



Chatterbooks *Dragonsitter* Activity Pack – with Andersen Press



Reading and activity ideas for your Chatterbooks group

About this pack

Here are the six stories in the funny and brilliant ***Dragonsitter*** series by Josh Lacey and Garry Parsons.

Imagine having a full-sized fire-breathing dragon come to stay in your house!

These books are perfect for children aged 5 years upwards, to read or have read to them. The stories are short and inviting, written as a series of emails – simply told yet with lots to read between the lines!

This pack gives information and tasters from all the books, suggestions for more reading (including further titles by Josh Lacey), plus discussion and activity ideas for your **Chatterbooks reading groups**. It's brought to you by The Reading Agency and their Children's Reading Partner, [Andersen Press](#).

Chatterbooks [www.chatterbooks.org.uk] is a reading group programme for children aged 4 to 14 years. It is coordinated by The Reading Agency and its patron is author Dame Jacqueline Wilson. Chatterbooks groups run in libraries and schools, supporting and inspiring children's literacy development by encouraging them to have a really good time reading and talking about books.

The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more through programmes for adults, young people and Children – including the Summer Reading Challenge, and Chatterbooks. See www.readingagency.org.uk

Children's Reading Partners is a national partnership of children's publishers and libraries working together to bring reading promotions and author events to as many children and young people as possible.

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The author: Josh Lacey

Josh Lacey is the author of several books for children including *The Dragonsitter*, *The Island of Thieves*, and *Bearkeeper*.

He worked as a journalist, a teacher and a screenwriter before writing his first book, *A Dog Called Grk*. There are now eight books in the *Grk* series, set in different countries around the world – from New York to Rio de Janeiro, India to Italy. *The Dragonsitter*, packed with wonderful illustrations by Garry Parsons, was shortlisted for the 2012 Roald Dahl Funny Prize.

The story continues in five more books – all featured in this Chatterbooks pack.

Josh has written one book for adults, *God is Brazilian*, a biography of the man who introduced football to Brazil. Have a look at Josh's [website](#) or meet him in our Summer Reading Challenge author of the month [interview video](#), where he answers questions and reads from the first *Dragonsitter* book.



The illustrator: Garry Parsons

Garry studied Fine Art at Canterbury and the Illustration Sequential Design M.A. at the University of Brighton. He lives in London. Visit Garry's [website](#).

What readers say

I am 7. This is a brilliant book and it's so good, that I read it in one night. It's made up of funny emails and the emails get you through the story. I'm buying the others straight away.

Full of fun, this is the perfect first chapter book for boys and girls alike ... any child is sure to be hooked **Books for Keeps magazine**

Introducing the *Dragonsitter* series!

These books are great to read aloud to your group or for children to read for themselves. Once they have read one they'll want to read them all – they are short, fun reads with lots of humour and likeable characters – especially the dragons!

Talking about the books: some book-talk questions

Get everyone to share their first responses. This could be with the whole group or class – or children could discuss in small groups, and then share feelings and questions with everyone.

Ask lots of open questions to get people talking and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the way the story is told with lots of illustrations linking in with the text.

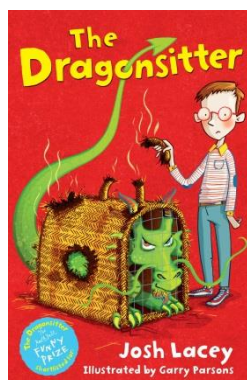
There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions – everyone will have their own feelings and opinions about the book, and the things they like, or don't like!

Here are some questions to get you going:

- What did you like about the book/s?
- Was there anything that you disliked?
- Was there anything that really got you smiling?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Were there any patterns – any connections – that you noticed, especially when you'd read more than one book?
- Who was your favourite character? It could be a person or a dragon!
- What did you think was the funniest thing in the book? Was there anything you found scary?
- How would you describe these books to a friend?
- What did you think about the way the book was written in emails?
- What did you think about the beginning and the ending of the book – did the beginning get you interested? How did you feel at the end?



