

# Using the front cover of *Primary Geography*

The geographical adventures of  
*The Boy, the Mole, the Fox  
and the Horse*

A celebration of the book by  
Charlie Mackesy

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with Paula Owens and Tessa Willy  
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## PRIMARY GEOGRAPHY

Focus on empowering geography

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"What does it mean to be  
happy?" asked the fox.



"Happiness is letting go of  
what your life is supposed  
to look like," answered the  
horse.

With thanks to the Year 6 children in Oak Class of Redfield Edge Primary School, Bristol, for permission to use their wonderful pictures for the front cover of *Primary Geography* and throughout this PowerPoint.

Charlie's book could be a stimulus for many subject areas within the primary classroom. This presentation focuses on some possibilities for work specifically within geography. We hope this will provide you with inspiration for your own work.

It was a fortuitous day when we saw this on twitter and contacted the school:

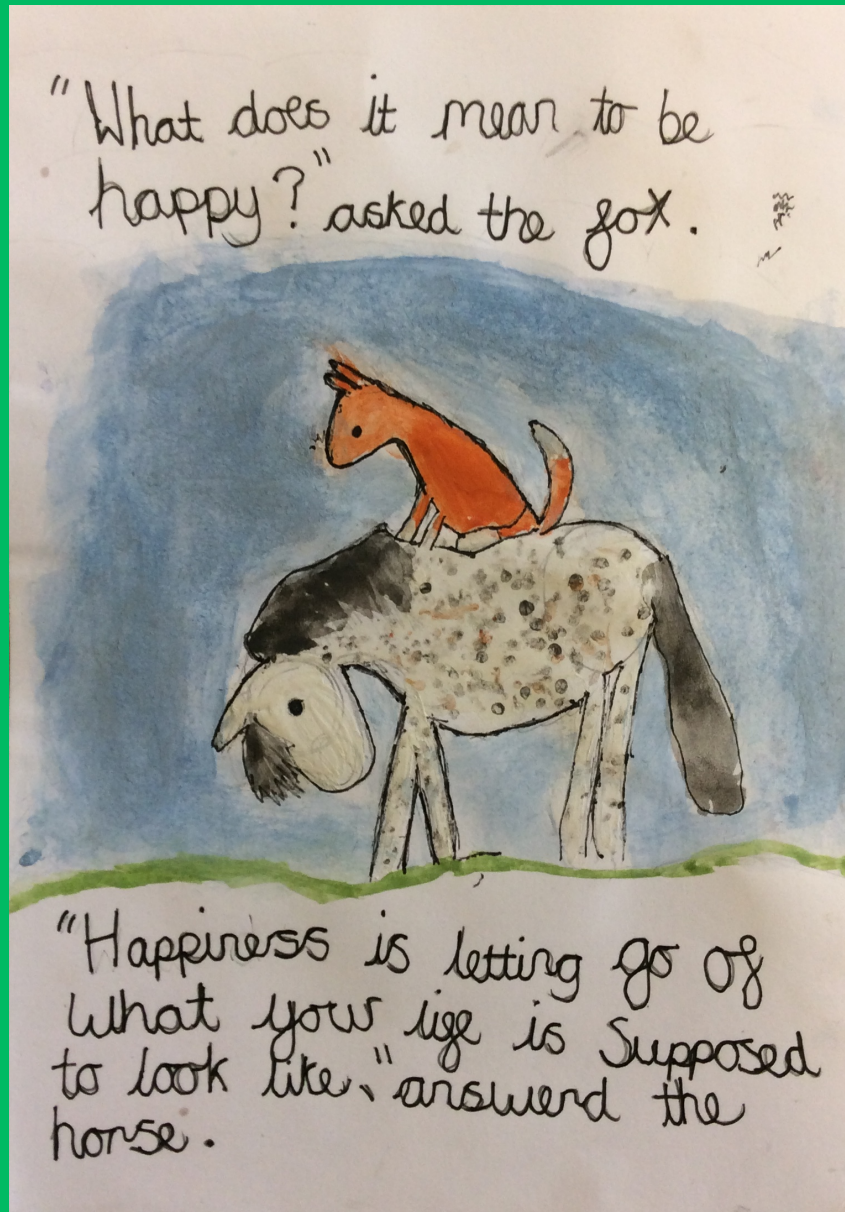


Oak Class  
@OakClass\_RE

As part of our Recovery Curriculum, the children in Oak class have been reading the Boy, the Mole, The Fox and The Horse. Then, they created a brand new page for the book, including their own inspirational quote or message.

