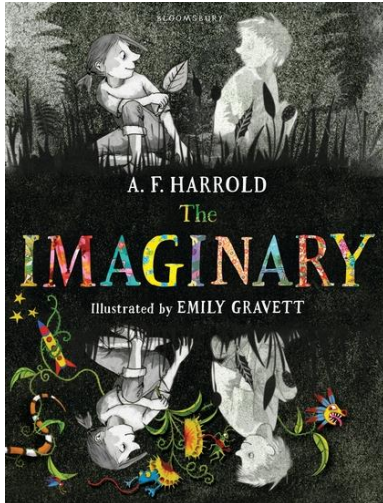


## Teacher's Guide *The Imaginary* by A.F. Harrold

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### SYNOPSIS (PLOT)

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'Some children need their parents to pay them a lot of attention ... Amanda had never been one of those children. She'd always been quite content off by herself.' (p 24)

Rudger's friend Amanda Shuffleup seems to have died. Which is a problem, since Rudger himself is her imaginary friend and so is now in big trouble himself.

So begins a hair-raising adventure in which Rudger meets a talking cat named Zinzan, finds the Library full of forgotten Imaginaries, tries to attach himself to another person so that he can find Amanda, and eventually does find his way back to her, since she is not dead after all! His quest is

thwarted at every turn by the creepy Mr Bunting (who hunts Imaginaries in order to eat them) and his spooky little Imaginary girl, and when they finally meet up in the hospital room, the conflict with Mr Bunting is truly terrifying.

Atmospherically illustrated by multi-award-winning Emily Gravett this whimsical, surprising book is lavishly illustrated in colour and black and white illustrations.

A.F. Harrold is an acclaimed British poet and here in his latest children's book, he poses philosophical questions about the importance of memory, the dynamic balance between power and powerlessness, the importance of friendship, and of confronting loss as we grow older. Most of all, though, this book is a celebration of the Imaginary Friend, and of the value of the imagination.

### THEMES

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This fiction text which might be used in relation to each of the KLA's in the curriculum. ([www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)) Themes include:

#### **Imagination**

*Key Quote:* 'Imagination is slippery, Rudger knew that well enough. Memory doesn't hold it tight, it has trouble enough holding on to the real, remembering the real people who are lost.' (p 198)

*Discussion Point:* Much of what we do as children is a form of imagining. We play games (like Amanda and Rudger do) in which we are pirates, cowboys, aliens, spacemen, circus performers. Invite students to discuss their favourite make-believe game.

# B L O O M S B U R Y

*Discussion Point:* Playing often involves creating or finding a secret place. It might be a small clearing in a forest, or a hole beneath a hedge; it might be the attic in your house or a cupboard big enough to hide in. Rudger and Amanda have a secret place they call a 'den' under the thorn bush in her garden (p 15). Invite students to share stories about their special places.

*Discussion Point:* What other forms of imagining do your students do? For example, some people have 'rituals'. They try to avoid walking on cracks in the footpath or pavement as they walk to school. Invite discussion of this topic as well.

*Discussion Point:* How are memory and the imagination related?

## **Imaginary Friends**

*Key Quote:* 'In fact he thought, looking at his hands again, he didn't have the imagination to imagine himself. (p 75)

*Discussion Point:* Have you ever had an Imaginary Friend? Encourage students to share their experiences.

*Discussion Point:* Read the descriptions of the Library of Imaginary Friends (pp 89–92) Discuss which one is most appealing to you. [See also **Visual Arts** and **Teacher Activities** below.]

*Note:* Teachers may also wish to refer to educational or parenting sites for information about children having Imaginary Friends.

'Imaginary friends' [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/imaginary\\_friends.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/imaginary_friends.html)

## **Memory**

*Key Quote:* 'Photographs are all we have of some people. Those and our memories.' (p 198)

*Discussion Point:* ' 'No,' said Zinzan casually. I've seen what happens when someone dies, seen what happens to someone like you. They die; you vanish, like shutting a door. Gone in a second. No, you... you're just *Fading*, boy, and Fading means you're being forgotten, that's all.' ' (p 79) Although this quote is about an Imaginary Friend, it could apply to real friends too. How do we maintain our memories of those we've lost? Discuss the use of photos, diaries and other forms of records of the past.

