

Fiction activities:

Mystery Book, Mystery Title, Mystery Creature

Preparation:

- Before the visit, ask the class teacher to put the children into trios
- Depending on the size of your library and the number of staff available, you may want to have all the children in one large group, or to split them into 2 or 3 smaller groups, with a member of library staff for each
- Each activity is designed to take 10 – 15 minutes, so if you want to, you can get the group to move on to a new activity with a different member of staff if that would work better in your library

Materials needed:

- Post-its or small pieces of coloured paper
- Pens or pencils
- Copies of book covers for **Mystery Book** and **Book Title** activities (enough for 1 per trio)
- Kitchen timer, or something to call time with (e.g. a whistle)

Introduction

- Introduce yourself and ask the children to get into their trios. Make sure members of the trios are all sitting together!
- Remind them how trios work: one Reporter (hands up, Reporters!), one Recorder (ditto), one Checker. If any children are in pairs, one Reporter and one Recorder.
- Remind them to work quietly, so that other trios can't hear them and steal their ideas!
- Give each Recorder some post-its or pieces of paper and a pencil



Mystery book

- Give copies of book covers to each trio
- Ask children to look closely at book covers and blurbs. Tell them they have 3 minutes to do this.
- Their task is to listen carefully to the extract you're going to read, and try to work out which book the extract is from
- Read the extract
- Give them 2 or 3 minutes to write down the title of the book and their reasons for choosing it
- Get each trio to report back, giving one reason for their choice
- Reveal the identity of the missing book!

Mystery book

In the far corner Mayor Knightleigh sat uncomfortably in a carved chair with feet that were zebra hooves at the back and lion paws at the front.

Benedict stood by a window that looked out upon a cranking collection of gears, cogs and pulleys. The mechanisms whirled in a precise ballet and filled the room with a rhythmic hum. Here in the bowels of the funhouse, the man had a superior view of the machinery that ran it all.

Ellen noticed that Benedict's right leg was no longer a unicycle; now it was covered with white feathers and ended in a scaly foot with four fierce talons.

"Peculiar," she murmured.

Benedict crossed to his desk and propped his chicken foot upon it.

"Oh! An itch. Just now. I can't quite reach it," he said. "I hate to impose, Mr Mayor, but would you scratch it for me?"

The mayor curled his lip in disgust. "If...you insist."

He reached out and tentatively placed a fingertip on the underside of the foot, then began to scratch. Suddenly, the chicken leg shot from Benedict's body and smacked the mayor's chest, knocking him back into the animal chair, which squawked like a kookaburra.

"Spring-loaded chicken leg," chuckled Benedict. "My most recent invention."

From **High Wire** by Charles Ogden.

Mystery creature (2 to choose from)

- Tell the group that you're going to read an extract from a book. You want them to listen carefully and try to work out what kind of creature is being described. Every time they hear a clue, they should jot it down on their post-its
- Read the extract
- Give them 2 minutes to work in their trios
- Go round each trio in turn, asking them for their answer and one clue which led them to that answer
- Each trio should give a different clue – they shouldn't repeat what someone else has just said!
- Reveal the identity of the creature and show the children the book cover

Mystery creature 1: The Circus

On Saturday they were all over Bristol – every lamppost, every hoarding, every empty shop. Any space that could carry a poster did.

A photograph of Desmond looking terrifyingly fierce was splashed across the middle.

Cirque de la Lune, it declared. *See the world famous French circus! Amazing animatronics! Appearing in Bristol only, Mordilla – the fire-breathing <something>!*

“Mordilla?” said Katrina. “Mordilla!”

“They didn’t think ‘Desmond’ was scary enough”, muttered Desmond, an embarrassed flush shimmering across his scales.

“And why does it say ‘Bristol only?’” asked Katrina. “Being in a circus could be good, couldn’t it? You could travel all over the place with them.”

