

Superbird

Aims

- To introduce the genre of science fiction and space travel.
- To introduce some of the issues and themes of the story and encourage discussion.

1 Ask students if they know anything about the following films, TV series and books: *Starwars*, *Dr. Who*, *Star Trek*, *2001*. Ask for some details on what they are about and what sorts of things happen. Ask them what genre they are (science fiction). Ask them for other examples.

Ask students if they like science fiction stories and why. If not, why not?

2 Ask students to work in pairs and list the key elements of science fiction stories. Call back ideas from the whole class and write them on the board.

Possible answers: space and time travel, aliens, conflicts and danger, strange machines and new technology, surprise and mystery.

3 Tell students that the space person Mary Mount is the only survivor of Superbird's trip to Earth. Ask them to read Extracts 1 in which she describes some ordinary things she sees when she lands on Earth. Ask students to work in pairs try to decide what she is describing. Call back ideas from the whole class.

Answers: sheep; dog; woman; hamburger with ketchup; soldiers.

Ask students to imagine they have landed on Earth for the first time and to describe the following everyday objects in the space woman's way: a cup of tea, a cat, a book, a bird.

Ask students to think about what the author is doing by making us look at everyday things through the eyes of an alien. Ask them what effect this has on them.

Possible answers: It makes us reflect on the way that we take everything around us for granted, and think that everything we do is 'normal'; it helps us to look at ourselves, our behaviour and our world in a new and different way.

4 Tell students that Mary helps the Earth people to rebuild Superbird and they fly to her home. Ask them what they imagine happened to her on her return.

6 Ask students to read Extracts 2 which describe Mary's return to her own planet. Ask them to work with a partner and decide why they treated her as they did when she got back.

7 Ask students to think about meeting someone from another planet. Ask them what they imagine an alien might look like. Ask them to read the extracts in Description. Based on Mary Mount's comments in the interview, what do you think she looks like? Why does she call the 'yellow-haired' person 'it'?

Answers: The aliens are small, have small noses, no facial hair, more than five fingers on each hand, no blood. She uses the pronoun 'it' because she doesn't know how to tell the difference between a man and a woman.

8 In Activity 2, students may have mentioned conflict as being one of the main elements in science fiction stories. Ask them to explain why they think these conflicts begin.

Possible answers: Fear and suspicion arise because aliens and human beings look and behave differently. Because of this, it is easy to misunderstand situations and to distrust one another. Out of fear both sides assume that the other wants to harm them.

Ask students to read the extracts in Conflicts and tell you what they learn about them in *Superbird*.

Answers: There is aggression on both sides – human and alien; they basically want to be friends.

Tell students that interactions between humans and aliens are not always negative in the story. Ask them to read Extracts 3 and see what happened when Mary Mount met the human June. Ask them to describe this encounter and say how it is different from those presented in the Conflicts extracts.

Possible answers: They are both frightened at first, but then they are fascinated by one another; they become friendly and make physical contact with one another. The students might note that they are both female and thus perhaps less aggressive.

9 Ask students to imagine meeting an alien. Ask them how they think they would feel, what they would do, what they would want to know. Ask them to discuss their ideas in groups of four, then call back ideas from the whole class. In their groups, ask them to write a conversation between them and an alien in which they ask each other questions about their world and their lives. These can then be performed for other groups.

Optional Activity

Ask students what they think about space travel and what they know about the new phenomenon of space tourism. Ask them if they'd like to go into space. Why/why not? Working in pairs, ask them to discuss their ideas, then call them back from the whole class.

NB: Space tourists are currently very rich people who pay around £20 million to go up to the MIR space station, after lengthy training.

Superbird

Extracts 1

- a When I got near the house I saw lots of small people. They were all white, except one which was black; and they had four legs. They were eating something green in the sand. When they saw me they made strange noises and ran away towards the house.
- b But then another person, a person with four legs ran towards me. This one was brown and small; and it had long hair. It shouted very loudly in a strange voice. It wasn't friendly . . . The four-legged person came back. The other one spoke to it quietly and it sat down near my feet and was very friendly.
- c . . . I looked through an open window and I could see one of the big people. It was one of the people with yellow hair . . . This one had no clothes on at all and it was sitting in water. Its body was wet and very white.
- d . . . the yellow-haired one gave me something to eat. It was brown and flat and it was inside something which was white. The yellow-haired one put something red from a bottle on top of the brown thing . . . it also gave me a drink, a sort of cold, brown drink.
- e In this room there were four very big people with brown hair and brown clothes sitting on chairs. They all had guns.

Extracts 2

- a The soldiers took me to a hospital and they asked me a lot of questions. Every day for six months they asked me questions. They wanted to know all about the Earth people.
- b They wanted to know what I told the Earth people. I told them about the drawings of Superbird I did for the Earth people and how I helped them build Superbird again. They became angry.
- c I have been growing old in a small room with a soldier outside the door.

Description

- a I could see one of the big people. It was one of the people with yellow hair.
- b They were very tall . . . and they had something in the middle of their faces. Like our noses but much bigger . . . Some had hair on their faces too.
- c They shot [my friend] four or five times. He fell down and they shot him again. They put their lights on his body and one of them said, 'No blood'.
- d . . . the yellow-haired person was standing by my bed. It was smiling . . . and held my hand. I saw then that it had only five fingers on each hand.

Conflicts

- 1. Then we saw lights on the road coming towards us fast . . . they stopped near the hill. Then there were lots of people and lots of noise, people shouting at each other. They put a light on Superbird. I could see Alan inside Superbird . . . Some of them went inside Superbird. I could hear guns. They shot Alan.
- 2. I said to the people on Earth: 'This is Mary Mount. I'm your friend. There are seven of us. We want to land. We want to be your friends. Can we land?'
- 3. Suddenly there was a very loud noise, the noise of guns. It was Captain Lake. He was shooting at the Earth. Then the sky was full of lights. It was the guns of the humans. They were shooting back at us.
- 4. 'Good,' said the soldier. 'My name is Major Jones. We want you to help us.'
'To help you?' I asked. 'How?'
'It's very important. There are four Superbirds going round and round the Earth. We want you to talk to them. We want you to tell their captains to land the Superbirds on Earth. We don't want to fight. We want to be friends.'

Extracts 3

The person in the water looked up and saw me through the window. It screamed very loudly and I screamed very loudly too . . . Then we were silent. We didn't scream anymore . . . I smiled at the yellow-haired person and it smiled at me . . . then it got out of the water, put on a white coat and it came outside the house to meet me. We looked at each other for a long time and then it touched my hand . . . We held hands and then it took me inside the house.