[@charliemackesy](#)

An Introduction:  
'the Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' by Charlie Mackesy



Published in 2019, some of you may have been fortunate enough to have read the book 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' by Charlie Mackesy. This is a book for unprecedented times borne out of conversations with friends. It is a magical, inspiring book with themes of empathy, compassion and thinking deeply about how we live in, and with, the world and how we treat others. The story is told with stunning pen-and-ink drawings and minimal text. Mackesy (2019) uses a geographical notion to explain why the book used mainly images: 'the truth is I need pictures. They are like islands, places to get to in a sea of words'.

Through the book we are introduced to four characters who Charlie explains 'represent different parts of the same person': the curious boy, the enthusiastic, but greedy mole, the fox who has been hurt and is slow to trust, and the wise horse. We join these characters as they travel through an imaginary world...

Since publication, this book has brought comfort to many people during the Covid pandemic. The images and conversations between the Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse have been shared thousands of times on social media. They have featured on the cover of *Big Issue* magazine (September 2020), been photocopied and stuck on ward walls in hospitals, and featured in prisons, churches, women's safe houses, universities and even a park trail at Marble Hill: Exhibition of Hope (May-November 2020). They have been displayed outside houses to send positive messages to neighbours and shared widely during Mental Health Awareness Week in May 2020. They have been made into tattoos and featured on bags, t-shirts, and cakes. This is a book with a wide reach and appeal...

What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Sharing the book...**

This is a book that needs to be read aloud to the class, indoors or outdoors. Reading aloud provides a shared experience that can invite lively conversations and promote geographical vocabulary, particularly with regard to place settings, landscape features and positional and directional vocabulary.

Sharing the book together will support the development of the pupils' listening skills, encouraging the pupils to visualise the setting, using prior geographical knowledge and their own personal experiences to connect to Charlie's pictures and text. It provides opportunities for the class to ask questions, to check geographical understandings, to engage in critical thinking and will provide the teacher with some valuable insights into the pupils' ideas and feelings. Three example questions are:

- Have you ever felt like...?
- Why do you think Charlie Mackesy included...?
- What would you think will happen after...?



What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **The importance of place...**



His official website shares that 'Charlie Mackesy was born during a very cold snowy winter in Northumberland'. Places are clearly important to Charlie and inform his book: swimming in the River Tyne, working in America and exhibitions in London, New York, and Edinburgh. His personal geographies have clearly had a significant influence on his work and his passions. He has lived in South Africa, Southern Africa, and America. He has a passion for music and has visited numerous jazz clubs and gospel bands in New Orleans and London. He reveals a particular fascination with the Royal Albert Hall. His description of the building reflects this: 'a loving shape like a jelly – a cosy pudding housing genius'.

The stories of the characters – The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse – unfold within a 'wild' natural landscape of hills, trees, and rivers. It hints at a different way of humans coming to know the world in the company of animals. Knowledge is situated and created in the moment within a sentient world (Bird Rose, 2013). Relationships are at the heart of this lively, diverse inclusive world, both human and more-than-human, i.e. animals, plants rocks, weather, imaginings, dreams.

What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Considering place settings...**

The setting of the stories offers possibilities to consider geographical content:

- **Weather**, e.g. snow, storms, rainbows, rain, sunshine
- **Seasons**, e.g. the story is set as winter turns into spring
- **Times of day and night**

**Landscapes:** Featured are broad landscapes of downland, fields, trees, hills, holloways (sunken paths created by centuries of movements by wheels, hooves, feet, and rainfall), woodlands, dry stone walls and perhaps a more mountainous landscape.

