



A Day of Villainy at Don Valley

On the 15th March 2010, Don Valley Library was focused on all things villainous as we played host to author Mark Walden. Mark is the creator of the 'HIVE' series of books.

'HIVE' stands for 'Higher Institute of Villainous Education'. If you've ever wondered where megalomaniac super-criminals such as Dr No or Goldfinger get their ideas from, HIVE might just give you a clue! The young hero, Otto Malpense, at the start of the first book, is kidnapped, drugged, and brought to a secret location in the heart of a volcano (where else!). He learns that he is now to become a student at HIVE, a school which trains the criminal masterminds of the future! From this point onwards, Otto and his new friends are caught up in a series of fabulous, action-packed adventures, in which the breathless pace never slackens and the plots, characters and gadgets keep the reader riveted.



Using Drama to explore the text

In the morning, our students took part in a drama workshop based on the first two books in the series. The workshop leader, Dave Cryer, read aloud the scene where Otto and his new friend, Wing, arrive at HIVE. Next he led a whole-group discussion on the HIVE organisation, the main characters, and how it might feel to be kidnapped, taken away from your normal life and end up in such a fantastical place.

Our students were asked to work together to improvise a scene by imagining how the two boys, Otto and Wing, might react to their situation, and the sort of conversation they might have. Lots of them wanted to perform their pieces.

The next activity was based around the boys' meeting with the sinister Contessa, one of the teachers at the school. This was scripted, but our students had to imagine how the Contessa's voice might sound, and what methods she might use to intimidate the boys. Some of the performances were truly scary!

For the third activity, we switched to book two, and an exciting scene where Otto is free-falling from 20,000 feet trying to get to someone who has murdered his friend. The interpretations were brilliant, with innovative use of the library furniture and some fabulous robot voices.

To finish, we discussed the books and characters in a bit more depth and the various groups worked on different scenes based on a promotional video which in the story is shown to all new HIVE students. By this point, Mark Walden had arrived in the library and was able to watch the students perform. He said that he found this really interesting, and he enjoyed seeing how the students interpreted his ideas.



Bradley in 'free fall'

What makes a great villain?

In the afternoon, we moved down to the Lower-School Hall for the author talk proper. As well as the Don Valley Students, (who were members of the Reading Group, or Y7 students recommended by the English Department), we were joined by students from three of our feeder primaries. All of Y5 and Y6 from Kirkby Avenue Primary, Y6 from Toll Bar, and some students from Y6 Bentley High Street came along to meet Mark.

Mark's talk was really interesting and engaging. He began with how he got the inspiration for HIVE, saying that ever since childhood, he'd always found the 'baddies' to be much more interesting than the heroes in many books and films. He then led a discussion on what makes a good villain, inviting the students to say which ones they particularly liked and why. There were some fabulous student responses, ranging from the Daleks in Dr Who, to a character from Spongebob Squarepants! He then asked them to think about famous villains such as 'Dr No' from James Bond or Batman's 'Joker' - all mad egomaniacs with amazing secret headquarters, plotting to take over the world! He had often wondered how such people got their ideas and ambitions, and from this the idea for HIVE was born.

Creating the storyline

Mark went on to talk about his books and main characters, explaining how he creates each storyline and invents the technology and gadgets that are so crucial to the plots. He finished by taking questions from the students, which led to a forest of hands and some really brilliant questions. Before the end of the event, he signed autographs for practically every student present, and said that he'd really enjoyed his visit. Feedback from the audience was equally enthusiastic. Each of the teachers present said how much their students had enjoyed the event.

Keeley Twycross, Y8, said, 'I enjoyed the drama workshop because we got to work with different people and produce our own improvised drama.'

Caitlin Scott, Y7, said, 'I got the first book and I've read the first two pages, it's so good. My Mum's read the back and she wants to read it'.

This event was free. The visit was a prize I won in a competition from Readingzone.com. I would definitely consider repeating it next year and inviting Mark back, and would like next time to target reluctant readers, particularly boys from Y7 and Y8, as I feel they would really enjoy both the books and Mark's talk.