



Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Goodnight Mister Tom by Michelle Magorian (Puffin)

1. Explore it

Without sharing the book title, read this story opening. You might want to hear it read aloud as well as reading it for yourself.

'Yes', said Tom bluntly, on opening the front door. 'What d'you want?' A harassed middle-aged woman in a green coat and felt hat stood on his step. He glanced at the armband on her sleeve. She gave him an awkward smile. 'I'm the billeting officer for this area,' she began. 'Oh yes, and what's that got to do wi' me?' She flushed slightly. 'Well, Mr, Mr ...' 'Oakley. Thomas Oakley?' 'Ah, thank you, Mr Oakley.' She paused and took a deep breath. 'Mr Oakley, with the declaration of war imminent..' Tom waved his hand. 'I knows all that. Git to the point. What d'you want?' He noticed a small boy at her side. 'It's him I've come about,' she said. 'I'm on my way to your village hall with the others.' 'What others?' She stepped to one side. Behind the large iron gate which stood at the end of the graveyard were a small group of children.

Many of them were filthy and very poorly clad. Only a handful had a blazer or coat.

They all looked bewildered and exhausted. One tiny dark-haired girl in the front was hanging firmly on to a new teddy-bear. The woman touched the boy at her side and pushed him forward. 'There's no need to tell me,' said Tom. 'It's obligatory and it's for the war effort.' 'You are entitled to choose your child, I know,' began the woman apologetically. Tom gave a snort. 'But,' she continued, 'his mother wants him to be with someone who's religious or near a church. She was quite adamant. Said she would only let him be evacuated if he was.' 'Was what?' asked Tom impatiently. 'Near a church.' Tom took a second look at the child. The boy was thin and sickly-looking, pale with limp sandy hair and dull grey eyes. 'His name's Willie,' said the woman. Willie, who had been staring at the ground, looked up. Round his neck, hanging from a piece of string, was a cardboard label. It read 'William Beech'.

- What is happening in this extract? Who are the central characters? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences?
- Talk about how this story opening makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you know in stories or real life? How?
- Think about how it is written. What parts of this really stick in your mind? Which words and phrases do you like the best? What do you like about them? Do they look or sound interesting? Do they help you make a picture in your mind? What do other people think?
- Are there any words you are unsure of the meaning of? If possible, look these up in a dictionary or use an online version, e.g., <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>. If you are able to, you might ask someone else if they know the meaning.
- When do you think the book may be set? What clues tell you that? What do you know about 'evacuation'? What questions does the opening of the book raise for you?

2. Illustrate it

Read the text again and think about the different characters in the opening of the novel. What impression are you given of William Beech? Which words and phrases help you to imagine him? Why do you think he has a label with his name on? How do you imagine he feels in this moment?

What impression do you have of Mr Tom Oakley? Which different words and phrases suggest what he is like? What do you notice about the way he speaks? Does he seem friendly to you? You might like to highlight or underline the parts of the text that help you to visualise these two different characters.

Now draw a sketch of William from Mr Tom's perspective. What would you need to include in the drawing? What do you think Tom's first impression of William is? Why? How might you show this in your drawing? What might his body language be like? Do you think he would look confident or shy and nervous? What kind of expression might you draw on his face? Why?

Re-read the opening and write some words and phrases that have helped you make your picture of William. Share what you have drawn with someone else: Why have you chosen to draw him this way? Which words and phrases helped you make a picture?

3. Talk about it

Now look at the front cover and the title of the book. Is this what you expected? Why? Why not? What details do you notice on the front cover that reinforce the impression given to you in the opening of the story? Are there any aspects of the illustration that surprise you?

Looking at the front cover, what do you notice about William and Mr Tom? What do you notice about the body language in the picture? Based on the illustration, how might their relationship develop from the initial meeting you read about in the introduction to the book? Why do you think the book is called 'Goodnight Mister Tom'? What do you predict will happen in this story?

4. Imagine it

This book is set during World War Two. Children like William were sent away from towns and cities to the countryside to help keep them safe. They had to live with strangers. What do you think it would have been like to be sent away from home like this? Imagine you are a child such as William, what do you think you would have felt as you took the train to somewhere you had never been before? What do you think you would have told your new family about yourself to help them get to know you? What questions could you have asked the family you were staying with to help you settle in? What would help you to feel at home in your new surroundings?

5. Create it

Imagine you are going away somewhere and you can only bring one suitcase of items with you, containing five objects or items that are special to you; what would you pack?

Draw or write a list of these items, justifying why they should be allowed to go with you and why they are so special to you. You might like to share this list with someone else and ask them what they would bring with them and why. Have you chosen similar items or different items?