

They stepped forward in turn, all adopting the same relaxed hand position as the first boy. Except for the messenger. He presented his hands stiff, fingers splayed, thumbs up. The full force of both strokes caught him thumbs first, cracking across the side of the knuckle bone.



The first stroke made him cry. The second made him sick.

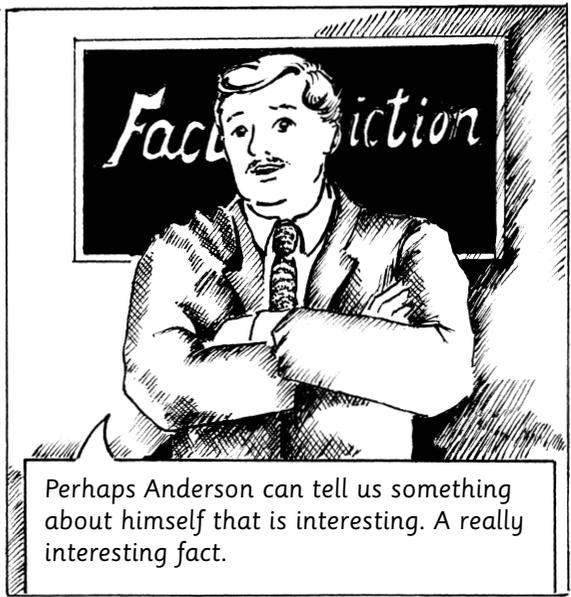
The boys leave with stinging, blistered hands and return to lessons. Billy joins Mr Farthing's class. He is giving a lesson on the difference between fact and fiction.



I've been to see Mr Gryce, Sir.

Yes, I know. Sting?

Not bad.



Perhaps Anderson can tell us something about himself that is interesting. A really interesting fact.



- Verbal and physical abuse are just the norm for Billy, at home and at school.
- The sympathy shown by Mr Farthing is rare.

Anderson describes a day when he went tadpoling with a friend called Reggie. The tadpoles are easy to catch, but the boys have no container to put them in to get them home.

'Well it was once when I was a kid. I was at Junior school, I think, or somewhere like that, and went down to Fowlers Pond, me and this other kid. Anyway it was Spring, tadpole time, and it's swarming with tadpoles down there in Spring. So this kid, Reggie, says, 'Take thi wellingtons off and put some in there, they'll be all right 'til tha gets home.' So I took 'em off and we put some water in 'em and then we started to put taddies in 'em. We kept ladling 'em in and I says to this kid, 'Let's have a competition, thee have one welli' and I'll have t'other, and we'll see who can get most in!'

'You ought to have seen 'em, all black and shiny, right up to t'top. When we'd finished we kept dipping us fingers into 'em and whipping 'em up at each other, all shouting and excited like. Then this kid says to me, 'I bet tha daren't put one on.'

So I took my socks off, and I kept looking at this welli' full of taddies, and this kid kept saying, 'Go on then, tha frightened, tha frightened.' I was an' all. Anyway I shut my eyes and started to put my foot in. Oooo. It was just like putting your feet into live jelly. They were frozen. And when my foot went down, they all came over t'top of my wellington, and when I got my foot to t'bottom, I could feel 'em all squashing about between my toes.

'Anyway I'd done it, and I says to this kid, 'Thee put thine on now.' But he wouldn't, he was dead scared, so I put it on instead. I'd got used to it then, it was all right after a bit; it sent your legs all excited and tingling like. When I'd got 'em both on I started to walk up to this kid, waving my arms and making spook noises; and as I walked they all came squelching over t'tops again and ran down t'sides. This kid looked frightened to death, he kept looking down at my wellies so I tried to run at him and they all spurted up my legs. You ought to have seen him. He just screamed out and ran home roaring.

'It was a funny feeling though when he'd gone; all quiet, with nobody there, and up to t'knees in tadpoles.'

Silence. The class up to their knees in tadpoles.



- How would you describe Anderson's story – funny, vivid, disgusting, cruel, weird, interesting? What is it that holds your attention?
- What does the author mean by 'Silence. The class up to their knees in tadpoles'?