



KS2

## **Vivian French – weird and magical worlds**

Activities based on  
*The Robe of Skulls* for  
classes and book groups

---

## About this resource

---

This resource is full of cross-curricular activity suggestions to help you find out more about Vivian French and explore her book *The Robe of Skulls* 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.

---

## About Vivian French and the *Tales from the Five Kingdoms* series

---

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.

The Tales from the Five Kingdoms series began in 2007 with the *The Robe of Skulls*, which won the 2008 Stockton Children's Book of the Year Award and was shortlisted for the 2008 Royal Mail Awards<sup>1</sup>. In *The Robe of Skulls* we are introduced to intrepid young heroes Gracie Gillypot and Prince Marcus of Gorebreath, and throughout the rest of the series we follow their adventures as they save the Five Kingdoms from all manner of evildoers. Gracie and Marcus are aided by a whole host of memorable characters including Gubble the Troll and a bunch of friendly bats. Click here to find out more about the books:

[www.vivianfrench.co.uk/tales\\_from\\_the\\_five\\_kingdoms/](http://www.vivianfrench.co.uk/tales_from_the_five_kingdoms/)

<sup>1</sup> The Royal Mail Awards are now called the Scottish Children's Book Awards and are run by Scottish Book Trust. More information here: [www.scottishbooktrust.com/scba](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/scba)

---

# Activities

---

## Introducing Vivian French

Ask your pupils to visit Vivian's website at [www.vivianfrench.co.uk](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: [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 find out about the Tales from the Five Kingdoms series: [www.vivianfrench.co.uk/tales\\_from\\_the\\_five\\_kingdoms/books](http://www.vivianfrench.co.uk/tales_from_the_five_kingdoms/books). Ask them to look at the covers and come up with questions and observations about each book.

## Write your own magic spell

Challenge the pupils to create their own magic spells. To help them form and organise ideas, you can give them a list of different kinds of magic effects. Wikipedia has a useful list of magic categories: <http://bit.ly/SpellEffects>

Tell the pupils that there are different uses for magic: it can be used to attack, defend oneself, hide, or fool an opponent. Then, ask them to create a table with four headings:

- Name of spell
- Type of spell
- What it is used for
- Description of the spell

After this, the pupils can write a short set of step-by-step instructions for using their magic spell. As a cross curricular project, they could produce an illustration of the spell, or a storyboard in which each step is depicted.

Why not compile a book of all the pupils' spells complete with illustrations, or display them on the wall?

## Research a castle

Lady Lamorna lives way above the village of Fracture in a derelict castle. You can use the Word document in this resource on the TES website to explore different types of castles with your pupils (you need to create a free TES login): [www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Medieval-Realms-Learning-About-castles-6190506/](http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Medieval-Realms-Learning-About-castles-6190506/)

Ask your pupils to find out about a castle near them with the CastleXplorer website: [www.castlexplorer.co.uk/](http://www.castlexplorer.co.uk/).

After their research, you can ask them to come together and design their own castles, using the knowledge they have gained in the following areas:

- What different rooms would you expect to find in a castle?
- Who lived and worked in castles? Where did they all sleep and eat?
- How were castles designed with enemy attacks in mind?
- What kind of locations provided a good spot to build a castle?

## Expressive Arts – Art and Design

*The Robe of Skulls* features some fantastic illustrations by Ross Collins. This activity can help your pupils to compare different materials and develop their techniques in using these materials as they recreate images from the book.

Ask your pupils to divide a large piece of paper, ideally A3, into quarters. In each quarter, ask them to recreate one of the images from the book using different materials each time, eg chalks, watercolours, pastels and gouache. You may want to pick one of the simpler images if you're short on time: the image on page 15 is less detailed than others, and you could ask them simply to focus on Gubble rather than the whole image.

This can lead nicely into the next activity where pupils' task is to design a homepage for a *Robe of Skulls* website. They can use their artwork to inspire their designs for the site, or upload their creations to the site.

## Design a homepage for the *Robe of Skulls* website

For this task, pupils must imagine that they are creating the homepage of a website for the book *The Robe of Skulls*. The intended audience for the website is up to you: you can ask them to create it for people who haven't read the book but want to find out more, or for people who have already read and enjoyed the book.

