Summary: Dylan, his mum, and his baby sister Mona survived The End, back in 2018 when Dylan was 6. The End came as the electricity went off and life as they knew it disappeared. They have learnt to live off the land and survive by using what they can find around their hill top home above the village of Nebo in north-west Wales.

Writing separate chapters of their ‘Blue Book of Nebo’ Dylan, now 14, and his mum Rowenna reveal their secrets, worries, and joys with us. How have they managed to survive, and what might the future hold for them? Is anyone else alive, or are they totally alone? Are there any positives to losing life as we know it?

Theme: survival, adaptation and resilience.

Additional themes: family relationships, manmade disasters, the power of nature.

Recommended age range: KS3 and 4 – there are brief sexual references, plus one use of the F word.

Orientation

Context setting, websites, newspapers, non-fiction – (built into the activities in the Storykit)

The short films and articles below are about the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster (caused by a tsunami in 2011). We recommend reading the novel first, so that the situation can be revealed through the eyes of Dylan and Rowenna, rather than pre-empting it for students. The resources below might give some interesting context and help to answer questions once the reading of the novel is complete.

- Article on the disaster and the clear up: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-56252695
- Short film about how things are recovering, 8 years on: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-asia-48433222
A short film about how technology is being used to clear up the aftermath:
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/technology-41584738

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Empathy skills practised</th>
<th>Learning approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tasting Memories</td>
<td>Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings</td>
<td>Group discussion, creative writing, sense memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others’ feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activities**

**Empathy skills practised**

**Learning approaches**

**Tasting Memories**
Read from page 10 to page 13, from “I don’t remember Mam’s birthdays before” through to the end of the chapter.
Discuss what the group remember from their younger years – what memories can they recall from birthdays as young children?
As a group, make a note of how people talk of their memories – do they mention smells and tastes to help them recall past times?

**Task 1**

How does it feel to listen to someone else’s memory?
In pairs, sit together, and pick one person to describe and one to listen. The describer will share a memory of something from the past that they remember fondly – they should try to describe it using all of their senses. What can they see, smell, taste, touch and hear in their memory? The person listening should close their eyes and try to absorb as many of the details as they can, try to imagine the tastes, smells, sounds as they are described. Ask students to consider how they feel either as the describer or as the listener. Swap round so everyone has been a listener and a describer.

When describing or listening to memories do you feel a mixture of emotions? What mixture of emotions do you think Rowenna feels as she looks back? Discuss this in the group, and find as many words as you can to describe the different feelings she might have at the end of this chapter. Write all these emotions down and consider why Rowenna is quiet at the end of the chapter, leading to a discussion about how complex our emotions can be and feelings of overwhelm.

**Task 2**

In small groups, give each group a Bounty Bar (or you could choose another vintage chocolate bar if you prefer!)
Ask the group to open the wrapper, paying close attention to the feel and smell of the treat. Now they should chop the bar into pieces so everyone can have a taste. Taste it slowly, reading out loud the end of the chapter as you do so. Really savour the taste and textures. What would you miss if you couldn’t just choose what you wanted ‘because it was there’? Have a discussion with the group about the small things that we don’t appreciate. Are there particular treats that they would really savour if they knew they wouldn’t be able to easily get them?

Try turning your thoughts from these two tasks into a piece of writing about food memories. Write about a particular food memory that is precious to you – describe it using all the senses, so your reader feels like they experience it too. Why is this particular memory so important to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Plant Parents</strong></th>
<th>Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings</th>
<th>Group discussion, Creative writing, gardening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Read page 50 to 55, as Dylan describes planting carrots and his feelings towards the plants as they grow.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pick out particular phrases for discussion:</strong> “The plants insisted upon living” – discuss how plants and humans might be different? Think about human emotions and how they can affect our ability to act, change, grow, or be happy. “I felt like a father to them” – discuss why Dylan might be feeling this? Can you think of anything you are so proud of that you have made or created? Think back to your own feelings of pride and satisfaction and compare that to how Dylan feels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose some seeds to plant as a class. Tomatoes, carrots, radishes, or lettuces would work well. Prepare pots, plants the seeds and then wait. Take it in turns as a class to water and tend to the plants. You might need to re-pot the seedlings, or find other ways of taking care of the plants so that you eventually get to taste what you’ve grown. Consider how Dylan felt as he harvests and eats what he has grown. Write your own poem about being a ‘parent’ to something you have created, whether that’s the plants you grew, a piece of art you made, a story you wrote, or a gift you made for someone.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Use these words from the chapter in your poem, (a section of it could be the title of the poem, for instance) or use them as a springboard:**

