Robin Hood and his Merry Men

Historical context
The story of Robin Hood is a legend. It is probably based on a real person who lived in England in the 12th
century and around whom lots of imaginary stories have developed. The story of Robin Hood is set during the
time when King Richard 1st was away fighting in the Middle East and his brother, Prince John, ruled England.
At that time, England was governed by the king and a small group of wealthy lords who owned most of the
land. Many people were very poor – they worked for the lords as farmers and had little freedom of their own.
While Prince John ruled England, they were particularly badly treated and exploited. Robin Hood, who came
from a wealthy family near the town of Nottingham, did not like what was happening. He spoke out against
the unfairness of the tax system, and became a champion of the poor. In particular, he became an enemy of
the Sheriff of Nottingham (the man in charge of the area where Robin Hood lived). He hid in nearby Sherwood
Forest to escape from the Sheriff. He robbed the rich and gave the money back to the poor. Many men joined
him in his fight against injustice.

The story
Robin’s father, Sir Robert of Locksley, was imprisoned by the Sheriff of Nottingham because he could not pay his
taxes. Robin saw that this was happening everywhere. He wanted King Richard to return and rule the country
fairly again. Prince John and the Sheriff knew that Robin did not like what they were doing. The Sheriff sent
his men to arrest Robin on the day of his wedding to Marian. Robin managed to escape with his friend, Will
Scarlet.
They went to live in Sherwood Forest. A lot of other men joined him and became his Merry Men. Will Scarlet
captured a ‘boy’ walking through the forest and took ‘him’ to Robin Hood. The ‘boy’ turned out to be Marian,
who had come to join the Merry Men. She told Robin that the Sheriff had allowed one of his men, Guy of
Gisborn, to move into his old house, Locksley Hall, and that Guy wanted to marry her.
Robin sent Will Scarlet and Much, the miller’s son, to see what they could discover. Will was captured. He was
sent to Nottingham to be hanged the next day. Robin dressed up as the hangman and rescued Will.
One day in the forest, Robin saw a little boat on the river. A fat friar, a holy man, rowed people in the boat
across the river. The man, Friar Tuck, told Robin that he had had to leave the abbey where he lived because
he had spoken out against the Sheriff. Robin invited him to join his Merry Men and be their cook. Friar Tuck
married Robin to Marian.
On another day, Robin discovered that the Sheriff’s men had robbed a friend of all his money. The Sheriff was
taking it back to Nottingham. Robin set a trap for them, and took back the money the Sheriff had stolen.
A few weeks later, Robin met a tall man on a narrow wooden bridge. There was only room for one man to
pass. Robin asked the stranger to make way for him. The stranger refused and they fought each other with long
wooden sticks. The stranger, Little John, knocked Robin into the water. Robin invited him to join his Merry Men.
He needed good, strong fighters like Little John.
On another occasion, Robin heard that the Sheriff was holding a shooting competition. The winner’s prize was
a silver arrow. With his hood pulled over his eyes so he would not be recognised, Robin won the competition.
When the Sheriff presented him with his prize, he was most surprised to see who the winner was. Robin escaped
before the Sheriff could capture him.
Later, Robin dressed up as a butcher and went to the Sheriff’s house. He tricked the Sheriff into coming into Sherwood Forest, where he robbed him and sent him home without his money.

However, things did not always go well for Robin and his men. One day, Will Scarlet and two other men were killed by the Sheriff’s men and Little John was captured. Robin fought and killed Guy of Gisborn, tricked the Sheriff and freed Little John. The Sheriff was just about to kill Robin when a knight dressed all in black rode up and told him to stop. The Sheriff put his sword away and left. When the Black Knight took off his helmet, Robin saw it was King Richard! As Guy of Gisborn was dead, the king gave Robin back Locksley Hall.

One night, the Sheriff tried to climb up a rope into Robin’s house, but Robin heard him. He cut the rope. The Sheriff fell and was killed. Robin knew that the Sheriff’s men would come to punish him, so he sent Marian to stay with her sister. Robin rode off and joined a ship as a sailor. The ship was chased by pirates. Robin fired his arrows and killed many of the pirates. The ship’s captain gave Robin half of the pirate’s gold.