The Dragonsitter books



***The Dragonsitter* 978-1849394192**

'Dear Uncle Morton. You'd better get on a plane right now and come back here. Your dragon has eaten Jemima.'

It had sounded so easy: Edward was going to look after Uncle Morton's unusual pet for a week while he went on holiday. But soon the fridge is empty, the curtains are blazing, and the postman is fleeing down the garden path.

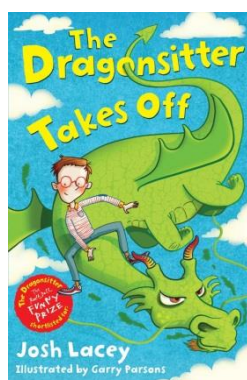
Also, you could have warned us about his poo. It smells awful! (p5)

There may not really be such a thing as dragon poo – but do you know about dinosaurs' poo? See what you can find out about fossilised dinosaur dung – it's called 'coprolite'.

...I would suggest Desolation. Or Firebreath. Or something like that. (p45)

If you had a dragon to look after, what do you think would be a good name for it?

Uncle Morton travels with Roquefort cheese and sometimes chocolate, in his backpack. Why do you think that might not be such a good idea?!



***The Dragonsitter Takes Off* 978-1849395717**

Dear Uncle Morton, Ziggy won't move from the linen cupboard. He still hasn't eaten a thing. Not even a Malteser. I'm really quite worried...

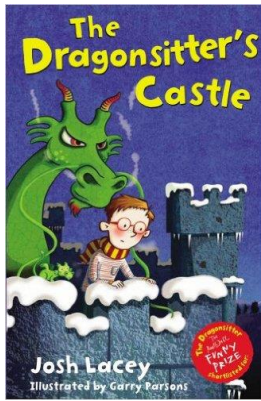
Eddie had thought that this time dragonsitting would be easy – until Ziggy disappears, only to be found in the linen cupboard, refusing to budge. But moving Ziggy is the last thing on Eddie's mind when he learns that his uncle's dragon has been keeping a *big* secret...

Hi Eddie, I was overjoyed to get your email and the beautiful pictures. What wonderful news! I'm delighted and not a little envious. One of my greatest ambitions has always been to witness the birth of a dragon.

Has any of your group seen chickens just hatched, or new-born puppies or kittens? Talk about this experience. Did the mother look for somewhere quiet and private as Ziggy does in the linen cupboard?

It was like being in the Red Arrows (p52) What are the Red Arrows?

Eddie has a wonderful time flying above the clouds on Ziggy. Talk about what it's like in an aeroplane – what can you see? And talk about other stories where the characters get to fly – such as the boy in *The Snowman*, or Harry Potter in a flying Ford Anglia car! (See also p13 in this pack)



***The Dragonsitter's Castle* 978-1849397698**

Dear Uncle Morton

Your dragons are still here. They have eaten the entire contents of the fridge and most of the tins in the cupboard too.

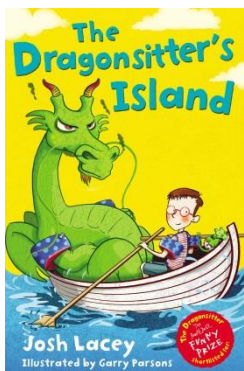
Arthur also swallowed three spoons and the remote control. Mum says they will probably come out the other end, but I'm not really looking forward to that.

When Eddie has to take Uncle Morton's dragons away with him in the Christmas holidays, it's not long before they're causing all sorts of mischief again! Dragonsitting isn't getting any easier for Eddie. A castle, a sneezing dragon and a big box of fireworks: looks like the new year is going to start with a bang!

Dear Eddie, I hope you're safely home by now. I'm terribly sorry that I never reached Wales and didn't get a chance to see your father's castle. However it all turns out to have been for the best.

We've been helping Bronwen make the canapes. There's smoked salmon and mini pizzas and cheese straws and chicken wings, plus enough crisps to fill twelve huge bowls. (p20)

Collect on a flip chart all your group's favourite party foods!