“A tiny, tiny, curl of life daring to exist, a flash of green light, a speck in the square of dead soil. The start of something”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Build a longer a table</strong></th>
<th>More developed social values which turn feelings of empathy into moral actions in the home, school, and community</th>
<th>Group discussion Social action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read together page 65, from ‘were people like this with one another before The End came?’ through to the end of the chapter.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In small groups ask students to discuss the differences between people’s behaviour before and after The End. Can they find any connections with how people around them have behaved during the Covid pandemic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask students to particularly focus on the conversation Dylan and his mum have about what he would do if more people ‘turned up tomorrow’. Do you think Dylan and his mum share the same view? What would you do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce this quote to students: <strong>When you have more than you need, build a bigger table not a higher fence.</strong> Discuss what it means, and watch the film from Amnesty International on the link below. <a href="https://longertable.amnestyusa.org/">https://longertable.amnestyusa.org/</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the class think of a way that they can build a longer table, and share what they have with others? You could connect with charities in your community that work with refugees or disadvantaged families, and organise a meal to share at school, or you could simply collect for the local foodbank. Involve students in all the steps of the planning so that they can put their own ideas into action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>How's The Weather With You?</strong></th>
<th>Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings</th>
<th>Group discussion Data skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read page 31 together, and discuss the idea of finding human emotions in the world around us. As a whole group, look outside and decide what emotions are visible today – it may be the weather, or the changes you can see in nature, or in the urban landscape you can see around you. Discuss this as a group, and then find a way to describe the emotions you can see. Write this down each day on a chart.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now ‘take the temperature’ of the people in the class – how are people feeling today? Ask them to describe their mood in terms of weather or nature, eg ‘I’m feeling warm and sunny, like daisies in bright green grass’, or ‘I’m feeling rumbling thunder, and heavy storm clouds’. Whoever would like to share theirs, can do, but everyone should write down their personal weather on their own chart which can remain private.

After a week, or even a month, look back to see how things have fluctuated. Do you think the emotions of the world are affected by our human emotions, or does the world affect us? See if you can trace any connections between the two.

### Imagining Isolation

**Task 1**
Read page 91 together. Take a look at the photos of London during the first 2020 lockdown on this link: [https://www.itsnicethat.com/features/chris-dorley-brown-london-during-lockdown-photography-170620](https://www.itsnicethat.com/features/chris-dorley-brown-london-during-lockdown-photography-170620)

Try also to find some photos of your local area taken during the first lockdown when the streets were empty.

Ask the class to think of as many different words as they can to describe how the pictures make them feel, or what thoughts the pictures evoke for them. There really is no wrong answer; encourage as wide a range of answers as possible, which may well contradict each other (contradiction is good!) Write down all the words as they are spoken.

Discuss the idea that isolation away from our every day human lives could bring up lots of confusing feelings – just like Rowenna and Dylan have. The next practical task explores this sense of confusion further.

**Task 2**
Split the group into pairs and ask each pair to pick a pair of words from the selection you all wrote in Task 1. They should choose a pair of words that are opposites or contradictory in whatever way appeals to them (they do not need to be a ‘regular’ pair of opposites such as warm/cold, it could be a pairing such as concrete/sparkling, creepy/calming.

Each pair should find a space together. They will just need themselves and a chair to play this game. Firstly,

| Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings | Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others’ feelings | Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation | Group discussion | Photo stimulus | Drama activity | Creative writing |
they should create a still image, made only from their two bodies and the chair, that evokes the first word they chose. It can be as abstract as they wish. The only rule is that the two bodies must be connected in some way to the chair. The chair can be used, tipped, sat on, hugged, stood on, or used however they wish – but both bodies must be connected to it (even by just a little finger!) and the image must be still.

Now each pair should make an image for their second word. Again, they must use their two bodies and the chair – but this time, the only rule is that they are not touching the chair. The bodies and chair should still feel like they are all part of the same image, but without physical connection between humans and chair. The two humans can be touching, and there can be plenty of space between humans and chair, but it should feel like a single image made by the three things.

Once they have two strong images, ask the pairs to go to their image 1. Now ‘dial up’ this image: counting slowly from 1 to 10, ask them to deepen, strengthen, exaggerate the power of image a little with each number. Once at 10 hold it, then ask them to move from this position, to their image 2 position across a count of 1 to 5. At 5 they should have taken up image 2. Now dial up this image from 1 to 10, until it’s at its full power.

Now ask them to move from their dialed up image 1 to their dialed up image 2, across a slow count of 5. They should make the transition between images as smooth as possible. Repeat this a few times. Ask the pairs to consider if there is a difference in how they feel in image 1 or image 2: what does the shape of, or tension in, their body, the connection or lack of it, make them feel?

Now ask the pairs to watch each other make these transitions. The watchers should try to say what words they think were the starting point (it doesn’t matter if they get it wrong!), the aim of the task is to evoke contradictory feelings in the watchers.

