

NEVER SAY DIE BY DAVID TINKLER

SYNOPSIS

Twelve-year-old farm boy Benedict Dingle Flint is more of a dreamer than a fighter. But when he's blown up, that all changes! He becomes Firebrand Flint, an accidental real life hero who, together with his best friend Alfie, joins the British Resistance and takes on the Nazis. The Bandits' motto? Never say die, the war's not over yet.

In order to loosen the Nazi stranglehold on England, Flint and Alfie are set a series of tasks to perform; first to ensure the safe landing of resistance fighters on English shores, and later the kidnapping of the 'Pretender-King'. However, this is far from easy with the cunning Doctor Six watching their every move extremely closely!

WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS ...


When I was a boy I always wanted to be on the side of the rebels – Bonnie Prince Charlie, Robin Hood – hiding up trees and fighting back! But what if, suddenly, Britain was invaded and it was all horribly real? Would you be a rebel then? Training to be a spy hero, with guns, codes and disguises, might sound cool – but what if you lost?

Although our nation never had to make that choice, we came very close to losing the Second World War – and this is the story of what could have happened then. It's exciting, stirring and dangerous stuff. In Tinkler's alternative history you'll discover a very young Princess Elizabeth (and her corgis) in exile, a nation overrun by a Nazi invasion, and a bunch of the most unlikely heroes ever!

Come on – let's all join the Resistance and find out what we're made of!

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AUTHOR BACKGROUND

David's first job after reading English at Bristol University was as an editor on the old Eagle comic. He eventually went freelance, writing everything from obituaries to an annual history of the world for an encyclopaedic year book. David lives with his wife in an attic overlooking Lyme Bay.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

“The opening sentence came out of nowhere. It came as a shock and all by itself: They'd shot his dad then they'd come for his mother. Why did they shoot his father? What happened to his mum? Above all - who was he? There was only one way to find out - I had to write the book!” **DAVID TINKLER**

THEMES

- Heroism
- Life/Death
- Relationships
- Duty
- Family

WRITING STYLE

Never Say Die is an alternative history set in England at the time of the Second World War. It depicts the struggle of the English resistance against occupying Nazi forces. It centres on the character of Flint, a boy who becomes embroiled in the resistance movement after losing his parents. While much of the focus is on the efforts of the resistance, the narrative continually shifts to reflect the responses of the Nazis. There is a strong emphasis on ideas of duty and identity (and there is a significant amount of the novel given over to Flint's 'imagined' parallel life). There are some depictions of violence. 24 chapters, 210 pages, age 10+.



PUPIL ACTIVITIES

1. *What's in a name?*

On page three, Alfie remarks that, 'Flint is a pirate name'. He suggests that Flint himself should live up to this name, 'be more like a buccaneer and less like a startled canary.' Throughout *Never Say Die* we meet and hear about a range of characters, most of whom have very intriguing names. Whether or not these characters 'live up' to their given names is for readers to decide, but in each case it is likely we make assumptions about how these characters will look or behave through their names alone.

In view of this, it would be interesting for pupils to imagine what the characters in the novel might be like (how they look and act) before they have read the book. Pupils could compare their imaginings; perhaps drawing and labelling pictures of the characters. Then, once they have finished the novel, they can decide on how accurate their first impressions were. Some of the characters to consider in this activity include Benedict Dingle Flint, Old Kent, Aka, Vogler, Hans Holzbock, Alice Bolt, Tumbleweed, Doc Bolt, Lord Max Blade, Dr Franz Alfred Six, Cicely, G106, Sharp and Worzel. Before reading the novel – and following on from this work – pupils could act out a meeting between two or more characters, with other pupils having to deduce which characters are being portrayed. It is important here that pupils do not reveal the name of the character they are acting out. This work could stimulate a discussion about the assumptions we make about people based on their names, and how closely we share ideas about how they are likely to look and behave.

2. *Inner worlds*

One thing we learn about Flint early on, is that he is prone to daydream about a more heroic existence; one in which he becomes 'Firebrand Flint'. It is an imagined existence (an 'inner world'), but one that runs parallel with his normal life. Using this as a starting point, pupils could be tasked with creating a character who leads a reasonably ordinary life, but who has an exciting inner world into which he or she regularly retreats. A walk



through the woods might inspire a daydream in which he or she lives in the woods as a dangerous outlaw. One pupil's story could then act as a catalyst for another pupil's; one that is the inner world of the previous pupil's character. Ideally these would be linked together in some way – with an element of one story (the 'reality') overlapping another (the 'daydream'). This chain could continue all around the class, and it would be interesting to discover how diverse these stories might become.

