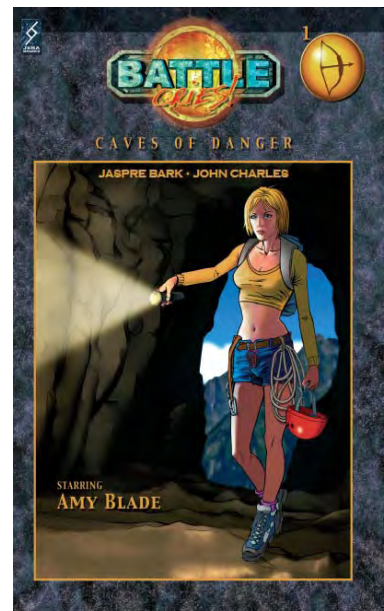


BATTLE CRIES: A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

WHAT IS THE BATTLE CRIES SERIES?

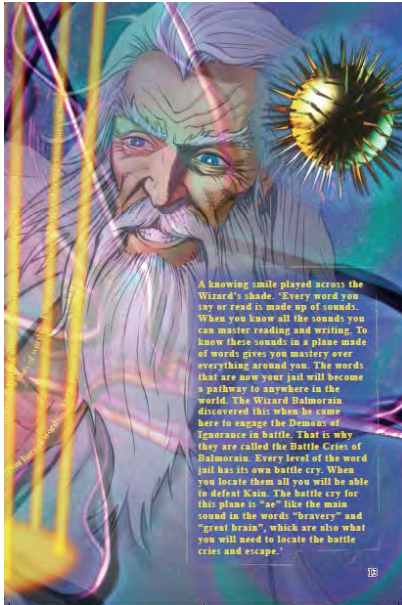
The new *Battle Cries* comic book series is based on a brilliantly conceived idea by author Jaspre Bark to help foster and improve literacy in older children and young adults by helping them to read with greater fluency and, at the same time, enjoy a series of six thrilling adventures. In the series, the heroine Amy Blade – ‘all action, all heart, already two steps in front of you’ – takes on the evil wizard Kain. Amy finds herself trapped in a labyrinthine word prison, at each level of which she must work out the answer to the word riddle set by Kain. In each adventure, Amy needs to find out the Battle Cry that will enable her to escape and move on to the next level, a process that leads, at the end of the series, to her freeing herself from the wizard’s prison of words.



WHO IS THE SERIES FOR?

Battle Cries is a series that can be enjoyed by any reader because it works at a number of different levels at the same time. It can be read as a straightforward adventure series, each book containing a different adventure and a problem that has to be solved before the next adventure starts.

The books also explain some of the different kinds of writing systems people have used throughout history, from cave painting through Egyptian hieroglyphics to the alphabet system we use for reading and writing English today.



On another level, the book can be read as a reflection on the importance of being literate: each adventure is an allegory of the struggle between knowledge and ignorance. In the first book *Caves of Danger*, Amy, the heroine of the series, learns how the Wizard Balmorain came to engage the Demons of Ignorance in battle. A Wizard explains that 'every word you say or read is made up of sounds'. If someone knows this and learns how to spell the sounds, they can gain mastery over reading and writing and break the bars of illiteracy in which they are imprisoned.

FOCUS ON SOUNDS AND THEIR SPELLINGS

This brings us to the main point of the series: Battle Cries has been written to focus attention on sounds and the conventional ways in which we spell those sounds. Each book focuses on a particular sound and is deliberately contrived to contain multiple spellings of the sound. Pupils reading the books are made explicitly aware of the fact that the sounds in English can be represented by conventionally agreed spellings. In so doing, they learn the multiple ways of spelling sounds and learn to apply this knowledge to anything they read.

The sounds and their spellings concentrated on in this series are:

Book 1 - *Caves of Danger*: /ae/, as is the word 'play'¹

Book 2 - *Peak of Fear*: /ee/, as in the word 'seat'

Book 3 - *Stone Cold Shadows*: /oe/, as on the word 'go'

Book 4 - *Burning World of Words*: /er/, as in the word 'girl'

¹ Note: in this guide sounds are represented in forward slashes; spellings are indicated within the chevron brackets.