Meanwhile, Marian’s greedy sister told Marian that Robin was dead so that she could share Robin’s money. Robin came to collect Marian but Marian was out walking. Marian’s sister tried to poison Robin. Fortunately Robin realised what she was trying to do. When Marian returned, she was amazed and overjoyed to see Robin. They left immediately and returned to the safety of Sherwood Forest.
The contents page

- Ask the children to turn to the contents page. Explain that the Contents list tells us what is in the book. Explain that the story is divided into chapters.
- Ask How many chapters are there? Read the chapter titles to and with the class. Briefly explain any unfamiliar words (most will be covered in the chapter notes). Explain that Will Scarlet and Marian are people's names. Ask the children what page each chapter starts on.
- Point out that at the end of the book there is a poem (on page 58) and some facts about life in the days of Robin Hood (beginning on page 60).
- Ask questions about each chapter title to stimulate the children's interest, for example: Chapter 1: Who do they think the baby is? Chapter 2: What is a wedding? How could you have only half a wedding? In which chapter is there a fight? In which chapter does Robin become a sailor?

Robin Hood's song (Page 3)

- By way of introduction to the story, look together at the words of the song and listen to it on the audio cassette/CD.
- Read the note about King Richard and Prince John to and with the class. Point out how they are both dressed. Ask Why do you think Prince John is called bad? If necessary, explain what taxes are.

Characters in the story

- Page 1 of the Workbook introduces some of the good and bad characters children will meet during the story and gives some brief information about each. This may be read together at this point to introduce the characters. As children read the story, ask them to fill in the page number on which the character is first met.

You can play the story on the audio cassette/CD at any time you choose.
**Active vocabulary**

- **beard** contains the ‘hidden’ word *ear*
- **daughter** the ‘gh’ are silent letters and are not pronounced
- **forest** a two-syllable word: *fo-rest*
- **forgive** a two-syllable word: *for-give*
- **handsome** a compound word: *hand + some = handsome*
- **hungry** the ‘y’ is pronounced ‘ee’
- **prison** contains the ‘hidden’ words *is* and *son*
- **sword** the ‘w’ is a silent letter and is not pronounced
- **threaten** the ‘eat’ is pronounced ‘et’ in this word
- **wedding** note the ‘dd’ in the middle

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**Passive vocabulary**

- crashing
- galloped
- sheriff
- taxes

**Before reading**

- Pre-teach the active vocabulary (see the Teacher’s Notes Introduction page 13 and the Glossary). Use the notes in the table to discuss any interesting features of the words.
- Ask the children to do the activities on page 2 of their Workbook to practise the new vocabulary.
- Read the title of Chapter 1. Ask *What is a forest?*
- Tell the children to look at the picture on page 4. Ask *Where are the man, woman and their baby?* Discuss the way the man and woman are dressed. Ask *How can we tell it is not in the present day? Do the man and woman look happy? What is the baby lying on? Is it in a cot? Do you think the baby is a boy or a girl?*
- Tell the children to look at the picture on page 7. Ask *What do you think is happening?* Draw attention to the man who is tied up and has been thrown on a horse’s back. Ask *Why is he tied up? Who tied him up? Who is he? Where is he going?* Point out the soldiers (or knights) on horseback and on foot. Discuss with the children how they are dressed, pointing out their metal coats of ‘chain mail’ (made from circles of metal joined together to make a strong, protective coat); their helmets, and their weapons and shields. Ask *Do the men look frightening? Do they look powerful? Why do you think some soldiers are on horses? Who do you think the boy and woman in the front of the picture are? Do you think the prisoner on the horse is related to them? Why do you think the soldier is holding the boy? How does the woman look?*
Optional suggestion: you may wish to give the children an appropriate amount of time, for example five minutes, to look quickly through the chapter to find (and perhaps underline) the active vocabulary they have been introduced to.

During reading

- Explain that the word Sir in front of someone’s name means he is an important person. You will also need to explain who the Sheriff of Nottingham and Prince John were (see the notes on Historical context on page 1) and that many nobles liked to hunt animals such as deer in the forests, but poor people were not allowed to kill these animals for food.

- Read the chapter expressively to the class (or play the audio cassette/CD). Do not stop to explain anything or to ask questions. Ensure the children are following in their books.

- Choose whichever of the following options is most appropriate for your class:
  - Read the chapter again and encourage the class to read it with you.
  - Read the chapter again, a paragraph at a time, and ask the class (or individuals) to read each paragraph aloud after you.
  - Do not read again yourself. Ask groups or individuals to read the chapter aloud, a paragraph at a time.

- Read (or play) the chapter again, a paragraph at a time. Explain the meaning and pronunciation of the words listed as passive vocabulary, and any other unfamiliar words.