**Geographical vocabulary:** for the human and physical features illustrated.

**Sense of place:** special places, places we feel connected to, places that enchant and inspire.

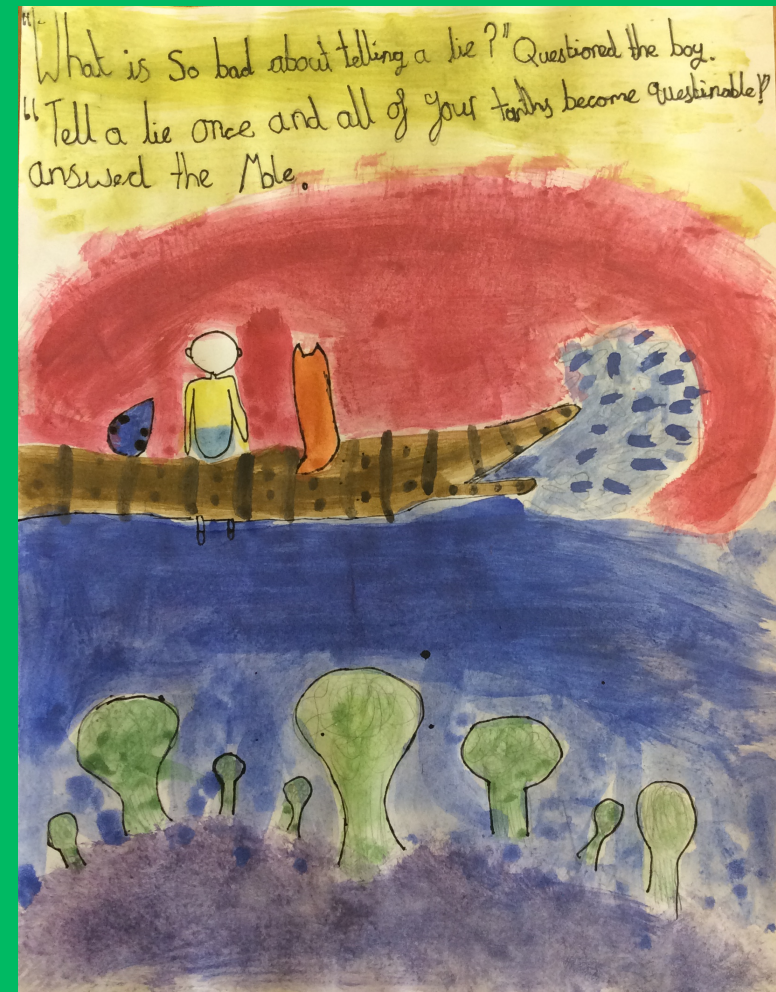


What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Considering place settings...**

Within the classroom pupils could be invited to make a map as the four characters journey together. This would be an interesting exercise in geographical and spatial understanding and comprehension of the stories.

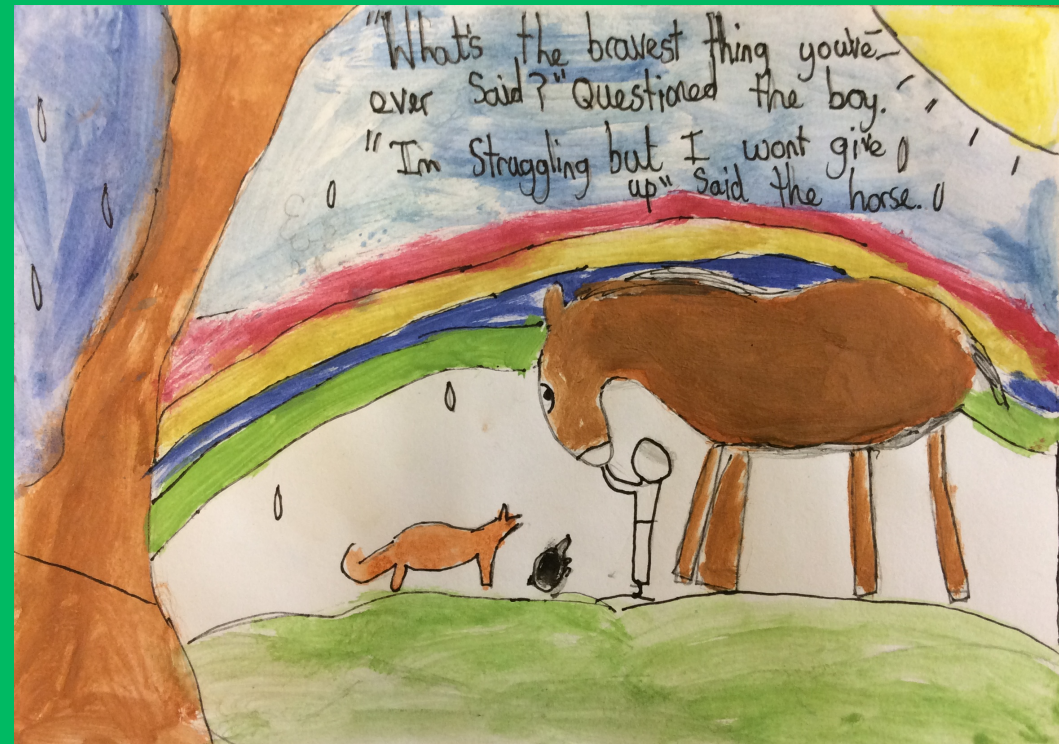
Pupils could engage in speculative thinking – what journeys did the characters make to get to the place in the story where they appeared?

