



CfE Level 2 (Ages 8-11)

## ***The Adventures of Alfie Onion* learning resource**

Creative activities to explore  
Vivian French's book in the  
classroom or library

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## About this resource

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This resource is full of cross-curricular activity suggestions to help you find out more about Vivian French and explore her book *The Adventures of Alfie Onion* with your class or book group. Adapt and use these activities as you see fit! Whether you own a class set of the book or just one copy, we hope there's something in here which inspires you to set up some fun, creative learning around the book.

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## About Vivian French and *The Adventures of Alfie Onion*

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Vivian French published her first book in 1990 after working in theatre, counselling and storytelling. Since then, she has gone on to publish over 200 titles, and has worked as Writer in Residence for Edinburgh International Book Festival. In 2009 her play about two teenagers, *Baby Baby*, toured Scotland, winning four star reviews and culminating in a sell-out performance at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh.

Published in 2016, *The Adventures of Alfie Onion* tells the story of a young girl who grew up reading fairy tales, and soon decided that in order to live a life of wealth and luxury, she should marry a seventh son, and later give birth to her own seventh son, destined to be a hero. Her seventh son – Magnifico – does not at all possess the attributes of a true hero, nonetheless his mother sends him on his way to find and marry a princess, accompanied by her inconvenient but loyal eighth son, Alfie. They encounter a variety of talking animals, ogres, trolls, princes and potions, and along the way it becomes apparent that Ma may have placed her hopes on the wrong son...

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# Activities

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## Introducing Vivian French Lit 2-14a, Lit 2-11a

Ask your pupils to visit Vivian's website at <http://www.vivianfrench.co.uk>. The home page is really effective in grabbing the viewer's attention. What adjectives would your pupils use to describe the images they see? What kind of books do they think Vivian French might write?

Ask them to visit the section on Vivian's books:

[http://www.vivianfrench.co.uk/vivian\\_french\\_books](http://www.vivianfrench.co.uk/vivian_french_books). There are lots of books aimed at readers of different ages. Ask each pupil to find one or two books that they really like the look of and find out more about them. After this, pupils can go back into their groups and tell each other about the books they have chosen and why these books appealed to them.

Finally, ask all your pupils to take a look at *The Adventures of Alfie Onion*: [www.vivianfrench.co.uk/bookdetail/the\\_adventures\\_of\\_alfie\\_onion/](http://www.vivianfrench.co.uk/bookdetail/the_adventures_of_alfie_onion/). Ask them to look at the cover and come up with questions and observations about the book.

## Draw an adventure map

EXA 2-03a, EXA 2-05a, ENG 2-31a

Have pupils create a map based on what they imagine Alfie's fairy tale world to look like. Make sure they include the key locations, such as:

- Pigsticking Farm
- River Dribble
- The ogre's rubbish pit & house
- The forest
- Princess Mary's castle

Or if they'd prefer, have them create a map for their own world. Have them name their locations, and decide who lives there. Do magical things happen at certain places? Are any locations dangerous?

To help pupils create their own world, check out Sibeal Pounder's top 5 tips for world-building, including ideas for names and places:

[scottishbooktrust.com/blog/teachers-librarians/2017/07/sibeal-pounder-my-top-five-tips-for-world-building](http://scottishbooktrust.com/blog/teachers-librarians/2017/07/sibeal-pounder-my-top-five-tips-for-world-building)

The Hand Drawn Maps Association has a nice collection of fictional maps for inspiration: <http://www.handmaps.org/location.php?ID=fictional>

After the maps are completed, the pupils can write a journey story. This can be one of their own creation entirely or a variation on Alfie Onion's journey. A great place to start is Lari Don's blog series 'Unlocking the Writer Inside': [scottishbooktrust.com/blog-tags/unlocking-the-writer-inside](http://scottishbooktrust.com/blog-tags/unlocking-the-writer-inside)

For tips on engaging pupils in creative writing, check out our video series

For other fantastic cross-curricular resources visit [scottishbooktrust.com/resources](http://scottishbooktrust.com/resources)

with Nick Hesketh: [scottishbooktrust.com/learning/cpd/toolkits/engaging-pupils-with-creative-writing](http://scottishbooktrust.com/learning/cpd/toolkits/engaging-pupils-with-creative-writing)

### **Create your own potion**

ENG 2-27a, EXA 2-03a, EXA 2-05a

The ogres' sleeping potion is a green, smelly soup made from poppies and snails. Have your pupils come up with their own potion, choosing what its ingredients are, what it looks and smells like, and what effect it will have on those who encounter it. Pupils can then design a bottle and recipe to go with their potion.

Pupils can also design their own label. They can think about slogans, layout, images, and which persuasive devices to use to sell the potion, as well as the more informative elements like warning messages, ingredients, etc. Encourage pupils to create a short poem to help describe their potion, in the style of Perce and Kev the magpies' rhymes.

If you like, you could provide a list of ingredients to choose from and then make the potions! This could simply include objects from the playground, such as grass, sand and pebbles, or The Eden Project has a list of 'Smelly Friends', including ingredients such as mint, garlic, lavender and cinnamon, which may be useful as a starting point:

[www.edenproject.com/learn/schools/lesson-plans/positive-potions](http://www.edenproject.com/learn/schools/lesson-plans/positive-potions).

### **Write a twisted fairy tale**

ENG 2-31a

*The Adventures of Alfie Onion* takes typical fairy tale tropes and puts a spin on them. Have your pupils rewrite a classic fairy tale with a twist. If they have seen the film *Shrek*, explain what makes that a twisted fairy tale, and ask them what they think are the main differences between *Shrek* and typical fairy tale films, such as *The Little Mermaid*. Explain that in this style of story, the author takes a well-known tale and changes it, usually to make the reader laugh.

Encourage pupils to play with setting, point of view, gender, and relationships in writing their stories. What if *Cinderella* was set in Scotland? What if Little Red Riding Hood was a ninja? What if the Giant at the top of the beanstalk wasn't to blame?

Once they have written the tales, pupils could share them with the rest of the class, or perhaps read them to younger pupils. For more information on older pupils reading with younger pupils, have a look at our Shared Reading programme for hints, tips and case studies:

[scottishbooktrust.com/files/running\\_a\\_shared\\_reading\\_project\\_1.pdf](http://scottishbooktrust.com/files/running_a_shared_reading_project_1.pdf)

Check out Vivian French herself giving tips on how to tell a great story: [scottishbooktrust.com/learning/resources/resource/vivian-french-how-to-tell-a-great-story](http://scottishbooktrust.com/learning/resources/resource/vivian-french-how-to-tell-a-great-story)

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