

# OUT of the SMOKE

## Workbook

Introduction for Educators

# A Note from the Author



When I began writing ‘Out of the Smoke’, I had little idea that it might become the sort of text that teachers could use in classrooms. I set out merely to write an interesting and exciting story that highlighted the work of Lord Shaftesbury through the experience of Billy the chimney sweep, and success in this was all I could hope for. It has taken me quite by surprise that it has found a different sort of life.

In my experience of English lessons and reading time in secondary education, books have tended to be regarded with deep suspicion by the majority of students. They cannot shake the feeling that they are being ‘improved’ by reading, and that enjoyment is a secondary (or even tertiary – or nonexistent!) consideration in the minds of their teachers. Often I have felt that I cannot blame them. The texts they are studying are, by and large, ‘serious’ and ‘important’ works of literature which can, by all means, be enjoyed by literate and enthusiastic readers, but which, invariably, lack the essential accessibility required to engage the mind of the modern teenager.

I consider my attempt at literature to be both serious and important, but I have tried to present it in a tone and style that renders it thrilling and engaging at the same time. By having enjoyment as the primary consideration, I hope that improvement and education will follow. To this end I have put together these worksheets in order to suggest a structure to guided reading time, and to allow teachers to bring an enjoyable book into the classroom with the minimum of guilt.

Guided reading is structured chapter-by-chapter, but feel free to adjust this according to the demands of your own timetable, and do not feel bound to follow this guide too strictly. Above all, remember that reading must be a lively and enjoyable activity, and boredom is to be avoided at all costs!

May this book, and these worksheets, bring many hours of joy to your classroom.

Matthew Wainwright  
August 2021

# How to use this workbook



## Questions

This workbook has been arranged by chapter, with two sets of questions for each:

### Word Analysis

Word analysis questions are a mixture of comprehension and language-based questions. They are designed to encourage close reading of the chapter, whilst avoiding a 'hide-and-seek' attitude to language where students only engage with the words on a surface level. You can set these questions as an independent task, or as a group or whole-class activity.

### Inference

These questions are designed to expand students' thinking beyond the text, and to engage with wider historical, social and literary ideas. They can be set as an independent task, and worksheets are provided for this purpose, but I feel they are best tackled as a group activity to promote discussion.

## Activities

This workbook also contains a range of suggested activities with associated resource pages.

## Hints & Tips

- Use the questions as a jumping-off point for discussion
- Give credit for creative answers that provide evidence and reasoning
- Try to avoid steering around to a single 'right' answer where possible
- Praise students for exploration of language and ideas
- Remember: the aim is for students to enjoy reading and writing, not to feel like it is a chore or a test to be passed!

# About the Author

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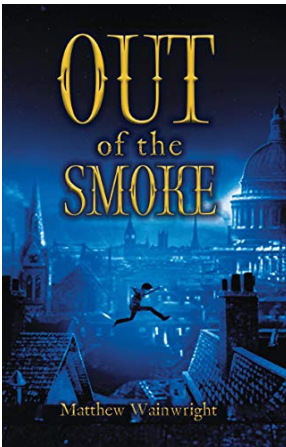


Matthew Wainwright has worked in education for over ten years, both in secondary and FE settings. He lives in Greenwich with his wife and three daughters, and his favourite place to write is in Eltham Palace Gardens.

He has also been involved in children's work for many years with the Metropolitan Tabernacle Baptist Church in Elephant & Castle, working with inner-city children and teenagers. He loves to work with teenagers, and is enthusiastic about school visits and workshops.

# About the Book

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## From the back cover

Plunged into the criminal underworld of Victorian London, Billy the chimney sweep knows he must fight — or die.

But with notorious gang leader Archie Miller closing in on him, every turn he takes only leads to more trouble.

When the 'Poor Man's Earl' offers Billy a chance to exchange his gangland life for an education, Billy must decide if his pride is too high a price to pay, and whether turning on Archie will mean freedom — or certain death.

A thrilling story of faith and survival, based on the work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury.

## Plot

'Out of the Smoke' is the story of a 'climbing boy', Billy, who is forced to go on the run after his best friend, Tosher, steals a silver spoon from a client's house and puts them on the wrong side of local gang boss, Archie Miller. When their friend, a girl called Clara, is shot and wounded in their escape, Billy manages to find her refuge in a ragged school, though her life hangs in the balance. Tosher begs to be allowed to stay, and is accepted, but Billy is considered too violent and unpredictable, and is turned away.