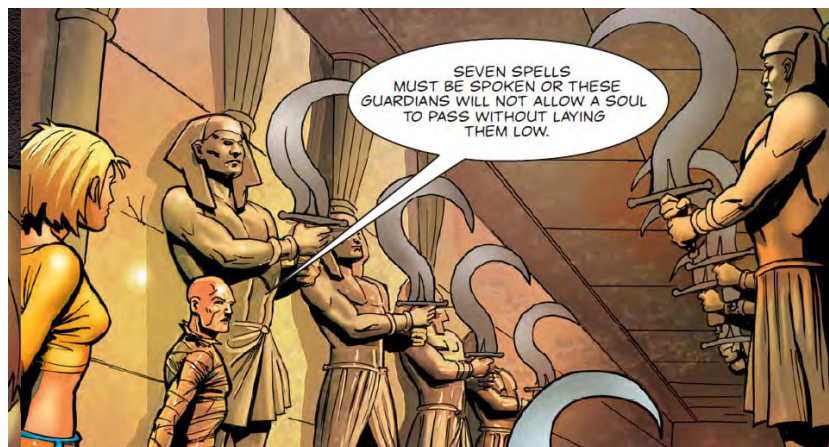
If, when reading one of these words, the pupil stumbles, simply run your pencil under the spelling and say, “This is /ae/. Say /ae/ here.” One of the slightly more unusual spellings of /ae/ is the spelling <ei> in the word ‘abseil’ (on the same page) and, in this instance, you would run your pencil under the <ei> and say, “This is the way we spell /a-e/ in this word. Say /a-e/ here.” The pupil should then be able to complete the word on their own. Exactly the same procedure applies in the case of the word ‘sewn’ on page 6 of Book 3 *Cold Stone Shadows*, where the less common spelling of /oe/ is spelt <ew>.

READING LONGER WORDS

When reading a longer word such as ‘compliment’, encourage the pupil to break the word into its syllables: read the first syllable /c/ /o/ /m/, ‘com’; then /p/ /l/ /i/, ‘pli’; and, finally, /m/ /e/ /n/ /t/, ‘ment’; after that, they put the syllables together and get ‘com’, ‘pli’, ‘ment’; and they will be able to hear the word ‘compliment’.

WORDS THE PUPIL CANNOT READ WITHOUT HELP

Quite often, pupils are going to come across spellings of sounds they are not familiar with. For example, on page 11 of Book 3 *Cold Stone Shadows*, you will find the word ‘guardian’. As the sound and its



spelling correspondences may not yet have been taught, you will probably need to point to the <gu> spelling and say, “This is the way we spell /g/ in this word. Say /g/ here.” In the latter case, if the word has just one sound-spelling correspondence not yet covered, you can probably supply it and allow the pupil to have a go. If the word contains more than one complex spelling, in order to move on quickly and not lose meaning, you may decide to supply the whole word. If you have time later, go back to the word, analyse it and talk about the more complex sound-spelling correspondences.

WORKING OUT THE MEANING OF UNKNOWN WORDS

Some words may present a challenge in terms of meaning. On page 3 of Book 1 *Caves of Danger*, for example, the pupil might not know the meaning of 'shale'. Rather than providing the meaning, you should encourage the pupil to suggest what the meaning might be from the context.

In many cases, such as when the word 'hieroglyphics' is introduced on page 1 in Book 3, the meaning is then made clear in the text ("a form of ancient writing").

These strategies, which enable readers to work out the meaning of unknown words explicitly or from the context, are essential to promote comprehension.



FINALLY

How much you decide to read of the books at a sitting will very much depend on the ability of your pupils. While much of the reading is in short speech bubbles, there are some extended passages in the books that may require more effort and, at times, intervention from the teacher. The books are also deliberately designed to broaden the pupils' vocabularies and lend themselves to being exploited in many different ways.

If you a Sounds-Write trained teacher, you will want to use Lesson 9 'Seek the Sound' as a means of practising writing words containing the target sound and reinforcing the ways of spelling that sound.

In addition, pupils can practise sorting groups of words that contain the same spelling of the target sound. In *Caves of Danger*, the words **da**nger, **A**my, ama**z**ing, bra**v**ery and stra**n**ge would be sorted into one group; whereas ma**i**ling, bra**i**n, va**i**n and Ka**i**n would readily sort into another. These kinds of sorting activities provide a considerable aid to learning and memorisation and, as such, are extremely valuable in themselves.

Pupils can also practise their writing skills by creating 'silly sentences'. These are sentences that are grammatically correct but which don't necessarily make sense, such as Chomsky's famous example: 'Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.' After you've finished a book, you can ask your pupils to make a silly sentence with words containing the sound/spelling correspondences targeted in that book. So for Book 1, you could select words such as danger, brain, break, Amy, skates, ray, etc, and ask pupils to come up with a sentence containing those words, encouraging funny, weird, or creative efforts.

Some pupils may wish to explore further some of the topics in the books, and you can link the storylines to other school work in History, Art, or other subject areas. You might also want your students to do some creative writing around Amy's adventures.

Working on comprehension, the process of extracting and building meaning through interaction and engagement with written text, is of course a complex business. If you would like a superb guide to a range of ways of improving comprehension instruction, we can wholeheartedly recommend:

Block, C.C., Gambrell, L.B., and Pressley, M., (2002), *Improving Comprehension Instruction*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass

We hope you enjoy using Battle Cries with your class. We would love to hear what you and your pupils think about the series. You can get in touch with us by emailing us at: battlecries@sounds-write.co.uk.