How might the different animals' maps differ? For example: Mole's map underground may be very different from the Fox and the Horse. Fox and Horse travel at different heights – how would their perspectives differ?



What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Children as geographers...**

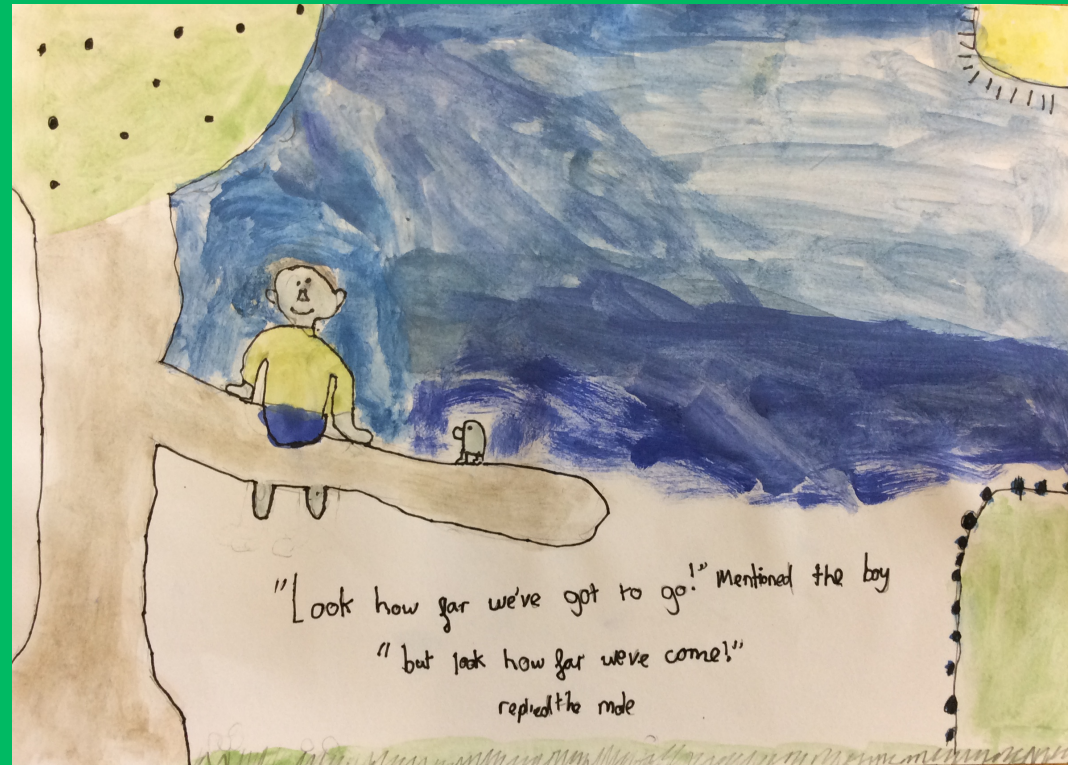
The boy in the Charlie's story is a wonderful role model for young geographers everywhere – a curious boy who likes to ask lots of questions about the world. One beautiful illustration urges us 'to be curious' with the boy, mole and fox sitting together staring at the moon. Throughout the book there are reminders that there is 'so much beauty we need to look after' (Mackesy, 2019). Themes of awe, wonder and beauty would make a lovely geographical-themed assembly using the illustrations. There are also hints for the primary geography teacher about how to lead fieldwork to nurture a fascination with the world. The book encourages humans to take a moment, to be mindful of the world and be present. The mole helps us understand further, saying: 'I find a quiet spot and shut my eyes and breathe' (Mackesy, 2019).





