Barrington Stoke
CLASSROOM RESOURCES

JEREMY STRONG
The Ghost in the Bath

PART 1  Ideas for exploring the text
PART 2  About Jeremy Strong
PART 3  Other activities
Read and enjoy Jeremy Strong’s funny and poignant *The Ghost in the Bath*, a brilliant quick read accessible to mixed ability groups.

**Luke had a problem...**

At school, Luke only really enjoys break time, lunch time and home time. His teacher Mrs Trouble – sorry, Mrs Rubble – has just set the class a project on the Victorians and Luke is well and truly stuck. His mum suggests he has a good think that night in the bath.

While in the bath – much to his embarrassment - Luke meets a ghost called Ellie, who believes that her fiancé Charlie lives in the house. It transpires that Ellie was on the *Titanic* and drowned. As a ghost, she needs water to manifest to living people. This gives rise to a lot of hilarity involving buckets, yoghurt pots and goldfish bowls.

Ellie and Luke team up, and with the help of a kind librarian and Luke’s class, they discover that Charlie survived the *Titanic* but died of wounds sustained in WWI. They find his grave and Ellie sinks into the ground to join him. Mrs Rubble has to accept Luke’s project on the *Titanic* – even though it was not Victorian, Ellie was!

*The Ghost in the Bath* offers an ideal opportunity for mixed-ability groups to explore the conventions of humorous writing and of ghost stories, subverted here for comedy purposes.
I. LAUGH YOUR SOCKS OFF OR CRY YOUR EYES OUT?

Jeremy Strong is best known as a writer of funny books. *The Ghost in the Bath* is funny, but it is also about very sad events – the sinking of the *Titanic* and the First World War.

Ask the class to work in small groups to record everything they know about the *Titanic* and the First World War:

- What was the *Titanic*, and what happened to it? Were there a lot of deaths?
- When was the First World War? Who fought in it? Were there a lot of deaths?
- Do the group know of or have they seen any films or television programmes about *Titanic*? Were these very sad films or programmes? Were they exciting?
- Do the group know of or have they read any books or seen any films about the First World War? Were these very sad books or films? Were they exciting?

Ask each group to answer the following questions:

1. How likely does your group think it is that anyone would make a funny film or TV programme or write a funny book on the topic of *Titanic* or World War I?
   - [ ] Very likely
   - [ ] Quite likely
   - [ ] Don’t know
   - [ ] Quite unlikely
   - [ ] Very unlikely

2. How appropriate does your group think it is for anyone to make a funny film or TV programme or write a funny book on the topic of *Titanic* or World War I?
   - [ ] Very appropriate
   - [ ] Quite appropriate
   - [ ] Don’t know
   - [ ] Quite inappropriate
   - [ ] Very inappropriate

Bring the groups together. Record their answers.
Explain to the class that there have been comedies written or made about tragic events quite often. In the UK in 1989 the BBC made a comedy series called *Blackadder Goes Forth*, which was set in the trenches in the First World War. In 1997 an Italian film called *Life is Beautiful* was released. It is a comedy set during the Holocaust, first in Italy and then in the concentration camps.

**Share these statements on the board:**

**STATEMENT 1**

The BBC, who made *Blackadder Goes Forth*, say:

‘Edmund Blackadder was a noble and sympathetic character... his efforts to evade his inevitable fate provided not only countless laughs but also a real sense of the futility of war.’

**STATEMENT 2**

*At the end of Blackadder Goes Forth all the characters from the series go ‘over the top’ into the guns of No Man’s Land. The screen fades to a scene of poppies – the symbol of the dead of World War I. This is often voted one of the top TV moments ever.*

**STATEMENT 3**

The Director of *Life is Beautiful*, Robert Benigni, said:

‘Who said it is forbidden to make a comedy about the Holocaust? In my eyes, comedy is no less important than tragedy, and it is entitled to deal with any topic and has always done so.’

**STATEMENT 4**

*The jury of the Jerusalem Film Festival gave Life is Beautiful the Jewish Experience Award. They said it used ‘comedy in a very sensitive and humane way’.***

**Now ask the class to AGREE or DISAGREE with this statement:**

Comedy can be a good way to talk about difficult or sad events. In fact, comedy can make the reader or watcher think even more carefully about sad events. This is partly because comedy makes us see characters as lively, happy people, so we care about them more, and are upset when sad things happen to them.

Discuss whether they have changed their opinions since work on this task began.

If you can, watch an episode of *Blackadder Goes Forth* with the class.
2. A SOGGY GHOST

Discuss with the class whether they would normally expect a ghost in a story to be scary and unpleasant or friendly and kind – or something else entirely!

On page 8, Luke’s mum asks him whether Ellie is ‘a nice ghost or a creepy one?’ What do the class think? Ask them to look for evidence in the book.

Ellie is not scary or creepy and we know this because:

- She talks like a normal person – like a huffy, rude normal person
- She doesn’t mean anyone any harm – she just wants to find Charlie
- She helps Luke out

In fact, Ellie is almost a funny ghost. Partly this is because she appears in the bathroom and embarrasses Luke. Partly it is because she is limited to appearing when she is wet and this means that she turns up in baths, buckets, toilet and – almost – a yoghurt pot. She explains to Luke that the reason she can only appear in water is that she drowned on the Titanic.