*Activity:* Discuss memory and what you remember from when you were very young?

## **Power and Powerlessness**

*Key Quote:* 'You know *nothing*. Without me thinking of stuff all the time you'd probably just ... I don't know, fade away or something.' (p 62)

*Discussion Point:* This book is partly about the feeling of having a lack of power or control in your life. Rudger has to face the fact that without Amanda's imagination, he doesn't exist. 'You're always working with someone else's imagination. Remember that.' (p 98) Compare this to how you feel as a child when adults tell you how things should be.

*Activity:* Describe the times or situations in your life when you have felt in control and when you haven't.

## **Friendship**

# B L O O M S B U R Y

*Key Quote:* 'Now that he'd found Amanda, though, he had a feeling in the bottom of his stomach of *rightness*. As if he'd been made for her. As far as he could tell she was his first friend. She was also his only friend, and therefore his best friend.' (p 15)

*Discussion Point:* What qualities make a good friend?

*Discussion Point:* Julia Radiche is not a good friend. Why not?

## **Growing Up and Loss**

*Key Quote:* 'Adults aren't meant to see everything, not always, not forever.' (p 193)

*Discussion Point:* Amanda's mother had also had an Imaginary friend called Fridge, her mother Mrs Downbeat reminds her (pp 26–7). How much of what we did when we were younger do we forget, or choose to forget?

*Discussion Point:* Growing up inevitably involves losing people and things. How do we deal with loss or grief?

## **THE ARTS**

In this curriculum area several sub-topics might be explored:

- **English**

*Discussion Point:* This is a contemporary fairy tale or fable in which a protagonist character is lost and has to overcome hurdles and defeat enemies in order to find his way home again. Emily tells Rudger that Mr Bunting 'made a bargain with the devil' (pp 100–1) which is an age-old theme in literature. Emily talks of Simple Simon (p 100) being a scary figure like Mr Bunting. What other frightening characters of folk or fairy tale do you know about? (eg The Green Piper is a variation of The Pied Piper of Hamelin, who lured children away from their homes by piping a song.)

*Discussion Point:* *The Quest* or *Journey Motif* is also central to this novel and the plot might be discussed in relation to the conventions of this trope.

*Discussion Point:* This book has been compared to *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman and to Roald Dahl's *The Witches*. What do these texts have in common in terms of genre? What makes them different from each other?

[See also **Writing Style** below.]

- **Visual Arts**

*Activity:* Study the pictures used in this text. Then invite students to choose one of the pictures in this book and create their own version of it in any medium (eg watercolour, oil, gouache, charcoal, collage) or style (eg abstract, super-realism, expressionist, etc.) and using any palette of colours they consider appropriate to the subject.

*Discussion Point:* If you had an Imaginary Friend, how would he or she look? Would it be a person or an animal? Draw a picture and create a painting of your Imaginary Friend.

# B L O O M S B U R Y

*Activity:* The image (p 2) is a photographic collage framed by the outline of a hand. Paint a scene to accompany the story you write [See **Blackline Master 3** below] and then create your own image like this, by cutting the outline of a hand from the scene.

*Activity:* The black and white portraits of the scary little Imaginary girl who is with Mr Bunting are great examples of how using pencil or charcoal can create a stunning effect. (See pp 47 and 51, the latter with Rudger.) Watch the video of the Emily Gravett drawing the little girl on A.F. Harrold's website: <http://www.afharroldkids.com/> Then try to sketch a portrait of someone you know in a similar way.

*Activity:* Create a new **cover** for this book.

*Activity:* Create a **poster** advertising this book. [See also **Teacher Activities** below.]

- **Creative Arts**

*Activity:* Act out the scene where Amanda, Goldie and Rudger are playing hide-and-seek and the lights go out.

*Activity:* Choose some atmospheric music to accompany the scene.

