

Dark Man

The Teacher's Guide

by

Stephen Rickard



Dark Man - The Teacher's Guide

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1 Introduction

The Dark Man series is a set of reading books and workbooks for older children, 'teenagers' and young adults who have a very low reading age. The twelve Dark Man reading books have a reading age of approximately 5 - 7 years, with an 'interest age' of roughly 12 - young adult.

The series will appeal to very poor readers (or even non-readers) who have probably never successfully managed to read a book.

The series will also be found useful for older students who are studying English either as a foreign language (EFL) or as a second language (ESL).

The Dark Man Reading Books

There are 12 Dark Man reading books. Each book features a complete, self-contained story. Although each story reveals a little more about the Dark Man mythology, the books can in fact be read in any order: no one story depends on having read any other story first.

The reading books are not formally graded as such, but are divided up as follows:

Dark Man Set One Reading Books

6 books:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Lower level: | The Dark Fire of Doom Destiny in the Dark The Dark Never Hides |
| Higher level: | The Face in the Dark Mirror Fear in the Dark Escape from the Dark |

Dark Man Set Two Reading Books

6 books:

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Lower level | Danger in the Dark The Dark Dreams of Hell The Dark Side of Magic |
| Higher level | The Dark Glass The Dark Waters of Time The Shadow in the Dark |

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Therefore each Dark Man set of reading books contains three lower level stories and three higher level stories. The differences between the two levels are not great: the vocabulary is more demanding in the higher level books, and the story lengths differ (the lower level books have stories of around 220 words each; the higher level stories are around 420 words in length).

The Dark Man Workbooks

There are four Dark Man workbooks altogether: two workbooks accompany the six Set One reading books, and two workbooks accompany the six Set Two reading books. The first workbook in each set covers the three lower level reading books, and the second workbook covers the three higher level books, as follows:

Dark Man Set One Workbook One

covers: The Dark Fire of Doom
 Destiny in the Dark
 The Dark Never Hides

Dark Man Set One Workbook Two

covers: The Face in the Dark Mirror
 Fear in the Dark
 Escape from the Dark

Dark Man Set Two Workbook One

covers: Danger in the Dark
 The Dark Dreams of Hell
 The Dark Side of Magic

Dark Man Set Two Workbook Two

covers: The Dark Glass
 The Dark Waters of Time
 The Shadow in the Dark.

Each workbook contains a total of 27 worksheets (nine worksheets for each reading book). These nine worksheets are graded by level, as follows:

- Worksheet 1:* very simple, for overcoming 'avoidance strategies' (see Chapter 2)
- Worksheets 2 and 3:* very low level (offering some quick wins for very poor readers or for those with low self-esteem)
- Worksheets 4, 5 and 6:* lower level (usually cloze-type activities)

Worksheets 7, 8 and 9: higher level (more open-ended activities, involving creative writing / creative thinking and introducing some new vocabulary).

How to use this book

This Teacher's Guide contains:

- ◆ General information and guidance that may be helpful in working with young adults with poor reading skills.
- ◆ Information on the Dark Man, the mythology and characters featured in the stories.
- ◆ Detailed information and resources on each of the reading books in the series.
- ◆ Detailed teacher's notes to assist in using the workbooks effectively with students.

2 Working with High Interest Age Students with Low Reading Ages

Older children and young adults (say ages 12+) who have very low reading abilities will have been effectively excluded from 'reading' for a good many years. This is likely to have had a number of consequences:

- ◆ The students will have developed strategies to avoid having to read. They will certainly have sought to avoid books, but they may also have developed strategies to manage their everyday lives as best they can without reading, and to conceal their inability to read.
- ◆ Their poor reading skills may well be accompanied by, or partly caused by, other problems (e.g. poor home environment or other social issues, dyslexia, visual impairment, etc.).
- ◆ They are likely to be very defensive about 'reading' and quite possibly very hostile to books in general.

