

STEWART FOSTER

# CHECK MATES



TEACHER'S NOTES

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Dear teachers and librarians,

This resource pack is based on *Check Mates*, an inspirational story about Felix, his ADHD, his relationship with his granddad and of course their growing love for chess.

The lesson plans in this pack have been written for KS2 students aged 9-11 with each activity closely linked to the curriculum. The aim of this pack is to engage your students with the world Stewart has created, broach the unfamiliar topics and help build reading confidence and comprehension.

## About the Book

*Felix Schopp isn't a problem child. He's a child with a problem . . .*

Felix's ADHD makes it hard for him to concentrate and his grades are slipping. Everyone keeps telling him to try harder, but no one realizes how hard it is!

When Mum suggests Felix spends time with his granddad, Felix can't think of anything worse. Granddad hasn't been the same since Grandma died, and he's always trying to teach Felix *boring* chess.

But sometimes the best lessons come in the most unexpected of places, and Granddad soon shows Felix that there's everything to play for.



## About the Author

Stewart Foster is the award-winning author of *The Bubble Boy* and *All The Things That Could Go Wrong*. He was one of the Observer's New Faces

of Fiction for 2014 and one of Amazon's Rising Stars the same year. He lives in Bath.



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## Before Engaging with the Book

- Share the front cover with the pupils. Discuss and predict what the story might be about. Does the title give any clues?

## While Reading – ongoing activities

- Keep a reading journal to record thoughts, ideas, viewpoints, themes, author style/techniques, use of dialogue and examples of effective literary devices.
- Ask questions and explore answers through discussion, further reading and research.
- Make regular predictions about what might happen next from the details stated and implied by the author.
- Collect words and phrases used by the author to describe characters, settings, emotions, mood and atmosphere.
- Visualisation – at various points of the story, use the author's description to create illustrations for the book. Discuss the importance of the author's language to create a vivid picture for the reader.
- Discuss the themes covered within the story (*bereavement, loneliness, self-belief, perseverance, depression and mental health, trust, betrayal, loyalty, forgiveness, peer pressure, tolerance, prejudice, stereotypes, regret, friendship, hope, fear*). Find examples from the text where the author explores the above themes. What message(s) do you think the author is trying to convey to the reader? Find evidence from the text to support your opinion.

## Post-Reading

- How does the author hook the reader and ensure the reader keeps turning the page?
- Discuss why the author uses short chapters, italics, different fonts, chapters with a different layout, questions etc.
- Felix's Granddad tears up all his mail, bank statements and bills. He is also suspicious of phones and the internet. Why? Felix joins an internet chess game where he can compete against the computer or other players who he doesn't know. Use these examples as a starting point to explore why it is important to keep safe online and to keep details of your identity safe.
- Why has the author used the title 'Check Mates'? Find evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Read other books by the same author – 'The Bubble Boy' and 'All The Things That Could Go Wrong'.
- How are they similar/different to 'Check Mates'? Which is your favourite and why?

## Characters

- The main narration of the story is written in the first person from one character's perspective. How does the author give the narrator a distinctive voice?
- How does the author show the narrator's emotions through their descriptions and other literary devices? Find examples to support your judgement.
- How would the story change if the story was written from another perspective or in the third person?
- How does the author give the other characters (Jake, Rebecca, Granddad, Mum and Dad) a distinctive voice of their own?
- Are any of the characters' actions and decisions motivated by their emotions? Use quotations from the text to support your answer.
- Why are memories significant to the story? Why are happy memories important to Felix?
- Explore the emotional, physical and mental barriers affecting Felix and how he finally overcomes them?
- Compare and contrast two of the characters, finding quotes to support your viewpoint.
- Discuss how the author explores and challenges stereotypes e.g. calling those who play chess swots and dweebs.

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## Language

- Explore unfamiliar language used by the author. *Examples might include: bayonet, sniper, automatic, diabetes, pendulum, isolation, twenty-twenty vision, syllables, tactics, lymph nodes, platoon, billowing, wafting, fidgeting, hypothetically, meticulous, trudge, autobahn, glockenspiel, throttle, glowers, suspiciously, satchel, billycan, Eustachian tube, grimace, wincing, opponent, commander, irritable, engrossed, communist, subliminal, frantically, intuitive, adrenalin, funneling, relegated, accumulated, exasperated*

## Beyond the Book

### English

- Write your own newspaper report documenting Felix's win at the National Schools Chess Championship.
- Choose a passage and write a chapter from a different perspective.
- Write a character profile of each character using information shared by the author and your own inferred ideas. Use adjectives, similes, adverbs, verbs, prepositions, metaphors, personification in your descriptions.