- Discuss how the pictures can help the reader guess the meaning of the text.

Stage 1 comprehension (literal)

Ask these questions orally, or set them as a written activity. You can also ask the children to do the activities on page 3 of their Workbook.

1. Who lived in Sherwood Forest?
2. Why were they hiding in the forest?
3. What was the name of their baby?
4. Where was Joanna sitting when her father rode into the Forest?
5. What did he say about the baby?
6. Why did Joanna’s father want to punish Sir Robert two years before?
7. What did he want to do now?
8. Where did Joanna put Robin?
9. Sir Robert put down his _____ and _____ hands with Joanna’s father.
10. Where did Sir Robert, Joanna and Robin then go to live?
11. How old was Robin when he heard his father talking about the Sheriff of Nottingham?
12. What did the Sheriff always want?
13. Did Joanna’s father have lots of money?
14. How old was Robin when the Sheriff’s men came to take his father away?
15. What did Sir Guy of Gisborn say to Joanna’s father?
16. What did the men do to Joanna’s father?
17. Did Robin and his mother ever see Sir Robert again?
18. What problem did the people in Sherwood Forest have?
19. Robin said he wanted to _____ the people in Sherwood Forest.
This chapter covers at least 15 years, from the time Robin was a baby until after his father was taken away by the Sheriff’s men. Check that children understand this. Point out that the chapter is broken into smaller sections by the inclusion of pictures of arrows.

Ask the children to find examples of questions and exclamations in the chapter. Draw attention to their punctuation. Read each one aloud, and draw attention to how your tone of voice changes.

Ask the children to find and read aloud any words containing ‘ee’, ‘ea’, ‘oo’, ‘or’, ‘ar’.

Ask children to find and read any words containing a double consonant (for example, wedding).

Finally, ask individuals to re-read short sections of the text aloud. Encourage them to read expressively and with appropriate intonation. (You might like to ask children to play the role of particular characters and read their parts.)

After reading

Stage 2 comprehension (extension)

Ask these questions orally, or set them as a written activity for the more able. Answers will vary. Encourage the children to give reasons for their suggestions, and accept any answer they can justify.

1 Why do you think Joanna’s father did not like Sir Robert?
2 Do you think Sir Robert and Joanna wanted to leave their home and live in Sherwood Forest?
3 Why do you think they went to live in the Forest?
4 How do you think Joanna felt when she saw a man on his horse come crashing through the Forest towards her?
5 Why do you think Joanna held Robin tightly in her arms when she saw her father?
6 Do you think she was pleased to see her father?
7 How can you tell Joanna’s father liked the baby?
8 What do you think made Joanna’s father change his mind about Sir Robert?
9 Why did he want to forgive him?
10 How can you tell Joanna was pleased that her father wanted to forgive them?
11 How can you tell Sir Robert was pleased that Joanna’s father wanted to forgive them?
12 Do you think they were happy to return to Locksley Hall?
13 How do you know the Sheriff was a greedy man?
14 How can you tell that the Sheriff was a powerful man?
15 Do you think it was fair to take Sir Robert away and put him in prison?
16 How do you think Robin and his mother felt when the men took Sir Robert away?
17 What animals lived in the Forest?
18 Why did the people in the Forest want to kill the deer?
19 How can you tell Robin felt sorry for the people in Sherwood Forest?
20 Do you think Robin agreed with Prince John’s order that people could not kill the deer in the Forest?

Discuss why governments need taxes. What are they used for?
Talk about the importance of forgiveness. Ask *How hard is it to forgive people who have hurt you in some way? Do you think it is best to forgive? Is it a sign of weakness or strength?*

Ask the children to name as many powerful people as they can. Discuss why they are powerful and what sort of power they have.

Ask children to suggest some of the problems there might be if they lived in a forest.

Ask children how the soldiers in the pictures protected themselves: what they wore, weapons they carried, shields, etc.

Ask the children how they think Robin will be able to help the people in the forest.

Write some words from the chapter on the board, with lines replacing the vowels, for example _f_r_st (*forest*). Ask the children to supply the missing vowels.

Play a rhyming game. Write these words from the chapter on the board: *wife, live, bed, tree, day, boy, now, ten, king* and *took*. Brainstorm as a class, and write on the board, as many words that rhyme with each word as possible (for example, *wife*: knife/life).

Elicit from the class anything they know about deer.

If appropriate, try some Extension Activities (see the Teacher’s Notes Introduction page 19).

Ask *What do you think will happen next in the story?*