***The Dragonsitter's Island* 978-1783440450**

Dear Uncle Morton, I'm very sorry but we are leaving your island.

This morning Mum found another poo in the kitchen. She said that was the final straw.

Eddie is dragonsitting again, but this time he's looking after Uncle Morton's Scottish island too. And there are some strange goings on: the local sheep are disappearing, and Eddie swears he sees a mysterious creature in the loch. Could there be more than just dragons living there? It seems Eddie is in for a beastly surprise!

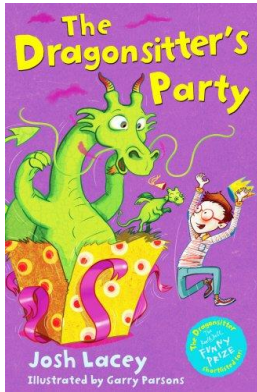
Dear Eddie,

Please don't be offended if I say this, but I really don't think you have seen the Loch Ness Monster (p38)

Talk about the Loch Ness monster – do you think there is any evidence that it exists?

Find out more about 'Nessie' – and about the other, real creatures in the story, like whales, dolphins, seals and sea otters.





The Dragonsitter's Party

978-1783442294

Dear Uncle Morton,

The party starts at 3 o'clock. Please try to get here on time or you'll miss Mister Mysterio sawing someone in half.

It's Eddie's birthday and he's looking forward to a birthday party filled with fun, games and ... dragons? Ziggy and Arthur are the unexpected guests, but their idea of a good time involves eating everything in sight and ruining the party magician's tricks. Is Eddie in for the wrong kind of birthday surprise?

Dear Eddie, I am so sorry to have missed your party. We had a situation with one of the sheep last night, so it was impossible for me to catch my train to the airport this morning.

Please call us ASAP and tell us your ETA (p11)

Eddie explains that ETA means Estimated Time of Arrival – do you know what ASAP means? Talk about acronyms – does your group know what these mean? PIN; FAQ; SCUBA; BLOG; ROM; LOL; POW; BFF; DOB. Can they think of some more?

Mister Mysterio does card tricks at Eddie's party. Can anyone in your group show off some magic tricks?

I shall be travelling to Tibet to search for the yeti (p47).

What is the yeti? Have a look at our Chatterbooks '[Lost Worlds' pack](#) and the section on Cryptids.



The Dragonsitter to the Rescue

978-1783443291

Dear Uncle Morton, I have to tell you some bad news. We have lost Arthur. He's somewhere in London, but I don't know where.

Eddie takes the dragons with him on his half-term trip to London, but disaster strikes and both dragons go missing. From the Natural History Museum to the London Eye, through tube stations, hotels and London Zoo, Eddie chases his dragons, hoping to avert disaster. But there's no smoke without a fire...

Dear Uncle Morton, Westminster Animal Rescue don't have Arthur any more. They've taken him to the Zoo. We're on our way.

Have a look at the map of London at the beginning of the book – pick out and talk about the sights. Which ones have people visited? What is their favourite? Have they seen the T-Rex in the Natural History Museum?



Dragonsitter series:

More activity and discussion ideas for your Chatterbooks group!

Get together a collection of stories and non-fiction about dragons – and other mythical creatures. And how about dinosaurs as well?

There are some suggestions in the **More books** section at the end of this pack. Have sheets of flip chart paper for collecting everyone's thoughts and ideas.

Warm up

Dragonsitter Wordsearch

All the characters below (and the chocolate!) appear in the *Dragonsitter* books.

Look for them in the squares – across, down, up, and from right to left.

The wordsearch solution is at the end of this pack.