What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Exploring emotional geographies...**

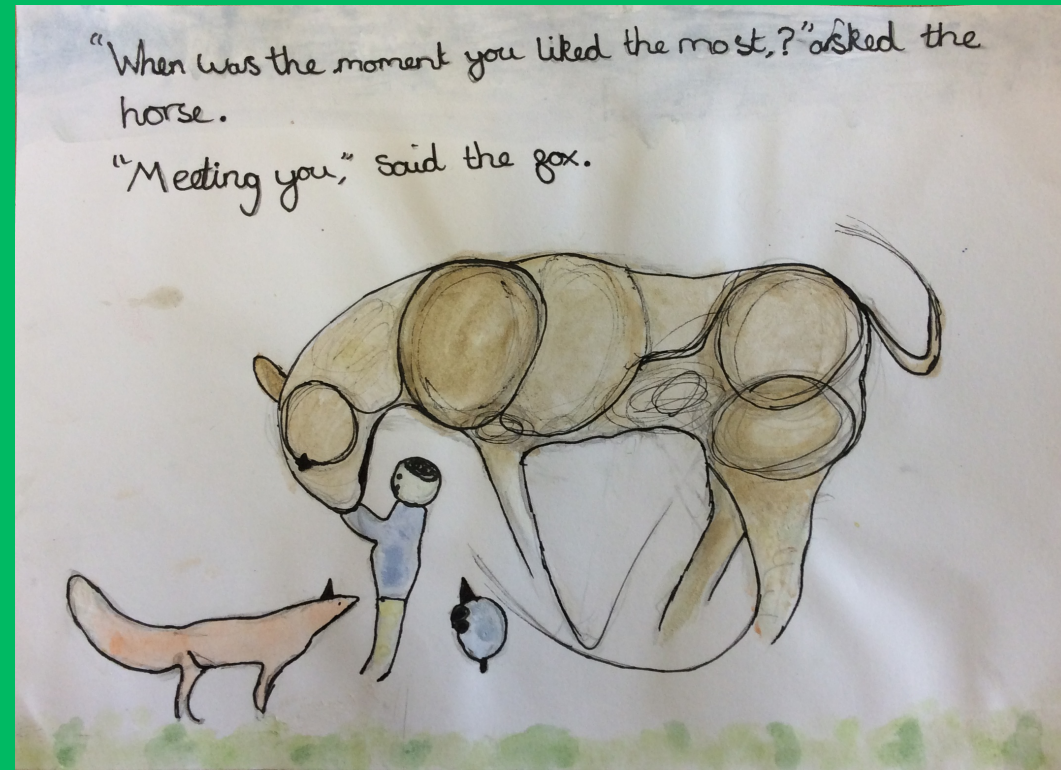
This has become a special book for many teachers. It has helped empower them through challenging times and kept spirits high with positive messages of light, hope and storms passing. It is a useful resource for teachers to help explore pupils' emotional geographies and express their feelings when experiencing challenging times. Through exploration of themes, such as home, belonging, self-empowerment and the power of others, the book provides geography teachers with a stimulus for transformative possibilities to make meaningful contributions to pupils' well-being and mental health agendas. On social media there have been examples of teachers who have asked pupils to create their own posters with words of wisdom promoting kindness and love.



What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Compassionate Geographies...**

The theme for 2021 Geographical Association Annual Conference is 'Compassionate Geographies', and this book offers a way of opening conversations with pupils to consider what really matters in the world. Geography is about taking a different view and Charlie Mackesy has created a world where acceptance, peace and kindness are key. Pupils may consider the following questions:

- What kind of world would they want to live in?
- What are the values that might be important in their new world?
- What would matter in their world? What are the issues they would like to address?
- Can they suggest actions to move towards this new world?



What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Placemaking...**

World creating and making activities encourage pupils to engage in speculative thinking to consider alternative futures. This kind of geographical activity allows pupils to share their inner worlds and provides a richness of opportunity to investigate ideas and feelings in relation to an imagined internal worldview and their real experiences of the world.