As you watch each pair, ask what story emerges from each set of images – if you let the discussion flow this way, stories will easily appear. Discuss the feelings and ideas evoked by these stories.
This could be the basis for a creative writing exercise of you wish, or simply a way of exploring physically the complex mixture of emotions Rowenna and Dylan feel about their situation.

**Differing Perspectives**
As the novel is written from two differing perspectives, this task asks you to practise ‘walking around’ the story to look at it from multiple points of view. Firstly, discuss ways in which different truths are revealed by the different characters. You might want to start by considering the role of Pawyll in the story. What does Dylan’s viewpoint of Pawyll reveal, both about Dylan and the situation they are in? Now what gets revealed by Rowenna when she gives her perspective on the hare?

**Task 1**
Imagine both Dylan and Rowenna are being interviewed about their experiences for a TV documentary. What would they say to the interviewer about the hare? Split the group into 3 – Dylans, Rowennas and Interviewers.

The Interviewers should work together to think of what questions they might ask to get Dylan and Rowenna talking. Would they need to ask different questions of Dylan and Rowenna to prompt answers about this particular part of the story?

The Dylans and Rowennas can discuss in their groups their feelings at different stages of their encounter with the hare. Do their feelings change over time?

Now, ask for a volunteer from the Interviewers and the Dylans. Everyone should watch as a Dylan is interviewed. Switch round to another Dylan or Interviewer when you wish. Do the same with the Rowennas. Compare how the stories changed, what feelings did Dylan or Rowena evoke in you as you watched?

**Task 2**
Use what you have learnt about different perspectives to consider other characters in the novel. Try creating the viewpoint of Gwion, Mr and Mrs Thorpe, or Gaynor. What would the story look like from their perspective? Either write a chapter of the book from

| Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings | Group Discussion |
| Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others’ feelings | Drama activity |
| Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation | Creative writing |

**Group Discussion**

**Drama activity**

**Creative writing**

**Empathy Explorers**
their viewpoint, or film yourself talking to camera about their response to the situation. Would they find it hard to talk about, as Rowenna did at the start? What positives would they notice, what skills might they develop, what did they struggle with, what might they have learned about themselves?

Task 3
Imagine that the films and stories are discovered 10 years later. How would a journalist write about The End and the responses of those affected?

Positive Mindfulness
Read page 144 together
Discuss the things that Rowenna puts on her list of ‘the best things’. Notice how there is sadness mixed in with the things you might expect to be on a list like this. Why do you think that might be?

Ask everyone in the class to write their own ‘best things’ list. This is a useful reflective activity to do at the end of each half term. Encourage as wide a mix of things - or moments - that made them feel human, to go on the list. It could be moments that inspired them, their recovery from something that hurt them, something that brought joy, something they’re proud of - whether it’s tiny, or massive - of – there are no rules!

There is no need to share the lists unless students would like to, but everyone from the class could share one thing from their list to create a class ‘best of’ list. Keep the class lists across the school year and then combine them once the summer term list is complete. It would make a lovely end of year gift for the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books which touch on similar issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across the Risen Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Bee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A note about Storykits**

Empathy Storykits focus on specific stories. They allow children to build practice empathy through character-focused activities. The text is used as a springboard for discussion, activities, and social action.

**Teaching children about empathy**

In teaching children about empathy, it is important to understand the three different elements to develop the right teaching strategies.
• **Affective** - the feeling part of empathy. *This is where we literally resonate with someone else’s feelings, for example feeling upset when someone else is upset. We do this automatically, and very early in life - babies often cry when another baby cries.* Since this happens naturally and automatically, we need to help children recognise that it is happening and help them identify and name the empathetic emotions they are feeling.

• **Cognitive** - the thinking part of empathy. *This is where we use our reason and imagination to work out how someone else feels as well as understand why they might feel that way (done through perspective taking).* We need to give children space and support to use their reason and imagination to try to work out how someone might be thinking and feeling, and why. Giving them the opportunity and encouragement to reflect through the safe distance of literature is a great way to do this.

• **Empathic concern** - the acting part of empathy. *Often described as empathic concern, this is where we are motivated to act as a result of our understanding. Research shows this plays a key role in our sense of social justice and is a powerful motivator for wanting to help someone else, a force for social change.* We need to encourage children to put their feelings of empathy into action and grow as active citizens, who’ve really worked out what kind of help to give, based on a deep empathic understanding.

In order to help children explore all three elements of empathy, Empathy storykits include activities which encourage children to use the following empathy skills:

• Stronger ability to imagine, understand and reflect on other people’s perspectives and feelings
• Wider vocabulary to recognise and share own and others’ feelings
• Stronger empathic communication skills: deep listening and conversation
• More developed social values which turn feelings of empathy into moral actions in the home, school and community

©EmpathyLab 2020