



This resource pack is based on *Coming Up For Air* by Lou Abercrombie and encourages students' engagement with the ideas and themes of the novel, as well as encouraging creative thinking and research into their local communities.

The tasks are divided into the following categories:

- **Creative reading log** — combines comprehension with media and film skills.
- **Writing activities** — a mixture of fiction and non-fiction activities.
- **Questions** — designed to develop inference and essay writing skills.
- **Cross-curricular activities** — making links between the novel and other subjects.

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# Creative Reading Log

Abercrombie has carefully chosen the titles of her chapters. Each title relates to what happens within the chapter.

After reading each chapter decide on one *key moment* that matches the title.

Imagine you are Coco. Create a social media post in the style of a tweet, Snapchat post or Instagram post from Coco's point of view and add 3 comments by friends and followers.

## Consider:

- Coco's feelings and opinions about the people, places and situations
- how she might choose to express them
- comments her friends and followers might make in response

## OR

Imagine you are a director. Create a scene from a film to show this moment and write a brief director's commentary: an explanation of your directorial choices.

## Consider:

- camera angle
- mise en scène (what can be seen in the shot)
- colour
- lighting
- sound that would be heard in that moment e.g. speech, sound effects, music

## For each essay question posed for Parts One to Three:

- Discuss the focus of the question
- Create a list of words that help you describe character, place and situation in relation to the question, or the ways in which the writer reveals something about character, place and situation in relation to the question – use these in your main points
- Select examples from the novel to support your points
- Explain how your examples prove your points



# Part One

## p. 5-20

1. Read the definitions on p.5 and predict how they might relate to the types of characters and situations that might occur in Part One.
2. Coco James is the protagonist. What do we learn about Coco's personality and interests? What can we infer about her character?
3. What do we learn about Coco's life in London? What can we infer about it?
4. On p.8, Coco reveals that Min calls Piscary Bay 'a hellhole on the edge of the world'. What does this *language* suggest about the way Min feels about her hometown?
5. Read the Wiziwisdom article on p.11. What do you think Coco might like about her new home based on what you have already learned about her?
6. Identify which *persuasive techniques* and words Abercrombie uses in the Wiziwisdom article on p.11 to present Min's hometown positively. Create a table of *techniques* and matching examples. For a challenge, explain how each language technique creates a positive impression.
7. Why might Abercrombie have chosen to present both negative and positive opinions about Piscary Bay before Coco even moves there? Which of these opinions is Coco's first impression more like?
8. How does Abercrombie show Coco's fascination with film? What can we infer about Coco's character?
9. List all of the qualities, skills and responsibilities you think a mother should have. How many of these do you think Coco's mother, Min, has? Can you find examples?
10. Do you think that Coco and Min have the type of mother-daughter relationship people expect parents and children to have? Find examples that show they do and examples that show they do not before you make up your mind.

## Essay questions

- How does Abercrombie present Coco's relationship with her mother?
- How does Abercrombie show that Coco is an artistic and creative girl?

## Writing Activities

Create your own Wiziwisdom page or blog for the place you grew up. Try to make it seem as positive as the Piscary Bay article, using similar persuasive techniques to Abercrombie.

## Cross-curricular Activities

- **PSHRE:** What advice would you give to a friend who finds out they have to move to a new place and start a new school?
- **Music:** On p.8 Coco asks ‘Wouldn’t it be great if we actually did have soundtracks to our lives?’ What would be the soundtrack to your life right now? Create a list of 5 songs/pieces of music and explain how each song/piece of music relates to your life. **OR** create a soundtrack for your day. What would be the soundtrack for getting up this morning? What would it be for going to school? **OR** compose your own piece of music/rap/lyrics to represent a key moment in your life so far.

## p. 21-43

1. How would you describe Min and Henry’s sibling relationship? What makes you think this?
2. Create a Venn diagram showing how Min and Henry are both similar and different.
3. What do we learn about Coco’s new living situation? What can we infer about it?
4. Draw a picture of ‘Cliff House’ and Henry, and label them with details from the novel. For each label, explain what we can infer about the house and Henry from Abercrombie’s *language*.
5. Coco uses *metaphors* to describe her life. On p.19 Coco says her mother is ‘seemingly oblivious to the load I’m now carrying uphill’ and says that is a ‘metaphor for my life if ever there was one!’, and on p.27 Coco says ‘I put my suitcases down, feeling as if a tornado has swept through my life, leaving nothing recognisable.’ What do these two *metaphors* convey (suggest) about Coco’s life and relationships? How do they relate to what we know about her life so far?
6. What do the locals’ terms for people on p.36 connote (suggest) about each group of people? Think about the qualities of fish, zombies and cuckoos and what they are known for. Look at images of each to help you.
7. Compare the chapter ‘Mesmirized’ to the opening on p.7. How are they similar and different? What *idea* do you think Abercrombie is developing here?
8. Which *themes* do you think Abercrombie is exploring in these chapters? Make a list of as many as you can think of.



