth adventure, Death Bringer.
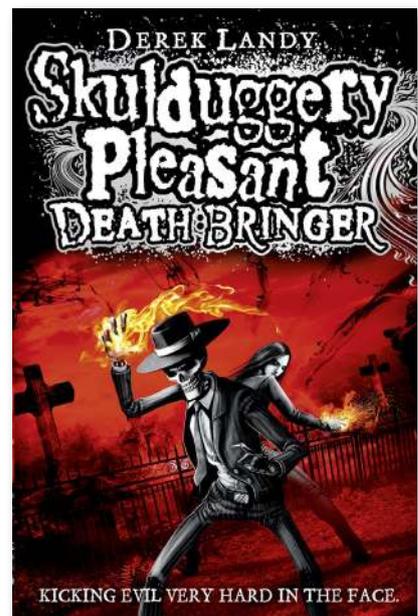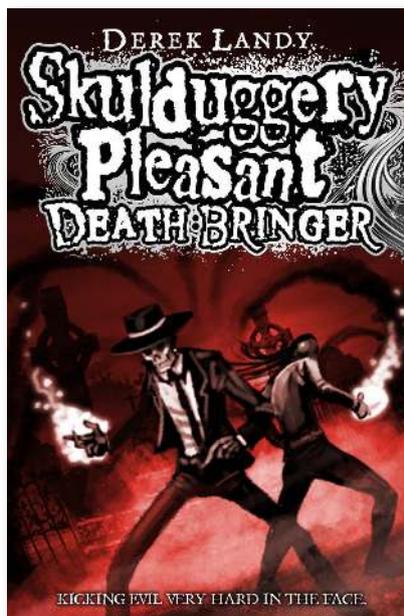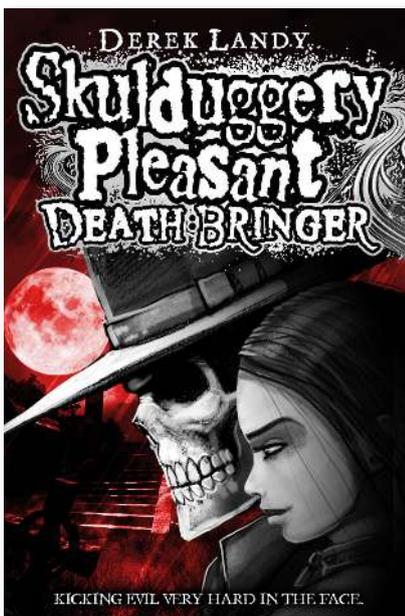
"So what does any of this have to do with my uncle?"

"I don't know," Skulduggery admitted. "That's why they call it a mystery."

Skulduggery Pleasant

At a glance

Why is it so hard to sum up Skulduggery Pleasant in one sentence? This activity gives children the opportunity to identify and describe different genres of writing, and to look at the purpose and style of reviews. They can write a review of their own, either of this book, or another that they've read, for a new school book club display.

Curriculum fit

The activities in You, the Reviewer can be used to meet the NC requirements in KS2 English to develop an understanding and appreciation of literary texts, including modern fiction by significant authors.

And in particular to:

* evaluate ideas and themes that broaden perspectives and extend thinking

* respond imaginatively, drawing on the whole text and other reading.

It also supports NC requirements in composition by asking children to:

* choose form and content to suit a particular purpose - in this case by writing a review

* use language and style appropriate to the reader

* use and adapt features of a form of writing, drawing on their reading.

Learning points

Through these activities children will:

* develop their understanding of genre

* consider their critical response to Skulduggery Pleasant

* appreciate the form and purpose of reviews

* plan, draft, revise and prepare a review of their own for an audience of their contemporaries.

Reading recap

This activity draws upon children's understanding of the whole book.

1. Introducing genre

As a class, discuss the following question

* What is genre?

Genre is category of writing, film, music or art that describes a particular style or form. Genres have conventions or rules. These rules are largely followed by work in this style. They can also be given a fresh twist too by different works over time. Genres change and grow to reflect different tastes and attitudes in society. E.g. Victorian writers such as Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens are regarded as the creators of English detective stories with works like The Woman in White and Bleak House. While some conventions that these works established may still be clearly seen in modern stories, later writers from Agatha Christie to Raymond Chandler, through to Douglas Adams and Patricia Cornwell have each had their own individual takes on detective fiction, and added new elements to the conventions of the genre.

* What examples of genre in writing can you think of? (Gothic/Horror, Fantasy, Detective/ Murder Mystery/Thriller/Romance/Adventure/Coming of Age Stories/Autobiography/Biography)

* Why is the idea of genre useful to us? (Helps us to choose, understand, evaluate.)

* Can a piece of work belong to more than one genre? Can you think of any examples of this?

* What kind of genres does Derek Landy draw upon in Skulduggery Pleasant?

Individually, make a list of the ingredients that you think make Derek Landy's work a good read.

2. What are reviews for?

Discussion points

* What kinds of things are reviewed?

* Where might we find reviews?

* What are they for?

Look at a couple of real reviews. Use the examples supplied below or ask children to find their own as part of a homework task.

"It's exciting, pacy, nicely handled and fun. I sincerely hope Landy revisits these characters."

Philip Ardagh, Guardian

"Skulduggery Pleasant serves up a thoroughly satisfying blend of humour, magic and adventure. Once you've met Stephanie and Skulduggery, you'll be clamouring for a sequel."

Rick Riordan

" Landy's fight scenes are perfectly pitched. His characters are exceptionally well drawn and delightfully colourful... Reading this book is like riding a rollercoaster."

Irish Independent

"It's pacy, it's funny, it's irreverent. The relationship between Skulduggery and Stephanie is tremendously strong. Stephanie is a splendid character – blunt, logical and outspoken... We enjoyed Skulduggery Pleasant. Muchly. Roll on volume two!"

The Book Bag

* How effective are they?

* What do you learn from them?

* How do they influence your opinion?

Identify what the ingredients of a useful review are. E.g. Makes you aware of something you might like, gives you an idea of what it is about and who it's aimed at, may compare it to other things that you may like, will comment on its strengths and its weaknesses, will conclude with a judgement and a recommendation (or not).

Ask children to write a review of Skulduggery Pleasant or another book they have read recently for a new books corner in the library or on your school's website.

Remind them to consider:

* audience - who they are writing for

* form - what conventions they need to follow

* purpose - what they want the reader to think at the end

* to add a judgement and recommendation.