After your pupils have read *The Robe of Skulls*, ask them to look at the homepage for Vivian French's website at [www.vivianfrench.co.uk](http://www.vivianfrench.co.uk). Have a brief discussion: do the pupils like the homepage, and if so, what do they like about the design?

Now, ask them to look at some other examples of homepages, and discuss differences and similarities, focusing on layout, use of colour, animation (if any), sound (if any) and any other design features. You may

also wish to get the pupils making notes<sup>2</sup>. Here are some examples of homepages which might be useful:

- Diary of a Wimpy Kid: [www.wimpykid.com](http://www.wimpykid.com)
- Harry Potter: [harrypotter.scholastic.com](http://harrypotter.scholastic.com)
- Mr Gum: [www.mrgum.co.uk](http://www.mrgum.co.uk)

After this, ask pupils to begin planning the design of a homepage for a *Robe of Skulls* website.

The final stage is for them to produce their homepage. If you would like them to produce an actual web page, see the next paragraph. If you would just like them to produce a design on paper, why not incorporate the previous task, where they compared different art materials and chose the one they preferred? They could use the material they selected to produce parts of their homepage.

If you would like pupils to produce a web page for *The Robe of Skulls*, there are a number of options available. Three accessible, easy to use and free sites that provide a good starting point can be found at:

- [www.moonfruit.com](http://www.moonfruit.com)
- [www.webs.com](http://www.webs.com)
- [www.wix.com](http://www.wix.com)

If you do the next task, why not record pupils' songs and upload them to their *Robe of Skulls* website?

### ***The Robe of Skulls* – writing and performing poems**

For this task, your pupils will compose dramatic monologue poems for a chosen character at a certain point of the story.

First of all, explain to pupils what a dramatic monologue poem is: they'll need to understand that they are speaking as if they are their chosen character. There are some good examples at the following links:

S1 pupils write dramatic monologues from the point of view of child labourers in Victorian times: <http://bit.ly/PoetryHardLabour>

Discuss with your pupils what we find out about these people through the poems. What do we find out about their thoughts and feelings?

After this, ask pupils to imagine they are one of the characters in the novel: the best ones for this task will be Gracie, Foyce, Lady Lamorna and Marcus. Tell them they are going to compose a short poem capturing their character's feelings and thoughts at a chosen point in the story. The point of the story that they choose is important, as it will have the most bearing on the content of the poem. For instance, Lady Lamorna's mood is very different at various points: she is excited when she comes up with her plan to pay for her dress, but nearer the novel's end she is dejected when she realises Foyce is beginning to have power over her and her scheme.

Ask pupils to pick their character and choose a point in the novel to focus

<sup>2</sup> We have created a worksheet which you can find in Additional Resources 1 at the end of this resource. The worksheet has been partly filled out to provide an example – you can customise it in Word.

on. Ask them to mind map all the different things their character might be thinking and feeling at this point in the novel.

Now, the pupils can move on with composing their poems. They can use the following structure if you wish:

**Stanza One:** Explain thoughts and feelings about what has happened up to this point

**Stanza Two:** Explain current thoughts and feelings

**Stanza Three:** Explain the character's thoughts about what they might do next

After their poems are finished, you can arrange for groups of pupils to perform their poems. One pupil can narrate the section of the novel, and each pupil can read their poem at the appropriate point.

### **After you've read *The Robe of Skulls...***

If you loved this book, you're sure to enjoy the rest of the Tales from the Five Kingdoms series. And when you're finished reading those, why not check out some of the books on our Magical Creatures book list:

[www.scottishbooktrust.com/reading/book-lists/fairies-dragons-and-other-fabled-beasts-8-11](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/reading/book-lists/fairies-dragons-and-other-fabled-beasts-8-11)

---

## Additional Resources 1 – looking at web pages (example)

---

In the boxes below, make notes about what you can see on the homepage for Diary of a Wimpy Kid.

Diary of a Wimpy Kid homepage			
Layout	Colour	Different sections	Design
Books in a column on the right hand side	Main section is mostly white  Orange and green used to make the areas around this more colourful	News section  About the author	Boxes with ribbons around the top left