Billy finds employment in the boarding house of Old Sal, picking pockets and selling the spoils back to her in return for a place to sleep and few coins for himself. Escaping from a failed attempt to steal a pocketwatch, Billy scrambles up the side of a house, using the skills he learned as a chimney sweep. He is seen by Flash Jim, Old Sal's chief enforcer, who invites Billy along on a job that evening. The job turns out to be the violent elimination of a rival gang, and Billy is needed to gain access to the gang's headquarters through a high window. Returning to the boarding house, Billy learns that the coup was orchestrated by Archie Miller, who has removed Old Sal and placed Flash Jim in charge of the criminal activities of the neighbourhood.

As a reward for his services, Flash Jim makes Billy one of his 'lads', and Billy becomes accustomed to a life of power and prestige amongst the local lowlifes. But the relationship between Flash Jim and Archie Miller quickly sours, and Flash Jim declares war, enlisting the help of neighbouring gangs to halt the spread of Archie's power across London. Flash Jim marches to Seven Dials in the centre of the slums of Soho to meet up with his allies, but is betrayed by them all, and his gang is ambushed and destroyed.

Billy escapes, and hides in a local theatre where a church service is being held. Some of Archie's men follow him, but the police intervene and Billy is taken to be interviewed by a man called Lord Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury questions Billy about his life, and offers him a secular and religious education as a means to escape it—but Billy is too proud to accept help, and still feels bitter against charity from his experience at the ragged school, and he refuses. Shaftesbury gives him a calling card and tells him to come to him if he is ever in trouble.

Billy plans to leave London and get far away from Archie, but makes the mistake of going back to the boarding house to collect some money, where he finds Archie waiting for him. In a bid to save his own life, Billy proposes that he work for Archie, sweeping chimneys to case wealthy houses and breaking in by descending the chimneys at a later date. Billy settles into a comfortable life again, but he is haunted by his conscience and the memory of Tosher, and cannot find peace. On a burglary job one night he is seen by a young servant boy, who he beats unconscious. This attracts the attention of the police and the press, breaking Archie's cardinal rule. Archie Miller deposes him from his position in the gang and reduces him to the level of a slave, forcing him to climb the chimneys whether he wants to or not. Eventually Billy climbs down the wrong chimney and finds himself trapped behind a blocked-up fireplace. He gives up, ready to die, mourning his short and pointless life.

Billy wakes up in a warm bed in a comfortable room, and is visited by Tosher. He realises he is back in the ragged school. He is visited by Lord Shaftesbury, who tells how Billy was heard weeping behind the fireplace and pulled out, half-dead. The card in his pocket led to Shaftesbury, who arranged for him to be taken in to the ragged school instead of a prison sentence. Shaftesbury relates his own life story and his Christian experience, showing Billy that human misery crosses the class divide, and explaining the reason why someone as high in society as himself should help people as low and desperate as Billy. Once more he offers Billy an education and a useful place in society, and when Billy protests that he is too bad, reminds him that mercy is free, and that Billy only has to accept what is being offered. Shaftesbury leaves Billy in the company of Tosher and Clara, with a glimmer of hope in his future for the first time.



# About the Setting



## Time Period

‘Out of the Smoke’ is set in the **1860s** — however, the exact year is never given, and some artistic license has been taken with certain events. See the back of the book for a timeline of events.