### History

- Felix is given an assignment on the suffragettes. Write your own essay to answer the question: Imagine you are a suffragette. Write an account of what it would be like if people did not have the right to vote. What would it feel like not to be heard or have a voice? What actions would you take so people took notice of your opinion? (page 16)
- Explore the lives of significant individuals in the past who contributed to the suffragette movement.
- When was World War I and why did it happen? Which countries were involved and why?
  - Become a group of advisors for the British government and debate the advantages and disadvantages of going to war.
  - Explore what life was like for those who went to fight in Europe.
  - Felix is given an assignment on World War I. Write your own 'account of what it felt like to be in the trenches in the First World War. In particular, think about the conditions they were living in' (page 154).
- What was the Cold War?
- When and why did the Cold War start?
- What is Communist Russia?
- How was the Cold War different to World War I?
- How did it impact on the lives of ordinary citizens?
- Why was the Berlin wall constructed? Is it still there today? Why not?
- How would it feel to live in a city/world full of high walls, barbed wire and patrolling soldiers?
- Imagine a wall has suddenly been constructed in your community over night - how would you feel? Discuss the impact it would have on your local community.
- Imagine you are living in a place which has always been enclosed by a huge concrete wall. Write a description of what you think might be beyond the wall.

### D.T.

- Make a traditional German recipe which Granddad could teach Felix how to make.

### Art and Design

The author makes several references to war and conflict (*Felix and Jake like to play soldiers in the tree house,*

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*Felix is learning about World War I at school and Granddad lived in Berlin during the Cold War)*

- Study War Art from different artists e.g. Paul Nash. Explore the paintings and prints of World War I. Create your own prints by sketching out a simple line drawing to cut out to use as a stencil.
- Experiment with colours, shapes, lines and marks to express fear in an abstract form.

## PSCHE

- Is there a time when someone would want to leave their home to have a fresh start in a new place or different country? (*Responses could include when people are suffering because of civil war, armed conflict between nations and because of a natural disaster such as an earthquake, flood, or famine.*)
- Can you be forced to leave your country and home? Discuss.
- Are there areas of conflict around the world today? How can we work together to ensure that such conflicts do not happen in the future?

## Geography

- Felix is watching German TV with Granddad when it is announced there are terrible floods in Germany. Use this as a starting point to research all about floods and other natural disasters around the world.
- Create a dynamic description of a flood/other natural disaster ensuring the senses are explored using adjectives, similes, personification, metaphors etc.
- Felix's Granddad is from Germany. Research what life is like there today. Explore the culture, buildings, famous landmarks, artists, physical geography, cities, weather, food etc.
- Compare a region of the United Kingdom with a region of Germany commenting on physical and human features.
- What is Berlin like? Compare a city in the United Kingdom with Berlin.

## Further Discussion

### Chapter 1-5

- What is the '*Staring at the Wall Club*'? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of schools creating an isolation room.
- What are your first impressions of the main character, Felix? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- What do we learn about the narrator?
- What is ADHD? How does this condition affect Felix? How does the author show that the main character has ADHD?
- Explore Felix's relationship with his Granddad. Does this relationship change as you progress through the novel?
- What is the significance of the 'pink car'?
- Why does Felix need 'catch-up lessons'?
- Why is German TV important to Granddad?
- Why does the author use italics in chapter 3 and 5?
- What would it feel like to not be heard or to not have a voice/opinion? (page 16). Discuss.
- What techniques does the author use to show the narrator's train of thought?
- '*It's pointless worrying about something that can't happen*' (page 21). What does the narrator mean by this statement?
- This is an example where Felix shows a lack of self-belief and low self-esteem. Find other examples in the novel.
- Where is Nova Scotia? What is it like? Why did Grandma want to go there?
- Why does Felix feel like he is in prison?
- Felix begins to ask lots of questions. What questions do you have about the character?