It is presumptive to generalise about students in this position - each student's needs are different - but, in general:

- these students commonly have relatively low self-esteem;
- they may already acknowledge that their inability to read is a problem, and they may want to do something about it. Alternatively, they may be unwilling to face up to it;
- if they do recognise it as a problem, they may still not know where to start in learning how to read;
- even if they recognise the problem and want to do something about it (in the abstract sense), they may still be very resistant to actually confronting the issue and starting to read.

There are also some difficult problems in finding reading books for teenagers / young adults who have this low reading age:

- ◆ Most books at this reading level feature characters and texts designed to interest 5 - 7 year olds. This subject matter (and the accompanying illustrations) are an instant 'switch off' for older readers. They do not want to read such books and do not want to be seen reading such books. And who can blame them?

- ◆ Even transferring the story context to a more appropriate interest age produces boring stories about shopping trips and parties: certainly not 'must-have' reading material. (These are, after all, people with very poor experiences of books: to describe them as 'reluctant readers' is generally a complete understatement.)
- ◆ It is not easy to create stories of only 200 - 400 words in length which use simple language **and** which are sufficiently engaging to make young adults *want* to read them.
- ◆ Although these young adults have a low reading age, they are in all other respects young adults. They have a relatively mature view of the world; they understand complex emotions and experiences; and they are probably avid consumers of 'culture' (television, movies, computer games, etc.). For example, they will have experience of watching movies with complex characters, convoluted plots and plot twists. Often they are of average or above-average intelligence. This level of complexity is difficult to capture using the language of a seven year old.
- ◆ Most important: for any particular child, the motivation to read is likely to come less from a general desire to learn to read, and more from a specific desire to read *this* book. If a child is suitably motivated, three quarters of the battle is won.

If high interest / low reading age readers are to learn to read and to develop their reading skills, then the requirement is simple: to provide something that is

- satisfying,
- age-appropriate,
- compelling in its own right, and
- 'cool'
- but which can genuinely meet educational needs in terms of fostering reading abilities.

These are the requirements that the Dark Man books set out to meet.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that students with a substantial mismatch between their interest age and their reading age often go through a number of stages in applying themselves to the process of reading:

1. **Avoidance strategies:** i.e. using various diversionary tactics (ranging from the need to go to the toilet to feeling ill to having more important crises to solve first) to avoid the process of actually sitting down and focusing on the book.

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2. Tackling **low self-esteem**: reading is difficult, and students with a poor self image will not be helped by early failures - even reading the first sentence may be a seemingly insurmountable hurdle.
3. Actually engaging with a book and **attempting to read** it.

If there is a single key to unlocking these stages it is **motivation**: a student who sees a book that they really want to read will not resort to 'avoidance strategies' but rather will move straight on to looking at the book.

The Reading Books

The Dark Man reading books are designed to 'switch on' young adults - particularly boys. The books have the following features, all designed to assist struggling readers:

1. The books are printed on cream paper (particularly suitable for students with dyslexia or with some types of visual impairment).
2. The text uses a clear font (Century Gothic) with good letter formation (particularly for 'a' and 'g'). The font is not babyish.
3. The text is clearly separated from the illustrations, enabling the words to be distinguished easily.
4. The illustrations are dark, adult in style, and with clear references to computer games, film, comic strips, etc. The characters are (hopefully) complex, credible and 'cool'.
5. The layouts change from page to page, maintaining interest and avoiding the predictable nature of many educational / illustrated books. The page layouts draw as much from graphic comics as they do from books. White space is used to dramatic effect.
6. The books do not look like 'educational' books.
7. The story text is short, simple and not patronising. The language is terse. Each story satisfies, even though often more is implied than is actually said in the text.
8. The Dark Man is a serious comic hero with his own mythology (c.f. Spiderman, Batman, etc.). So each book is a self-contained story, but each story is part of a greater whole ...
9. The texts are carefully written so that they follow the UK National Literacy Strategy for Key Stage 1. Taken together, the 12 reading books cover nearly all of the 200 high frequency words identified in the Strategy.