3. The exercise book

At the end of chapter one, when the girl thrusts the exercise book into Flint's hands, she instructs him to burn it. This, the boys discover, is because it contains secret codes that must not be allowed to fall into Nazi hands. Alfie tells Flint it is best they do not look inside the book in case they are ever questioned about it, and subsequently we do not find out what it reveals. Pupils could be asked to recreate this exercise book, complete with coded information. Of course, pupils will need to devise secret codes before they think about what they can put into the book (plans for attack on Nazi strongholds, communications with the British Government-in-exile etc.). It would be fun for pupils to work in small groups, and once finished they could attempt to decipher each other's codes. Pupils could create a key to their code in which some parts have already been deciphered, as a way into this activity.

4. 'Alternative' histories

Never Say Die presents an alternative history; the Second World War as it might have been in a parallel universe. Clearly the world depicted in David Tinkler's novel agrees with recorded history until a certain point, but breaks away from being historically accurate in the run up to the events that take place in the novel. In this sense, Tinkler creates an 'alternative history', one in which the Nazis have successfully invaded Britain and taken over the running of the country. Using this as motivation, pupils could be asked to research a particular period of history (one they are interested in, or perhaps one they have previously studied) and create an alternative version of events through their own creative writing. Their work should follow historical fact up until a certain point, but they will need to



decide which event would have a different outcome to the one recorded in history; thus giving them their alternative version of the past. This work would not only help pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of a specific historical period and enhance their creative writing abilities, but it would also encourage them to consider how the smallest change in events could have impacted on world history as we know it!

5. *Saints and Sinners*

While *Never Say Die* is primarily told from the point of view of Flint (documenting the efforts of the Resistance to overthrow the occupying Nazi forces), it also reveals the stories of some of those on the opposite side of the conflict; namely, Vogler, Dr Six and Hans Holzbock. In view of this, it is interesting for readers to think about where their loyalties and sympathies lie as they progress through the novel. Are they always fully behind the Resistance fighters, or do they feel some sympathy towards the German soldiers who are at risk of being killed by their actions? Hans Holzbock, in particular, offers younger readers an opportunity of seeing war through the eyes of the enemy. This would encourage pupils to consider how they view the characters they come across in the novel, and they could be tasked with listing the characters in *Never Say Die* in specific ways. For example, they could make a list of 'goodies' and 'baddies', having to include each character in one of these categories; or they could make one long list in which each character is ranked in terms of the sympathy the pupil feels for him or her. In either case, this type of activity would act as a catalyst for a class discussion about whether or not it is always possible to view characters in hard and fast ways (such as 'goodies' and 'baddies', or 'saints' and 'sinners').

6. *What happens next?*

At the end of *Never Say Die*, David Tinkler includes a timeline, documenting some of the major events in the Second World War. This culminates in those events he made up as the alternative historical backdrop for the novel. Pupils could continue this alternative history, adding in events they think would have happened. In the same way that one event would create another, pupils should think about how this alternative history would



ultimately create an alternative present and future, and they should consider what their lives might be like in this newly imagined world. Pupils could also draw pictures to illustrate how this parallel world might contrast with the one we know today. It would certainly be interesting for pupils to compare their future 'projections' based on the novel's events, and the work would provide an opportunity for a more in-depth look at the nature of cause and effect.

WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On page 34, Alice tells Flint that his not knowing if his mother is alive or dead is a good thing because it gives him hope. Do you agree with this idea? Do you think it would be better to know for certain? Explain your answer.
2. Throughout the novel, Alfie uses his cunning to outwit the enemy and 'throw them off the scent'. How does he do this? How might his behaviour prevent the enemy from suspecting him of wrong doing?
3. Do you think it is possible to feel empathy for the 'Pretender King'? Why? Why not?
4. Do you think it is fair that Flint is expected to perform some very dangerous tasks for the Resistance? Do you think he is given a choice? Would you do the things Flint does?