## Essay questions

- Coco acts more like an adult than the adults in her life. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- How does Abercrombie create and build tension in these chapters?

## Writing Activities

- Create your own metaphors to describe moments in your life. Try to be as inventive and original as you can.
- Go for a walk around the place you live, or find images on the internet, and describe it as the setting for an adventure novel.

## Cross-curricular Activities

**PSHRE:** Describe a place that you like to go to for peace and quiet when your life feels chaotic, or you feel troubled. It's OK if you do not have a place like this. Many people meditate by going to a quiet place in their mind. Create a place in your imagination that can be a place you think about when you are on the bus, or brushing your teeth to help you feel calm about life.

## p. 44-70

1. Make a prediction about the type of trouble Min might have caused before she left home. Has Abercrombie given us any clues?
2. How does Coco try to make friends? What does this tell us about her?
3. Describe the way the locals treat Coco. Why do you think they act this way? Explain whether you think it is fair that people treat Coco this way and why.
4. How does the way people treat Coco make her feel and why?
5. What does Coco's childhood dream (p.53) of 'having a stay-at-home mum who'd bake [her] cupcakes' and 'Min and Bob married with a newborn brother for [her]' suggest about the reality of her life and the type of life she wished she had?
6. Compare Henry's explanation of the locals' terms: fish, zombie and cuckoo on p.57-58 with your interpretations of the terms.
7. In what ways does Coco act irresponsibly in these chapters? What might contribute to her poor decision-making?
8. What more does Abercrombie reveal about the relationships in Coco's family?

## Essay questions

- How does Abercrombie explore the theme of isolation?
- Explore Abercrombie's introduction of the community of Piscary Bay.

## Writing Activities

Create a leaflet that would welcome new students to your school. Think about the group of students you are aiming your leaflet at e.g. Year 7's, refugee children, students who change school mid-year or after spending time in another school, students who have missed school because they are ill etc.

## Cross-curricular Activities

- **PSHRE:** Why do you think people are upset with Coco filming them? What do you think the etiquette should be for filming people and posting on social media?
- Think of a time you have been the new person. How did it feel and why? What did you find difficult? What did you find helpful? Why is it important to make people feel welcome in new places?
- Have you ever been friendly to someone and it hasn't worked? How did this feel? Have you ever experienced the opposite, when you have been rude or unwelcoming to someone trying to be nice to you? If you had the opportunity to apologise to them, what would you say?
- What is prejudice and discrimination? What prejudices about others do some people have? How do people discriminate against others based on their own prejudices?
- Think of the names you have heard people call each other at your school, on social media or in the community. What trait/characteristic is being picked on? Is it fair to judge people on these traits/characteristics? Why do you think people create labels for people? What do you think could be done to help get rid of mean labels and name calling in society, schools, workplaces and on social media platforms? Design positive posters that could help promote this message in your school.
- **Citizenship:** What are the protected characteristics in the UK as stated in the Equality Act 2010? Why is this act important? Are there other things that people pick on that aren't protected by this act? Why do you think some traits are protected by law and others aren't?
- **Art:** Create an artistic map, or piece of art to represent the place that Coco has moved to.



## p. 71-96

1. List all of the expectations people have of old women: interests, appearance, mobility, actions, the way they speak etc. Explain how the surfer on p.72-73 and the shop owner on p.48-49 differ from these expectations. Why might Abercrombie have wanted to present older women that are different to common expectations?
2. The surfer gives Coco the following advice: 'the sea will be different tomorrow, and so will you'. What makes these words comforting?
3. Why does Coco feel better after meeting the surfer and receiving the text from Bob?
4. Why do you think Coco decides to tell everyone her name? What does she hope will happen? Does telling people her name change anything? Why/why not? What do you think Abercrombie's message might be about people's names and labels?
5. Coco continues to make some poor decisions. Identify them and explain which choices you think she should have made instead and why.
6. Make a list of the people Coco begins to make friends with and who she still struggles to make friends with. What do you notice about the difference between these two groups of people? Why do you think she finds making friends with some people easier than others?