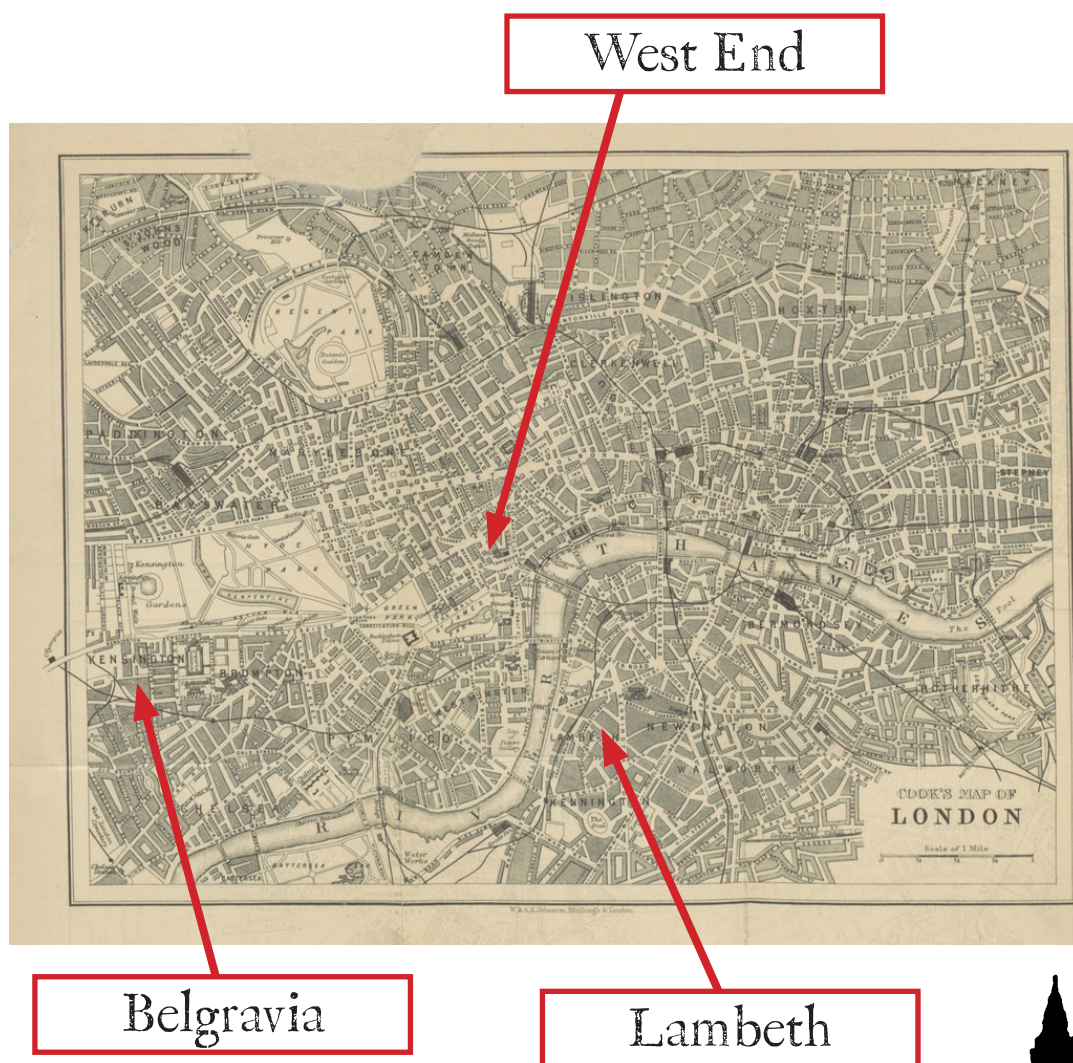
## Location

The book is set primarily in three locations around central London.

**Part 1** takes place mainly in the slums of **Lambeth**

**Part 2** takes place in and around **Soho** and the **West End**

**Part 3** alternates between **Lambeth** and the wealthy neighbourhood of **Belgravia**



# About the Characters



## Billy

A climbing boy, apprenticed to a master sweep named Gerard. Billy is small for his age, skinny, with dark hair. He longs to break out of his life of drudgery, but has little hope of escape. He is bright and shrewd, and is able to look after himself.

The only people he cares for are his fellow sweep, Tosher, and the barmaid at the local pub, Clara. He has a proud streak which will not allow him to accept help, and he will always try to find a way out of trouble by his own strength and wits—although more often than not this only leads to more trouble.

### Key Characteristics:

- Small and weak
- Loyal to his friends
- Uses his wits
- Not very courageous

## Tosher

A climbing boy, friend to Billy, and unofficial deputy to Gerard. Tosher is a year or two older than Billy, taller, but much skinnier. He has a shock of red hair, and prides himself on his appearance as much as he is able to.

Tosher only has a loose connection to reality—he revels in the dangers inherent in his job, and often speaks without thinking. He is prone to idle theft, and doesn't consider the consequences of his actions.

### Key Characteristics:

- The 'class clown'
- Speaks before he thinks
- Always in trouble
- Happy-go-lucky

## Clara

The barmaid at the Eagle and Child, Billy and Toshers pub of choice when they can get to it. She is of mixed heritage, born on a plantation in the West Indies and raised there until she escaped at age twelve and stowed away on a cargo ship to England. She is the adopted daughter of Mr and Mrs Hallam, the owners of the pub.

Fiercely independent and proud, Clara is more than able to look after herself. She can fight as well as any boy her age, and would be able to hold her own against most adults too. She looks on Billy and Tosher like an older cousin might, and gets them drinks at the back door of the pub, gently fending off their clumsy advances. Out of the three of them, she is the most level-headed, though when her temper is up you wouldn't want to cross her!

### Key Characteristics:

- Fierce
- Strong-willed
- Speaks her mind
- Ready to fight

## Archie Miller

Leader of the Devil's Lads, a rapidly-expanding street gang based in a disused warehouse in Lambeth. Archie comes from the West Country, and has never lost his accent. He is tall and wide, and enormously strong—his favourite attack is a single punch to the head, known as the Poleaxe, which can easily kill a man. He is also possessed of a great intelligence and sharp wits, and gets his way as much through bribery and corruption as through outright violence.

He is enamoured of the theories of Charles Darwin, seeing himself as the pinnacle of evolution, the lone victor in nature's long war. He is fascinated by Billy's ability to survive their repeated encounters, which leads him to spare Billy's life on more than one occasion—although this could prove to be his ultimate downfall.