10. The books are not distinguished in any way (e.g. by labelling or design) as being for slow or poor readers. They are just like 'ordinary' books.
11. Every page of the books (with the possible exception of the publication details) can be read by the student - including the back cover 'blurb'.
12. The books offer great opportunities for further work, in terms of creative writing, discussion, etc.

The Workbooks

The Dark Man Workbooks are designed for one copy to be given to each student. They may not be photocopied.

Each workbook contains only the worksheets to support each of the reading books; the teacher's notes for each of the worksheets are contained in this Teacher's Guide. Each worksheet has its own section in the teacher's notes, where the tasks are fully explained.

Each worksheet is designed to be used and read by the students themselves. However no instructions are included on the worksheets: the teacher (or other facilitator) will need to work with the student(s) to provide the necessary guidance. This is explained further in the teacher's notes to the worksheets.

Except for the higher level worksheets (where the vocabulary is extended), the vocabulary used on the worksheets is based around that used in the reading texts, and therefore should not present students with any additional difficulties.

The purpose of the worksheet material is to provide opportunities to check students' understanding of the books and to provide structures to encourage reading and writing. The worksheets can also be used in a broader sense to give students experience in 'reading' and interpreting a text.

However, there is no repetition within the set of tasks for any individual book, which enables the teacher to use the full set to provide a degree of progression if appropriate.

For a few of the tasks further research is suggested. Detailed suggestions have not been given, as this is predominantly dependent on the skill levels of the students. This would, obviously, be an appropriate place to use ICT.

Many of the tasks also include opportunities for oral work, and many of the open tasks also provide opportunities for display work, particularly where students are encouraged to make their own decisions about the specific content.

Worksheet Levels

The worksheets are graded as follows:

Worksheet 1: Overcoming avoidance strategies.

The first worksheet for each reading book contains an illustration from the reading book. The aim is to encourage students to engage with the picture, and what it might represent, without having to worry about text at all.

In other words, the purpose of this activity is to 'hook' the student. If they see that the 'work' does not involve any reading or text work at all, they are more likely to shed any resistance.

Thus it is suggested that this activity is undertaken orally in the first instance, with a discussion about the picture. This is best undertaken before approaching the relevant reading book. A range of discussion questions are provided in the teacher's notes to the worksheet. It is suggested that the discussion topics that are selected are those that will appeal most to the individual student. The activity could be extended to, for example, drawing something related to the picture, etc. Again, specific suggestions for each worksheet at this level are contained in the text.

Worksheets 2 and 3: Quick wins

These two worksheets contain simple exercises, hopefully providing quick wins for students. Again, the primary task is to keep students hooked while giving them some quick results, thus giving them confidence. One of these worksheets generally focuses on simple word level work, or letter-based CVC work. The other is more open ended and is designed primarily to reinforce students' engagement with the story, without allowing any difficulties with reading to get in the way. Both worksheets are best undertaken after attempting to read the relevant Dark Man story.

Worksheets 4, 5 and 6: Lower Level

Three lower level worksheets. These are literacy-based, usually cloze-type activities, with vocabulary usually supplied.

Worksheets 7, 8 and 9: Higher level

Three higher level worksheets, more challenging in both vocabulary and content. These worksheets introduce some new words not found in the books, and are more open-ended, offering opportunities for creative writing.

3 Who is the Dark Man?

At risk of stating the obvious, it is worth pointing out at the outset that the Dark Man books are not designed to appeal to you, the teacher or learning co-ordinator. They are designed to appeal to 'teenagers' and young adults, mainly boys. Many times we have heard teachers say that the books do not appeal to *them* - but their students love them!

The Dark Man books may be rather 'on the edge' for 'educational' reading books, but in fact it is all surface: in terms of darkness / horror elements, the books imply much more than actually show (or say). Moreover, in the context of contemporary computer games and movies that young adults are exposed to, the books are very tame indeed. If we are to motivate these disenfranchised readers, we must appeal directly to their interests.