Desmond shook his head firmly. “I was only hitching a lift. I said I’d perform with them if they took me as far as Bristol. I wanted to get back the minute I heard about Morgan. After what she did last time, I thought you might need some help. I tried to fly here but it proved a little tricky. The skies are so full of planes and whatnot, you can hardly move these days. And I nearly got shot down by the US air force in New York. Had to make an emergency landing in Central Park. Crashed right next to the circus people’s big top as luck would have it. Was surrounded by armed police in an instant. The locals were a little shocked. They’d have had me arrested if the circus lot hadn’t covered for me. It was very kind of them. They told the authorities I was their new attraction. And they were heading for Europe right after the New York show, so I came over with them.” Desmond smiled at Katrina. “Of course, they’d *like* me to stay on at the circus,” he added. “But it would be quite impossible.”

“Why?” asked Katrina.

Desmond coughed and shifted uncomfortably. He was going to tell her a deep, dark secret. Katrina leant forward and Desmond looked over his shoulder to check no one could hear. Then he whispered, “They’re all – they’re all...” He could hardly bring himself to say it. His wings gave a little involuntary flutter. “...vegetarians!”

Katrina nodded sympathetically. She could see the problem. No amount of tofu could quite fill the special place in Desmond’s stomach where a damsel in distress used to go.

“Oh Desmond,” she sighed, patting his claw affectionately. “What are we going to do with you?”

Desmond farted. It was only a little one, but it was enough to tear a bush up by its roots and send it scudding across the park.

“Sorry,” said Desmond. “Lentils.”

From **Merlin’s apprentice** by Tanya Landman. Desmond is, of course, a dragon.

Mystery creature 2

“Tarantella!” cried Pandora.

“The very same,” replied Tarantella.

“Pet lamb,” said Pandora, with total disregard for species. “I haven’t seen you for ages.”

Tarantella grinned widely and popped a fly wing into her mouth. She crunched, swallowed and extended a hairy leg to pat Pandora on the hand.

“So, what brings you up here?” she asked, licking her lips with a small black tongue. Pandora found herself mesmerized by Tarantella’s tongue, as it sought out every tiny uneaten flake of wing, transferring each minute morsel into her maw and devouring them...

“I’ve lost Multitudina”, she said.

Tarantella shut her mouth with a snap. “Good riddance to bad rattish,” she muttered. “And before you even think it – NOT GUILTY.”

“Have you seen her, though?” persisted Pandora.

“Not up here. Not in my domain, thank you. I’d bite her if I caught sight of so much as a whisker.”

“I’ve made a bet with Titus that I’ll find her,” said Pandora miserably.

“A wager?” squeaked Tarantella, rubbing all eight of her legs together with glee. “What’s the prize?”

“Nothing much, just fourteen rats and the privilege of staying alive..”

“And the forfeit?” Tarantella’s mouth gathered into a fuschia-pink O of horror.

“Swimming the moat,” said Pandora.

“Auuuuuk,” squawked Tarantella, remembering several unpleasant encounters with water, and ever mindful of the legendary Incy-Wincy’s watery fate.

“...with Tock,” added Pandora.

“Oh, what a tangled web...” groaned Tarantella sympathetically.

From **Pure dead magic** by Debi Gliori. Tarantella is, of course, a spider!

Invent your own book title

- Hand out a copy of a book cover to each trio
- The book cover has the author and title blanked out
- Ask the children to read the blurb and look at the cover of the book
- Ask them to come up with a title of their own (3 minutes)
- Go round each trio, asking them for their title and their reasons for choosing it
- Show them the real title of the book
- Ask them which title they like best!

Match the title and the blurb (a variation on **Invent your own book title**)

- Give each trio 3 book covers with the titles blanked out
- Give them 3 – 4 minutes to read all the blurbs
- Hand out a sheet with titles on it
- Ask them to decide which title fits each cover (2 minutes)
- Go round each trio, asking them to give the title for one book cover each. Why did they choose that title?