In the Harry Potter series, there is a ghost called Moaning Myrtle. Rather like Ellie, the place Myrtle appears is linked to her death. She haunts a bathroom and travels through the plumbing, because she died in that bathroom.

Discuss Moaning Myrtle with the class. What sort of ghost is she? Is she scary, creepy, happy, funny, sad, dangerous? Is it funny that she appears in a bathroom?

3. SILLY GHOSTS - EXTENSION WRITING ACTIVITY

Brainstorm some comedy ghosts who can only appear in silly situations, and how they might have died. Here are some starter ideas:

- A ghost who died by choking on some custard and who can only appear at circuses when clowns throw custard pies.
- A ghost who died by being run over by a bin lorry and can only appear ______.
- A ghost who died by _______ and can only appear in supermarkets.

Choose some of the ghosts to write into stories or make into pictures. Make a big book called ‘Class X’s Bumper Book of Ghost Stories’.

Add in any jokes the class knows about ghosts or other things which are meant to be creepy.
4. MOHAMMED: THE SORT-OF-Straight-Man

A straight man is one half of a comedy double act. The straight man is shown to be reasonable and serious. The funny man is shown to be funny, silly or stupid. In fact, the straight man can be as funny as the funny man – a lot of the humour comes from the way the two personalities play off against one another.

Can the class complete the names of these comedy double acts? Can they think of any more?

- Stan Laurel and Oliver
- Ant McPartlin and
- David Walliams and
- Dawn French and Jennifer
- Armstrong and

Luke and Mohammed are a bit of a comedy double act. Luke says silly and naughty things and Mohammed tries to agree and expand on each point, but he is not very good at it.

Look through the text for examples of Luke and Mohammed as a comedy double act.
Jeremy Strong was born in 1949. He says that he knows that makes him incredibly old and ancient but that he still has his own teeth, most of his own hair and all his arms and legs. He says that means life is pretty good, all told.

When Jeremy was three he fell out of a first-floor window onto his head. Ouch! He thinks that this may have helped him to become an author of slightly mad and very funny stories.

Before Jeremy became an author of slightly mad and very funny stories, he had lots of other jobs. He put the jam into jam doughnuts. He picked strawberries. He was a teacher. He was even a writer of serious stories and poems for grown-ups for a while. Luckily he then got into writing for children and has never looked back.

Jeremy has grown-up children and lives in Bath with his wife Gillie, lots of cats and some frogspawn in a pond.

Laugh your socks off with more Jeremy Strong from Barrington Stoke:

**MAD IRIS**

Mad Iris the ostrich has escaped from the ostrich farm and holed up in Pudding Lane School. Will the men from the ostrich farm catch her in their nets? Ross and Katie to the rescue!

**MAD IRIS GOES MISSING**

It’s the Cup Final day and Pudding Lane School is sure to win with Mad Iris as their mascot. But then Mad Iris is stolen! Can Ross and Katie save the day?

**LIVING WITH VAMPIRES**

Kevin’s parents are SO embarrassing. They really have no idea how to behave. When they turn up at parents’ evening, they bite the teachers’ necks and EVERYTHING...
THE SMALLEST HORSE IN THE WORLD

Swan boasts about all the things she has. She has money. She has a swimming pool. She has a horse. But Bella has a horse, too – the smallest horse in the world!

DON'T GO IN THE CELLAR

When Zack and Laura find a note forbidding them to go in the cellar, it’s like a red rag to a bull. But the last thing they expect to find is a machine that can cause mayhem and madness! Can they get the custard pies, spooky ghosts and the murder stuff under control?

You can find out loads more about Jeremy on his own website:

www.jeremystrong.co.uk

PART 3 OTHER ACTIVITIES

FIND OUT MORE: THE SINKING OF RMS TITANIC

The Titanic sank on the early morning of 15th April 1912. The 100th anniversary of the sinking in 2012 has generated a lot of interest in the story of the wreck and there are many free classroom resources available on the internet. You might like to try the following:

RMS Titanic: the ship

This BBC resource uses a ticket to the Titanic’s launch as a focus for history investigation:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/lesson_plans/british_history/bhni_lp_titanic.pdf

Click on ‘1912: Birth of the Titanic’ on this site for resources including a great photo-tour:

http://www.history.com/interactives/titanic-interactive
**RMS Titanic: the sinking**

Click on ‘1912: The Disaster’ on this site for resources including an animation of the impact:

http://www.history.com/interactives/titanic-interactive

This BBC site features audio accounts by survivors of the disaster:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/titanic/

**RMS Titanic: the passengers**

On this Discovery site pupils can follow the Titanic journey of one of five characters over the days before the ship sailed, during the voyage and on the night of the sinking:

http://www.discovery.com/guides/history/titanic/Titanic/titanic.html

**RMS Titanic: the wreck**

This BBC site follows the journey of a television crew from Belfast to the Titanic wreck and on to Halifax in Canada, where some of the victims of the wreck are buried. There are also quizzes on the video material and a ‘Ship’s Log’ function that allows students to bookmark clips for projects:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/titanic/

**RMS Titanic: Cross-curricular/complete schemes of work/other resources**

This National Geographic lesson plan explores real-life applications of geographical concepts:

http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/18/g68/ballardsleuthing.html

There is a very complete example of a school using the Titanic as a theme at:

http://connections.smsd.org/titanic/

There are editable and printable labels, passenger lists and more at:

http://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/topics/history/the-titanic/2