### Key Characteristics:

- Immensely strong
- Highly intelligent
- Cruel
- Ambitious

## Lord Shaftesbury

Anthony Ashley Cooper is the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, a member of the house of lords and a prolific campaigner for the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable in society. His life has been spent passing laws to protect the rights of children and to save them from back-breaking work in the mines, in the factories, and up the chimneys of England.

A committed Christian, he sees it as his duty to God to elevate all humans to a place of honour regardless of their background or upbringing, and he has a special care for disadvantaged children. He is tall and imposing, and does not suffer fools gladly—but he can also be tender-hearted and kind, never trampling on the weak, but always protecting and shielding them.

### Key Characteristics:

- Wise and insightful
- Strong faith
- Kind and sacrificial
- Particularly sympathetic towards children



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All of the characters in the book are fictional, with the exception of Lord Shaftesbury and other politicians. However, they have been deliberately written to reflect a broad range of characteristics and to demonstrate a range of reactions to adverse situations which modern readers will find familiar.

When talking about characters with students, try to emphasise their similarities to modern counterparts rather than their differences.



# Main Themes



## Child exploitation

The main character, Billy, is a climbing boy, apprenticed to a master chimney sweep who abuses him physically and verbally. The other boys in Gerard's care (the 'little 'uns') are also abused, as well as being starved and neglected. Most adults in the book see children as either a nuisance or a commodity, with the exception of Lord Shaftesbury and the staff of the Duke Street Ragged School.

Older children (teens and young adults) also frequently exploit younger children — Old Sal extorts money from Billy, and Flash Jim uses him to help defeat the Bouger and claim more territory. Billy is in his very early teens, but is forced to behave more like an adult due to his circumstances. At the end of the book he sees other children playing and being children, and reflects that he has never had this opportunity in his life.

## Self-reliance vs charity

Billy is intensely independent, and often refuses offers of help. He will only accept help from others as a last resort, or if he is desperate (see chapter 11). He believes he can improve his situation by himself, and comes to the conclusion that others will only slow him down. However, as Billy's financial and physical situation improve throughout the book, his moral and social situation only get worse, until he comes to a literal and figurative dead end in the blocked up chimney in chapter 35. It is only with the intervention of Lord Shaftesbury that there is any hope for Billy at the end of the book — if he is to be saved, he must give up his self-reliance and accept help from someone more powerful than he is.

## Gang lifestyle

Billy's path into gang life, first in Flash Jim's Lads and then in the Devil's Lads, really begins in chapter 16 when Flash Jim gives him back the pocketwatch he had attempted to steal earlier that day. This apparent generosity is typical of older gang members indoctrinating new recruits, especially where those recruits come from an emotionally and financially disadvantaged background.

Billy also finds belonging in his surrogate gang 'family' for the first time, but his relationships are dysfunctional and based on what he does for other people rather than any intrinsic worth. As soon as he ceases to be profitable, or he threatens to endanger the schemes of those whose care he is under, he is discarded and mistreated. This reflects the experience of many young people caught in gangs today, and demonstrates how the basic criminal and abusive principles of gang life are universal and timeless.

## Friendship

Billy forms many attachments and relationships throughout the novel — with Tosher, with Clara, with Old Sal and Flash Jim, as well as Long Paul and Sticks. However, few of these relationships enter into the territory of true friendship, and the person who does Billy the most good is the one with whom he does not necessarily share a close bond: Lord Shaftesbury. There is an emphasis on forming good friendships, and what a good friend looks like. For example, many of those who claim to be Billy's friends are really just exploiting him for what he can give to them, or they take from him unthinkingly without giving anything back.

## Faith

Billy has no religious faith at the beginning of the novel. He is aware of Christianity in very broad terms, but his views are deeply coloured by cynicism of the religious and political system. He knows that churches are places where 'good' people go, but he also knows there is hypocrisy. He undergoes the first stirrings of a spiritual awakening when he hears the sermon and the hymn sung in the church meeting in chapter 25, but these feelings do not come to any kind of fruition by the end of the novel. He is left on the cusp of a decision about his future, including whether he will pursue the kind of faith that Lord Shaftesbury has.

Billy's lack of faith in a higher entity is contrasted with Lord Shaftesbury's absolute certainty and belief in God as a Saviour and as an inspirer of charitable acts. Shaftesbury's entire reason for helping the poor and destitute is his belief that human beings are made in God's image, and that none should have to suffer indignity.

## Survival

Billy survives, but at what moral and emotional cost? This raises questions of what 'survival' really entails. Is it enough to be alive, warm and fed? Or do human beings have deeper needs that must be satisfied?