EDDIE EMILY UNCLE MORTON ZIGGY ARTHUR DAD
MUM GORDON ARTHUR'S FATHER MR MCDOUGALL DRAGON
DINOSAUR LOCH NESS MONSTER WHALE DOLPHIN CHOCOLATE

Q	W	D	I	N	O	S	A	U	R	X	Z	B	M	X	A
Y	P	P	X	O	N	M	B	N	P	A	S	F	R	G	R
P	V	Y	L	D	X	T	E	C	M	J	K	P	M	P	T
N	O	G	A	R	D	P	Y	L	I	M	E	V	C	K	H
S	F	G	D	O	V	A	M	E	Q	X	D	A	D	G	U
P	X	I	E	G	J	X	W	M	X	P	D	K	O	J	R
V	M	Z	T	Q	P	W	X	O	M	F	I	F	U	F	S
Q	W	J	A	R	T	H	U	R	X	K	E	W	G	X	F
N	X	Q	L	Y	X	A	E	T	J	A	V	X	A	H	A
I	P	W	O	Z	Q	L	X	O	P	Q	W	K	L	G	T
H	V	J	C	P	W	E	Z	N	F	P	X	V	L	Z	H
P	V	X	O	P	X	A	D	V	P	Q	W	F	G	J	E
L	O	C	H	N	E	S	S	M	O	N	S	T	E	R	R
O	E	T	C	U	X	L	J	U	D	S	P	W	J	V	X
D	X	J	P	P	W	Q	P	M	X	Q	M	P	V	P	Q
W	J	P	V	B	M	X	F	Q	G	J	X	P	V	B	P

Things to talk about

Characters

Talk about all the characters in the stories. They're in the wordsearch above – you could make a list of them on a flip chart and then next to each one, collect everyone's ideas about what they're like and what they do.

Try using the Character Sketch template below to build up a picture of some of the characters. They are drawn quite simply in the Dragonsitter books and you can get to know quite a bit about them from what they say, and how they behave in different situations.

	Character Sketch of
Name, and part played in the story	e.g. Eddie – main character
Where they live	
Family and friends	
Appearance: hair, eyes, build	
Personality	
Likes & dislikes	
Feelings, hopes and dreams	
How do they deal with things?	
What do they care most about?	
What books do you think they like reading?	

Uncle Morton's Excuses

I could have checked my mail at the hotel, but I had resolved not to interrupt my holiday. (The Dragonsitter p46)

Sorry about delay. Helping McD rescue sheep from unexpected avalanche. (The Dragonsitter's Castle p24)

Uncle Morton always has an explanation – or an excuse! – for why he is late, or doesn't answer emails.

Collect on a flip chart all the ones you can find in the different stories. What do you think about them? How would you feel if you were Eddie or Eddie's mum?

Chocolate

What are your favourite chocolates and sweets? Why do you think chocolate settles dragons? (All answers here are right!)

N.B. Don't try chocolate on your cats and dogs as it can be toxic and harmful for them.

Do you believe in dragons?

What do people think? Do dragons exist? Did they exist?

Do you know other stories about dragons? e.g. St. George and the dragon.

Why do you think there are stories about dragons? What could have inspired them?

Sometimes we use the word 'dragon' to describe something we're afraid of, which we see as a challenge for us to face up to. What are your 'dragons' and challenges?

Humour: words and pictures

Talk about what especially made you laugh in these books – maybe some of the situations, or what the dragons got up to? Or something someone said – or things in the pictures? What do you think about Ziggy's face and expressions?



More activities

Taking a dragon to school!

Imagine you are Eddie or Emily, and you take Ziggy and Arthur to school for a day. Write an email, telling Uncle Morton all about the day and how well (or not...) it goes. How do you get them there? Which lessons do they go to? Do they join in? Do they cause any problems?

Add pictures to your email as attachments – maybe use emojis as well.



Another way you could tell this story is with text messages through the day, from Eddie/Emily to Mum – and Mum's replies!

Flying

Here's an excerpt from a poem about flying an aeroplane. It's called *High Flight* and was written by John Gillespie Magee, a pilot in World War 2.

*Oh I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds – and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of – wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hovering there
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air...
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark or even eagle flew...*

And here's Eddie's description of flying on Ziggy's back.

Higher and higher we went. Till we were swallowed by clouds. I couldn't see anything except whiteness. It was really chilly too. If Ziggy hadn't been so warm I would have been frozen solid. Suddenly we broke through the top of the clouds and we were in sunshine. (The Dragonsitter Takes Off (p51))

Talk about these descriptions – how do they make you feel? What else might you add in about flying so high? – things you see, and things you feel?