## WRITING STYLES

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- **Narrative Perspective, Person and Point of View**

*Activity:* This story is written in third person largely from Rudger's perspective. This is a very effective device; he is the Imaginary friend and yet the story is told from his point of view which makes the narrative more intriguing. What might have been different in the story had it been told from Amanda's perspective?

- **Ideas**

*Activity:* Stories begin with strong ideas and concepts. Write a story inspired by this text. [See **Blackline Master 3 Story Starters** below for ideas.]

- **Structure**

*Discussion Point:* The story opens with an event described in a type of Prologue and then traces what leads up to, and beyond it. How effective was this structure?

- **Literary Devices**

*Activity:* The book is written in suggestive and often powerful language. eg Similes such as: 'The words were like a hole through his chest, like a well he was falling down.' (p 3) 'He was hollow now, echoing now, like an empty can.' (p 73) Locate other examples of such suggestive language.

# B L O O M S B U R Y

- **Setting**

*Activity:* Settings in the novel include Amanda's home, the swimming pool car park, the Library, Julia's house, and the hospital. Draw a map of the town, and where these places are in relation to each other. Give the town a name to match these characters!

- **Character**

*Discussion Point:* What kind of person is Mrs Shuffleup? How does she differ from Mrs Radiche? Rudger is the focus of this novel, but Amanda is his true centre. How does your relationship to someone else influence your character?

- **Humour**

*Discussion Point:* A.F. Harrold's voice in the novel is effortlessly humorous. Discuss types of humour and then identify passages which use different types of humour. eg **Sarcasm:** On Monday at school.' (p 12)

- **Poetry**

*Activity:* The novel opens with Christina Rossetti's poem 'Remember' which is a fourteen line poem with the rhyming scheme of an Italian Sonnet with an Iambic Pentameter in two quatrains and one sestet. The rhyming scheme is: ABBA ABBA CDDE CED See for further details:

[www.studymode.com/essays/Analysis-Of-The-Poem-Remember-By-1238089.html](http://www.studymode.com/essays/Analysis-Of-The-Poem-Remember-By-1238089.html) Discuss the meaning of this poem, then write a poem in this style.

*Activity:* Create an acrostic poem using the letters in 'Imaginary' to create a response to this text. See 'How to Write an Acrostic poem' for details: [www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-an-acrostic-poem/](http://www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-an-acrostic-poem/)

*Activity:* Listen to some of A.F. Harrold's poems for kids online [See link below.]

## AUHTOR BACKGROUND

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**A.F. Harrold** is an English poet (1975–present). He writes and performs for adults and children, in cabaret and in schools, in bars and in basements, in fields and indoors. He was Glastonbury Festival Website's Poet-In-Residence in 2008, and Poet-In-Residence at Cheltenham Literature Festival in 2010. He won the Cheltenham All Stars Slam Championship in 2007 and has had his work on BBC Radio 4, Radio 3 and BBC7. He is active in schools work, running workshops and slams and doing performances at ungodly hours of the morning, and has published several collections of poetry. He is the owner of many books, a handful of hats, a few good ideas and one beard. He writes fantasy, audio, fiction, and humour and is the author of *The Imaginary*, *Fizzlebert Stump and the Girl Who Lifted Quite Heavy Things*, *Fizzlebert Stump*, *Fizzlebert Stump and the Bearded Boy*, *Fizzlebert Stump: The Boy Who Cried Fish*

See more at: <http://www.bloomsbury.com/author/af-harrold#sthash.lGb4c5qh.dpuf>

On his website, A.F. Harrold has a video of how he came to write this book: <http://www.afharroldkids.com/> He also has some wonderful poems on this site which children will enjoy and there are videos there too. <http://www.afharroldkids.com/>

## ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

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**Emily Gravett** is twice winner of the prestigious Kate Greenaway Medal and the Nestlé Children's Book Prize Bronze Award for *Wolves* and *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears*. An author/illustrator of unique talent and tremendous skill, she has a host of critically acclaimed books to her name, including *Blue Chameleon*, *Wolf Won't Bite!* and *Again!* Emily lives in Brighton UK with her partner and their daughter.