Who is the Dark Man?

Who is the Dark Man? As background, the following profile may be helpful:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Age: | appears to be in his early thirties, but is ten years older |
| Hair: | dark |
| Eyes: | dark |
| Height: | 5'11" |
| Build: | slim |
| Character: | Brooding. Calm. Relaxed. Alert. Ruthless. Focused. Violent. Intelligent. Loner. Unapproachable. Shadowy. |

He inhabits an underworld. He shuns society. He lives in the cellars of abandoned buildings, sewers. He is always in the shadows. He is by nature a creature of the night.

His background is military. He has since been recruited to play a part in a cataclysmic struggle between good and evil. His continuing mission is to seek out an artefact, a Golden Cup. This cup is innocuous enough to look at, but it can channel limitless power and energy to spread love and goodness and elevate the human condition. Opposed to him, and also seeking to find this cup of power, are a sinister and corrupt organisation, The Shadow Masters. The Shadow Masters would use the cup for selfish purposes,

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and such a misuse of its gifts would spread evil - war, pestilence, famine and misery - throughout the world.

The Dark Man is best thought of as a superhero. Certainly he has 'magic' powers - and in these stories he meets others with similar powers.

Various facts about him are disclosed in the twelve reading books. For example:

The Face in the Dark Mirror - The Dark Man used to be called David.

The Dark Fire of Doom - He has the ability to put his hand into fire; he has no fear so the fire will not burn him. Is this a magic power?

The Shadow in the Dark - He once loved a girl, but the Shadow Masters took her from him long ago.

The Dark Side of Magic - A girl freezes time. The Dark Man is not affected by her magic. "He knows magic too."

Escape from the Dark - The Dark Man is able to cure a girl just by touching her hand.

The Characteristics of Superheroes

It is a good way to stimulate enthusiasm for this series amongst students by opening a discussion of superheroes in general. This gives opportunities to discuss a range of issues: mythologies, what readers expect of a book before they read it, what they are assumed to know before they start reading the book (does it matter if they don't know these things?), how this shared knowledge affects their understanding of the stories, etc.

What can we say about superheroes? And is the Dark Man a superhero?

- ◆ They often wear a costume to show that they are a superhero (e.g. Batman, Spiderman).

The Dark Man does not dress like a superhero (he does not wear brightly coloured tights, etc.). But his clothes are 'cool'. Are they in fact a superhero costume?

- ◆ Costumes also conceal the superhero's true identity.

The Dark Man does not conceal his true identity (or does he?).

- ◆ Superheroes often have superhuman or magical powers (e.g. Spiderman has extremely fast, spider-like reactions and can climb buildings, etc. - and Superman has great, literally super-human, strength).

The Dark Man too has magical powers (healing the sick, closing evil gateways used by demons), although we do not find out in these stories how he came by such powers (surely an opportunity here for creative writing!).

- ◆ All superheroes are 'good guys', although they often have a dark side too (for example Batman, especially in his recent Hollywood incarnations, is obsessive, difficult and brooding).

Is this true of the Dark Man too? He is undoubtedly a 'good guy', but he can be ruthless at times. For example in 'The Dark Waters of Time,' at the end of the story he leaves the girl with the teenagers. He hears a scream but 'cannot care' - he has got what he came for.

- ◆ Similarly, all superheroes face perennial 'bad guys.' Batman faces The Joker, The Riddler, etc. Superman faces Lex Luthor.

The Dark Man faces The Shadow Masters.

- ◆ All superheroes are dedicated to fighting the bad guys (often obsessively so).

Certainly the Dark Man seems to have dedicated himself to the fight against the Shadow Masters. Is he obsessive?

- ◆ Many superheroes have allies. Batman is helped by Robin and by Alfred the butler (who knows his secret).

The Dark Man is helped by The Old Man. But who is The Old Man, and what is his relationship with the Dark Man?