## Essay questions

- To what extent do you agree that Coco is an optimistic character?
- How does Abercrombie subvert (undermine) the expectations society has of older women?

## Writing Activities

Like Coco, many writers enjoy people-watching. Find a nice spot to sit in a busy part of the village/town/city that you live in and people watch. Make notes or sketches of what you see and hear. Create a description of the community you live in. Remember to use vivid imagery.

## Cross-curricular Activities

**Geography and Science:** Research your local wildlife. Do not worry if you live in an urban environment, even London has foxes! Which animals are native and which are non-native to your area? What are their habitats like? What threatens their survival? Create a conservation leaflet informing people about the local wildlife, the threats they face and how visitors and locals can protect them *and* enjoy their presence safely.

## p. 97-126

1. Throughout the novel, Abercrombie includes information about the tides and the rising and setting of both the sun and moon. Usually, when writers make repeated references to something, it means it is important. What do you think the importance of the 'Piscary Bay Tide Times' is?
2. Abercrombie reveals more about uncle Henry. What else do we learn about him?
3. How does the presentation of Adele Quartermaine differ from the presentation of Min?
4. On p.112 Abercrombie provides information about the illness ME. Why do you think she includes it in the novel?
5. How does knowing what ME is change your first impressions of Henry?
6. Return to the description of Cliff House and Henry. What were the signs that Henry had ME?
7. Why do you think Abercrombie reveals that Henry has ME after Coco meets her uncle and not before? What might she be trying to achieve?
8. How does Coco's attempt to help her uncle make him feel and why?
9. What do you think Abercrombie might like readers to think and feel about people who have ME and long-term illness in general?

## Essay questions

- Some might say that Min is selfish. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- How does Abercrombie create sympathy for uncle Henry?

## Writing Activities

Imagine the adult you would like to become. Create a Wiziwisdom page about yourself.

## Cross-curricular Activities

- **PSHRE:** What might be the physical, mental, social and emotional strains of having a long-term illness? How might your age affect your experience of a long-term illness? What might be the strains on the family and friends of someone with a long-term illness? Do you think long-term illnesses and disabilities are viewed differently by society? How can society help support people with long-term illnesses and/or disabilities?
- How might always taking your phone out effect your interactions with people who share your physical space with you? When you interact with your phone more than your environment, what might you miss? Do you find it difficult to leave your phone in your pocket? If so, why? If not, what advice could you give people who are really attached to using their phones?



## p. 127-154

1. Why do the local children refuse to be friends with Coco? Is it only because she isn't a local?
2. How and why does Coco's relationship with her uncle improve?
3. What big secret is revealed in Part One?
4. How has this secret affected Coco? How was she affected by this secret before she even discovered it?
5. What makes the moment Coco tries to talk to her grandmother dramatic? Why?
6. What makes it difficult for Coco to get to know her father's family?
7. Why do you think Coco shouts at her mother at the end of Part One?
8. Return to the definitions on p.5 and reflect on Part One. How does the definition of apnoea relate to this part of the novel?

## Essay questions

How does Abercrombie create a dramatic ending to Part One?

## Writing Activities

Rewrite the moment Coco meets her grandmother and aunt. Using the details from the novel, imagine how the conversation would have gone if Min hadn't turned up.

## Cross-curricular Activities

- **PSHRE:** Discuss the situation Coco finds herself in. Coco decides to introduce herself to her grandmother in a public place, without her mother's permission. Was there anything she should have done differently? Why do you think her mother kept her away from her father's family? What do you think about this? How could Min have handled things differently?
- **Film:** Storyboard or film one of the dramatic moments from the end of Part One. Consider how you will use camera shots, lighting, sound and the appearance of the actors to heighten the drama of the scene.

## Part Two

### p. 157-186

1. After reading the definitions of p.157, predict how they might relate to what might occur in the second part of the novel.
2. In Part One, Coco used metaphors to describe her life. On p.159, she refers to the literary technique *pathetic fallacy*. How does the weather in the chapter 'Pathetic Fallacy' reflect her life at that moment?
3. How do things start to change for the better in Coco's household after the storm?
4. What reason does Min give for not telling Coco more about the night her father died? Why do you think Abercrombie reveals Min's side of the story at this point in the novel?
5. How and why might the reader's opinion of Min change?
6. Why do you think Coco agrees not to introduce herself to her father's family?
7. Why is the family trip to the fish and chip shop significant?
8. Why does Coco compare herself to a remora fish and Bennie to a shark?
9. Why does Coco enjoy spending time with Sprout?
10. Why might Coco find it easier to become friends with Shiv than with the other teens?