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## Chapter 5-10

- Other people's perceptions and opinions matter to Felix. Do you agree? Find examples from the text to support your judgement.
- Why is the 'tree house' an important place for both Felix and his best friend Jake?
- *'It's going to be the most awkward weekend of all'* (page 39). Do you agree? Why does Felix feel this way? What do you think might happen during the weekend?
- Granddad states that a new morning, is a new start (page 44). What does Granddad mean by this statement?
- Imagine you are Granddad. What list would you create?
- Read chapter 10. What do the words in italics tell the reader at this point of the story?

## Chapter 11-16

- After reading chapter 11, what do you think Felix's Granddad is planning?
- Why is chapter 12 called 'Rebecca's a Genius'? What plan do they come up with to get Felix out of playing chess? What would you do in this situation? Do you agree with Rebecca or Jake? Whose advice would you take or would you do something differently?
- How does the plan backfire on Felix?
- *'It now feels like an elephant has stepped off my chest'* (page 74). What does the author mean? Find other examples where the author shows a character's feelings and emotions through their carefully chosen words and phrases. E.g read chapter 15 and collect examples which show that Felix is feeling anxious about scuba diving at the swimming pool with Granddad.
- What is the real reason why Felix does not want to play chess?
- How does Granddad's carefully prepared list help when playing chess?
- Why does Felix stay to play with his Granddad?

## Chapter 17-25

- What do you think will be the tenth item on list?
- Why does Felix ask his Dad for help?
- Do you think Felix should be giving up so easily?
- How is chapter 18 different to the others? What do you think is happening?
- Why is chapter 19 called 'Weakness'?
- Do you think Felix should join the chess club? What stops him from entering the room? Is it lack of *self-belief/self-esteem, peer pressure or another reason entirely?* Remember to support your ideas and opinion with evidence from the text.
- What do we learn about Granddad in chapter 20?
- How and why is the layout of chapter 23 different to the others?
- How does the relationship between Felix and his Granddad develop?
- Was Felix right to follow his Granddad? (*The drama technique conscience alley could be used to explore this.*)
- What is a spy? Discuss the characteristics needed for a spy.
- Compare the feelings of Felix and his Granddad. How does the author convey these feelings through the words he chooses?
- Explore the author's use of italics throughout chapter 25. Compare and contrast his use of italics in the novel so far.

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## Chapter 26-30

- *'Sometimes you don't miss things until they are gone'* (page 145). Discuss.
- Why has the author called chapter 26 'The Tipping Point'?
- What do you think Felix should do to make things better with his Granddad?
- In chapter 28 Felix feels that *'everything is going wrong.'* Do you agree?
- Explore Felix's friendship with Rebecca. How is Rebecca a good friend? Why is friendship important?
- Felix and Rebecca have a strong friendship despite being different. What do you think makes their friendship strong?
- *'It might be sunny outside, but it feels like there's a massive cloud in my room'* (page 161). Discuss how the author uses the weather to express Felix's feelings. Can you create some examples of your own for different points of the story?
- Discuss the importance of words, both spoken and written in everyday life. How can they be used in a positive and negative way?
- How does Jake help Felix despite them falling out?

## Chapter 31-38

- Why does Felix sabotage the match with Rich?
- *'We all learn from our mistakes'* (page 181). Discuss.
- Why is trust important?
- Is there a time when you have learnt something without knowing you were learning?
- How does the author create suspense throughout the chapters 35 - 38?
- How does winning the school chess championship help Felix?

## Chapter 39-45

- Explore the relationship between Felix and Jake. Should Felix do as Jake says? Why is Felix easily persuaded by Jake? Is Jake right to put pressure on Felix to stop playing chess to be with him?
- Explore how the author builds the tension and explores the changing emotions of Felix.
- What are the characteristics of a good team player?

## Chapter 46-58

- How has chess changed Felix's life?
- Share a time when you have felt nervous. Summarise your feelings in five adjectives.
- *'All you have to do is believe in yourself.'* Do you agree with this statement?
- Think of words and phrases to describe Felix's feelings when he wins the championship.

## Chapter 59-end

- What is the final twist of the story?
- Compose the questions which you would like to ask Granddad.
- How has Granddad's past impacted/shaped his life?
- Do experiences change people? Discuss.
- Have you ever been in a frightening situation? How did you feel? What happens to your body when you are afraid? How did you conquer/manage your fear?
- What do you think will happen next?
- Explore how Felix and Granddad have had a positive impact on each other.