- ◆ Superhero stories involve an ongoing mythology: there is always a past (usually a dark past) and a present. (Spiderman was bitten by a radioactive spider; Batman's parents were killed; Superman came to Earth from planet Krypton, etc.)

The Dark Man too has his past. What do we find out about it from these books?

- ◆ Yet in 'superhero world' the present is always an ongoing present. Stories can be told in any order, the characters never age, plots rarely develop.

To what extent is this also true of the Dark Man stories?

4 The Dark Man Reading Books

The following pages contain, for each of the 12 Dark Man reading books:

- ◆ The level of the story (lower or higher).
- ◆ The complete text of the story.
- ◆ A word count.
- ◆ A complete list of words used in the story.
- ◆ Some topics and questions for class / group discussion.

Set One Books

The Dark Fire of Doom

Level:

Lower.

Full Text:

Chapter One: The Tunnels

Secret tunnels run under the bad part of the city. All the tunnels have a nasty smell. The Dark Man does not care. He has been in the tunnels many times.

The Dark Man cannot see in the tunnel. There is no light. He steps with great care. The Dark Man looks for a magic flame. The Old Man said it was down here.

Chapter Two: The Boy

The Dark Man hears a secret word. He stops. A boy stands in front of him.

“I can take you to the fire,” the boy says.

The Dark Man follows the boy. He cannot see where they are going. After a long walk, the boy stops.

“It is around the corner,” he says.

Chapter Three: The Fire

The Dark Man steps into the new tunnel alone. A flame burns in the side of the wall. This fire is an evil gateway used by demons.

The Dark Man knows what he must do. He puts his hand into the flame. He has no fear so the fire does not burn him.

There is a great flash.

Chapter Four: It is Done

When the Dark Man opens his eyes, he is lying on cool grass. His hand is not burnt. He knows that the Fire of Doom will be gone. He has closed the gateway.

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But there will be others.

The Dark Man can never rest.

Word count:

232 words.

Words used:

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------|
| a | down | light |
| after | evil | long |
| all | eyes | looks |
| alone | fear | lying |
| an | fire | magic |
| are | flame | man |
| around | flash | many |
| bad | follows | must |
| be | for | nasty |
| been | four | never |
| boy | front | new |
| burn | gateway | no |
| burns | going | not |
| burnt | gone | of |
| but | grass | old |
| by | great | on |
| can | hand | one |
| cannot | has | opens |
| care | have | others |
| chapter | he | part |
| city | hears | puts |
| closed | here | rest |
| cool | him | run |
| corner | his | said |
| dark | I | says |
| demons | in | secret |
| do | into | see |
| does | is | side |
| done | it | smell |
| doom | knows | so |

| | | |
|--------|---------|-------|
| stands | three | wall |
| steps | times | was |
| stops | to | what |
| take | tunnel | when |
| that | tunnels | where |
| the | two | will |
| there | under | with |
| they | used | word |
| this | walk | you |

Questions for discussion:

1. The story says that the Dark Man has been in the secret tunnels (under the bad part of the city) many times.
 - ◆ Why might he have been there before?
 - ◆ If the tunnels are secret, how did the Dark Man find out about them?
 - ◆ Who made the tunnels? Why are they secret?
2. The boy is in the secret tunnels too.
 - ◆ How did *he* find out about the tunnels?
3. The Dark Man hears a secret word. Did the boy say it?
 - ◆ Explain what is happening here. Did the boy know he was to meet the Dark Man in the tunnels? If so, did he know the secret word to let the Dark Man know he was the right person?
4. When the Dark Man puts his hand into the fire, the story says that he has no fear, so the flame does not burn him.
 - ◆ Is this magic?
5. The Dark Man closes the gateway used by demons. But there are other gateways.
 - ◆ Do you think that the other gateways are all the same (i.e. fire)? What other types could they be?
 - ◆ Do you think that they must all be closed in the same way?