### Essay questions

How does Abercrombie present Coco's family life in these chapters?

### Writing Activities

Imagine you are Coco. Create the script for a vlog that gives tips on how to make friends.



## p. 187-217

1. What do we learn about Shiv? Which qualities does she have that might make her a good friend to Coco?
2. What makes the moment that Sprout is stuck on the rock dramatic? Can you link it to anything Abercrombie has already revealed?
3. On p.195, Leo does not give Coco his usual 'eye-roll' when she shows her ignorance about the sea. Why do you think this is? What can we infer about Leo?
4. The teenagers draw a line in the sand on the beach to show their differences, but what do they have in common?
5. Why is Coco so interested in Morvoren cave?
6. Why do you think Leo is so interested in the cave?

## Essay questions

- How does Abercrombie explore the theme fairness?
- How does Abercrombie explore the theme secrecy?

## Writing Activities

Write a short story about a fun moment you had on holiday. If you have never been away from the place you grew up, turn a fun moment you had during the school holidays into a short story.

## Cross-curricular Activities

- **PSHRE:** Discuss the situation with Sprout stranded on the rock. Sprout asks Shiv not to tell their mother and Shiv agrees. Why didn't they want their mother to know? Do you think this is the kind of secret you should keep from your parents/guardians? Why/why not? Why would a parent/guardian want to know about this situation even if everything turned out fine?
- **Local history:** Research the local myths and legends for the area you live in, or grew up in. Write 1-2 paragraphs about what you find interesting about at least one of the stories.
- **Art and textiles:** Create a piece of art or textile to represent the secret beach, underwater scenes and Morvoren cave based on Abercrombie's description.

## p. 218-242

1. How do uncle Henry's and Min's response to Coco having a bonfire differ? Which reaction is more like what you would expect from an adult?
2. On p.227 Amy says Coco has a 'superior London attitude.' Do you think this is fair? Why/why not?
3. List the ways Abercrombie conveys that Min is immature to the reader.
4. How does Min's appearance at the bonfire stop the progress Coco was making and why?
5. What else do we learn about why Amy and Leo do not like outsiders? Where does their hatred come from?
6. Why do you think Leo wants to help Coco be a better free diver?

## Essay questions

How does Abercrombie explore the theme hatred?

## Writing Activities

Imagine your parent or guardian decided to get involved in one of your parties. Are they fun or embarrassing? Write a short story about what happens.

## Cross-curricular Activities

**PSHRE:** Discuss Min's parenting skills. How might having a child at seventeen have contributed to the way she acts? How might her own mother's parenting style have affected her parenting skills.



## p. 243-261

1. What do both Shiv and Coco find difficult in their mother-daughter relationships?
2. What does the inclusion of articles about freediving and mermaids add to the story?
3. Why do you think Leo is kind to Coco and not kind to Shiv?
4. In what ways is Coco both a good and bad friend to Shiv?
5. Why does Dave seem confused by Leo inviting Coco and Shiv on the mermaid trip?
6. In what ways have both Shiv and Coco been irresponsible in these chapters?
7. What indicates that something bad might happen?

## Essay questions

How does Abercrombie explore the theme friendship?

## Writing Activities

Imagine a time when you were scared about doing something daring e.g. climbing a tall tree, going on a rollercoaster, using a zipline. Write a short description of the moments leading up to the event. Build tension in your writing.

## Cross-curricular Activities

- **PSHRE:** On p.244, Coco reveals more about her relationship with Min. She says, 'I don't tell Min anything' and advises Shiv not to tell Adele about the free diving trip. Do you think this is good advice? Why/why not? Why might this not be good advice to give a friend?
- What do you think Adele could learn from Min's parenting style and what could Min learn from Adele's?
- **Geography:** Research communities who free dive. Write an article about them for a Geography magazine for primary school students.

## p. 262-288

1. Why do you think that Shiv persists in trying the freediving techniques even though she is petrified of swimming in the sea?
2. What *language* does Abercrombie use to convey Coco's love of free diving?
3. How does Coco continue to be both a good and bad friend to Shiv?
4. Shiv asks Coco 'what am I even doing here?'. Why do you think Coco wanted Shiv to go on the trip with Leo even though she knows her two friends don't like each other?
5. Compare the reactions of the three mothers. What do their reactions tell us about them and their relationships with their children?
6. Do you think Adele is right to say Coco is a bad friend?
7. Discuss/debate whose fault you think it is for what happened to Shiv.
8. On p.279, Min says to her brother 'and what would you know about parenting, eh, Henry?' Who do you think has the better parenting skills in this situation?
9. How does the ending of Part Two show that in some way Min's fears about Coco getting to know her aunt and grandmother have come true?
10. Return to the definitions on p.157 and reflect on Part Two. How do the definitions of struggle and the struggle phase relate to this part of the novel?