Write your own description of flying – perhaps in a plane, on a dragon, as a bird, or in a dream... Or together collect ideas and possible words, phrases or lines, and then have a go at shaping them into a **group poem**. (See also p5 in this pack).

Films to enjoy about dragons

How To Train Your Dragon and *How To Train Your Dragon 2*
The Hobbit: the Desolation of Smaug

And more reading ideas....

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	ISBN
More books by Josh Lacey			
	<i>A Dog Called Grk</i> (series)	Andersen Press	978-1842703847
	<i>The Island of Thieves</i>	Andersen Press	978-1849392457
	<i>The Sultan's Tigers</i>	Andersen Press	978-1849394543
More books about dragons – and dinosaurs and monsters!			
Picture books			
Michael Foreman	<i>Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish</i>	Puffin	978-0140552607
Debi Gliori	<i>The Trouble With Dragons</i>	Bloomsbury	978-0747595410
Jack Kent	<i>There's No Such Thing As a Dragon</i>	Golden Books	978-0375851377
Steve Smallman	<i>Dragon Stew</i>	Little Tiger	978-1848951006
<i>And another food-guzzling story book friend...</i> Judith Kerr	<i>The Tiger Who Came to Tea</i>	HarperCollins	978-0007215997
Fiction and Poetry			
N.S.Blackman	<i>The Secret Dinosaur: Giants Awake!</i> (series)	Dinosaur Books	978-0992752507
Adam Blade	<i>Ferno the Fire Dragon</i> (Beast Quest series)	Orchard	978-1846164835
Cressida Cowell	<i>How To Train Your Dragon</i> (series)	Hodder	978-0340999073
Kenneth Grahame	<i>The Reluctant Dragon</i>		
Chris d'Lacey	<i>The Fire Within</i> (Last Dragon series)	Orchard	978-1841215334
John Foster & Korky Paul	<i>Dragons, Dinosaurs and Monster Poems</i>	OUP	978-0192761958
Cornelia Funke	<i>Dragonrider</i>	Chicken House	978-1910002056
Eva Ibbotson	<i>Monster Mission</i>	Macmillan	978-1447265696
Rex Stone	<i>Dinosaur Cove: Attack of the Lizard King</i> (series)	OUP	978-0192793652
Non-fiction			
DK	<i>Children's Book of Mythical Beasts & Magical Monsters</i>	Dorling Kindersley	978-0241189412

For more activity ideas about dragons and amazing creatures have a look at our [Fantastic Creatures](#) and [How To Train Your Dragon](#) Chatterbooks activity packs.

Dragonsitter Wordsearch Answer

Q	W	D	I	N	O	S	A	U	R	X	Z	B	M	X	A
Y	P	P	X	O	N	M	B	N	P	A	S	F	R	G	R
P	V	Y	L	D	X	T	E	C	M	J	K	P	M	P	T
N	O	G	A	R	D	P	Y	L	I	M	E	V	C	K	H
S	F	G	D	O	V	A	M	E	Q	X	D	A	D	G	U
P	X	I	E	G	J	X	W	M	X	P	D	K	O	J	R
V	M	Z	T	Q	P	W	X	O	M	F	I	F	U	F	S
Q	W	J	A	R	T	H	U	R	X	K	E	W	G	X	F
N	X	Q	L	Y	X	A	E	T	J	A	V	X	A	H	A
I	P	W	O	Z	Q	L	X	O	P	Q	W	K	L	G	T
H	V	J	C	P	W	E	Z	N	F	P	X	V	L	Z	H
P	V	X	O	P	X	A	D	V	P	Q	W	F	G	J	E
L	O	C	H	N	E	S	S	M	O	N	S	T	E	R	R
O	E	T	C	U	X	L	J	U	D	S	P	W	J	V	X
D	X	J	P	P	W	Q	P	M	X	Q	M	P	V	P	Q
W	J	P	V	B	M	X	F	Q	G	J	X	P	V	B	P