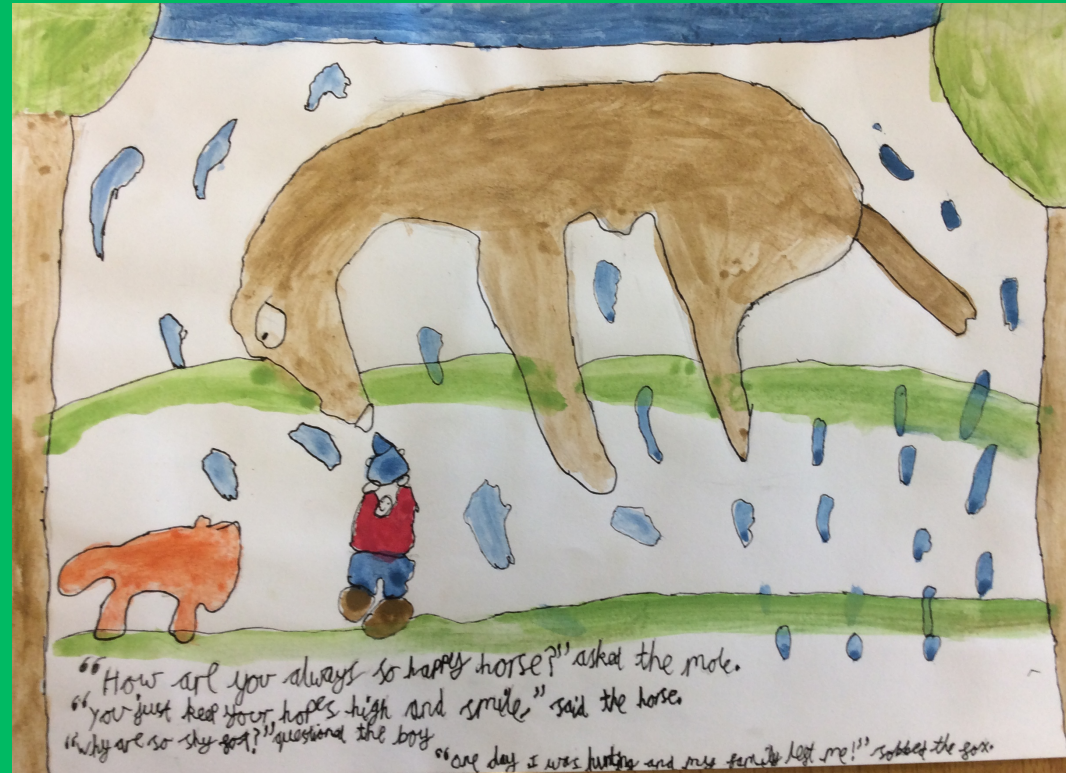
Macfarlane (2015) points out that pupils are adept at imagined geographies undertaking a 'kind of fantastic travelling, in which worlds slip easily around each other, where there are soft boundaries between what is real and what is remembered, and each place in front of us is somewhere else too'.



## What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Placemaking...**

### Teachers may like to consider how the pupils represent this world:

- Map making of future worlds – engaging pupils in fantasy mapping while insisting on titles, keys, symbols as appropriate to their age can be engaging.
- Can the pupils provide a travel guide with rules for guidance and codes of conduct for ethical, healthy, and happy travel to their new worlds?
- Travel posters may provide a useful stimulus – create an advert or piece of persuasive writing to encourage travellers to visit your new world.
- Could the pupils pick their own three characters to travel with? What animals would they pick? What landscapes would they draw? What stories would they tell? Could they illustrate their work in zig-zag books or make posters for displays?