## Essay questions

- How does Abercrombie present mothers?
- How does Abercrombie present teenagers?

## Writing Activities

Imagine you are Adele left on the rock while Leo and Coco go swimming. Write a first person description or monologue about the experience. Remember to convey fear and tension.

## Cross-curricular Activities

- **PSHRE:** Discuss how parents and guardians can make you feel safe and loved, without feeling smothered. Consider the importance of telling your parents and guardians about where you are going at all times.
- Discuss how the teenagers could have been more responsible in these chapters.



## Part Three

### p. 291-323

1. Read the definitions of p.291, predict how they might relate to what might occur in the third part of the novel.
2. What has brought Bob to Piscary Bay?
3. Draw a picture of Bob, Coco, Henry and Min based on Abercrombie's descriptions from different parts in the novel and explain why they stand out so much when they walk around Piscary Bay.
4. Why do you think Coco might feel more out of place at the Burbank Hotel now than she would have when she first arrived from London?
5. What might the reader think and feel about Coco's argument with her mother?
6. How do things change at Cliff House after Bob's visit?
7. Why do you think Coco reveals her secret to Shiv?
8. Both Sarah and Adele have accused Coco as being like her mother. Draw a Venn Diagram comparing Coco to Min. How similar are they?
9. Find examples of Coco and Shiv taking responsibility for their actions.
10. Why might the visit to the cave be a good idea? Why might it be a bad idea?

### Essay questions

How does Abercrombie explore the theme of responsibility?

### Writing Activities

Predict what happens next. Write the chapter about what happens in the cave.

### Cross-curricular Activities

**Geography and Sport:** Research the safety precautions and equipment cave explorers take when exploring underwater caves. Write a safety pamphlet for people who want to explore underwater caves.

### **p. 323-343**

1. What safety precautions did Coco, Leo and Shiv take? Do you think they were enough? Was there anything else they should have done?
2. Identify what makes this trip dangerous.
3. Identify the ways the teenagers demonstrate bravery.

### **Essay questions**

How does Abercrombie convey danger?

### **Writing Activities**

Write an anecdote about a time you showed bravery or a time you did something dangerous.

### **p. 344-362**

1. How does the community come together? When have we seen the town's differences been set aside before? Are there similarities/differences?
2. How do the teenagers show their parents' generation how to behave?
3. Why do you think everyone eventually agrees to stop using the labels: fish, cuckoo and zombie?

### **Essay questions**

- How does Abercrombie explore the theme of friendship?
- Compare and contrast how Abercrombie presents the community in Part One and Part Three

### **Writing Activities**

Script a dramatic scene between two to four characters in which a secret is revealed. Think about who reveals the secret and why, and the reactions of the other people there. Remember to set the scene.



## Cross-curricular Activities

**Geography and history:** What reasons do people have for migrating to other parts of the country or world? Research the history of migration into your village/town/city and remember, not all migrants come from other countries! Consider: What did the migrants wish to leave behind? What did they think your village/town/city had to offer e.g. natural beauty, rich history, jobs in the mines/factories etc. How has your village/town/city benefited from migration e.g. cuisine, architecture, art? What difficulties has your village/town/city experienced because of migration and why? Have some migrants been more accepted than others? Why might this be? Create a blog post, in your own words, about your local history of migration. Include images if you can.

## Final Thoughts

- Throughout the novel Abercrombie uses italics to make references to film techniques. What do you think they add to the story? Do you think they refer to real camera shots that Coco is filming, or do you think they are just her thoughts? What does this tell you about Coco's character?
- Throughout the novel Abercrombie intersperses the narration with different examples of media and communication such as websites, text messages, leaflets etc. What do you think the use of multi-media adds to the story?
- The novel is split into three parts. How would you define the narrative arc? How do the characters develop over the three parts.
- What do the definitions at the beginning of each part of the novel add to the story?
- Names seem to be important in the novel. Consider the importance of the following: surnames e.g. James, Pengelly, Min, introducing yourself by name, naming the fish in the tank, labels.