There is a video of Emily drawing an illustration of the little girl who is Mr Bunting's Imaginary on A.F. Harrold's website: <http://www.afharroldkids.com/>

'Emily Gravett Drawing Workshop'

[/www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrO-6fRO8gM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrO-6fRO8gM)

A Video Interview with Emily Gravett

<http://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/gravett>

## TEACHER ACTIVITIES

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**1. Read other fiction books** about Imaginary Friends and compare to this one. For example: *Jessica* by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow, 1998); *The Adventures of Beekle the Unimaginary Friend* by Dan Santat (Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2014); *Pingo* by Brandon Mull III. by Brandon Dorman (Shadow Mountain, 2009).

**2. Activity:** Make a **Book Trailer** for this book. Find tips on how to do this here:

'Book Trailers for Readers'

<http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/How+to+make+a+book+trailer>

'Book Trailers' <http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>

**3. Re-interpret the double page spread** (pp 90-91) by adding your own Imaginaries.

**4. Create a three dimensional diorama of the Imaginaries at the Library.** Each student could make a model out of 'fimo' modeling clay and contribute it to the scene.

## BLACKLINE MASTERS

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### 1 COMPREHENSION QUIZ

Fill in the answers by reading this book.

#### Questions:

1. Where does Amanda find Rudger?
2. What was the name of Mrs Shuffelup's Imaginary Friend?
3. Who took Rudger to the Library of Imaginaries?
4. Who was Snowflake?
5. What was the name of the babysitter?
6. What 'game' did Julia ask Veronica (Rudger) to play with her?

# B L O O M S B U R Y

7. How does Rudger travel to the hospital on Mrs Radiche's car?
8. What does Mr Bunting do to Amanda to stop her protecting Rudger?
9. What happens to Mr Bunting's Imaginary girl?
10. What photographic 'memory' has Amanda made of Rudger?

## Answers:

1. In her bedroom cupboard.
2. A dog named Fridge.
3. A talking cat called Zinzan.
4. A pink dinosaur who is one of the Imaginaries in the Library.
5. Goldie.
6. Washing her dolls' clothes.
7. He climbs onto the bonnet and holds on to the windscreen wipers.
8. He summons up snakes to hold her tight to her bed.
9. He eats her.
10. A felt tip drawing on their fridge.



**BLACKLINE MASTER 2 IMAGINE THIS SCENE**

This is a picture of Amanda and Rudger. Enlarge it on a photocopier to A3.

Invite students to create a scene behind them which represents something in Amanda's wild imagination. Create a collage of the entire picture.





**BLACKLINE MASTER 3 STORY STARTERS**

**A.** Invite students to begin a **fictional short story** with this sentence:

And then a quiet, clear voice said, 'I can see you.' (p 4)

OR

'One day Rudger and Amanda were exploring a complex of caves, deep and dark, that stretched out for unknown miles underneath the stairs.' (p 19)

OR

'All he knew was the hunger.' (p 188)

**B.** The den that Amanda and Rudger hide in can become a range of places: including a spaceship, the gondola of a hot air balloon, or an igloo (pp 17–8). Start a story written in first person, featuring yourself and a friend in any of these places and see where the adventure leads you! [See also **Blackline Master 4** below.]

**C. Juxtaposing the ordinary and the extraordinary is a good strategy for story writing.**

Examples in this book include:

A pink dinosaur.

A talking cat.






An Imaginary Friend.

Come up with lists of things which don't quite go together like those above. Then create a story about that idea.

# B L O O M S B U R Y

## BLACKLINE MASTER 4 NAME THIS STORY SETTING

Each of these images relate either to the games that Amanda plays with Rudger, or to other places where adventures might happen. Name each of them.

		
1.	2.	3.
		
4.	5.	6.
		
7.	8.	9.
		
10.	11.	12.

Answers: 1.Rocket. 2. Hot Air Balloon. 3. Igloo. 4. Castle. 5. Zoo. 6. Haunted House. 7. Circus. 8. Island. 9. Forest. 10. Supermarket. 11. Beach. 12. Eiffel Tower.