What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Conclusion...**

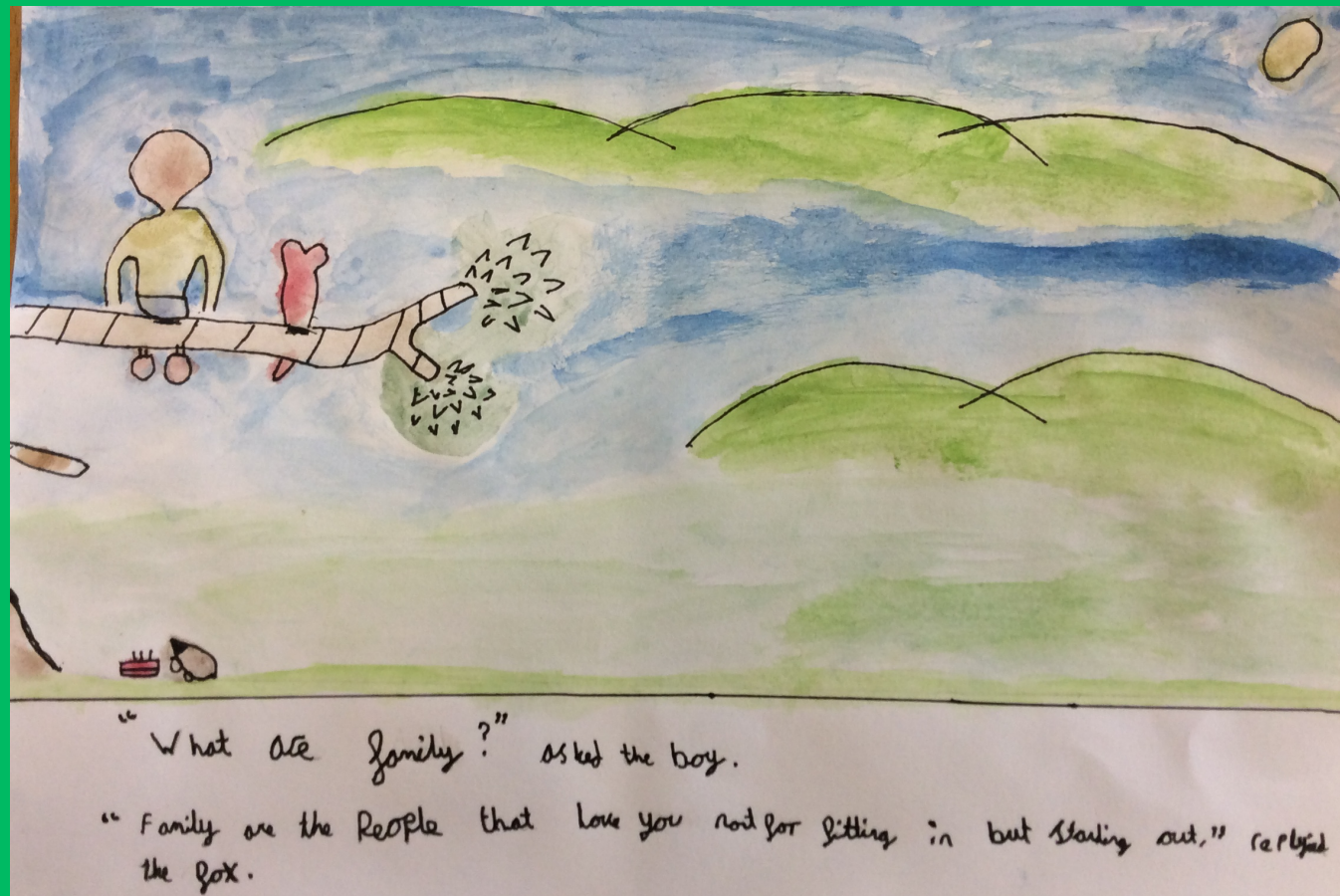
A book full of hope that empowers and has been empowering, Charlie's stories are full of advice, life-lessons, heartfelt messages, and potential for primary geography. They provide a glimpse into another world where compassion, uniqueness, understanding of difference, and cake is valued! Ultimately this book shares the transformative power of kindness and of friendship in relations with both human and nature kin.



What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **Please get involved...**

We hope these ideas have inspired you to look at the geographical possibilities inspired by Charlie Mackesy's book 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse'.

We would love to see your work: please share it with @The\_GA on twitter #PriGeogJournal



What might 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' have to do with primary geography? **References...**

Bird Rose, D. (2013) 'Val Plumwood's Philosophical Animism: attentive interactions in the sentient world', *Environmental Humanities*, 3, pp. 93-109.

Macfarlane, R. (2015) *Landmarks*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Mackesy, C. (2019) *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*. London: Exbury press.

Charlie's website: <https://www.charliemackesy.com/>

