



Teachers' notes by
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The Children of the King
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The Australian Curriculum Years 5 and 6

The English curriculum is built around the three interrelated strands of Language, Literature and Literacy. Teaching and learning programs should balance and integrate all three strands. Together the strands focus on developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating. Learning in English builds on concepts, skills and processes developed in earlier years, and teachers will revisit and strengthen these as needed.

Students engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read, view, interpret and evaluate spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade. These include various types of media texts including newspapers, film and digital texts, junior and early adolescent novels, poetry, non-fiction and dramatic performances. Students develop their understanding of how texts, including media texts, are influenced by context, purpose and audience.

Literary texts that support and extend students in Years 5 and 6 as independent readers describe complex sequences, a range of non-stereotypical characters and elaborated events including flashbacks and shifts in time. These texts explore themes of interpersonal relationships and ethical dilemmas within real-world and fantasy settings. Informative texts supply technical and content information about a wide range of topics of interest as well as topics being studied in other areas of the curriculum. Text structures include chapters, headings and subheadings, tables of contents, indexes and glossaries. Language features include complex sentences, unfamiliar technical vocabulary, figurative language, and information presented in various types of graphics. Students create a range of imaginative, informative and persuasive types of texts such as narratives, procedures, performances, reports, reviews, explanations and discussions.

English Achievement Standard

Receptive modes (listening, reading and viewing)

By the end of Year 6, students understand how the use of text structures can achieve particular effects. They analyse and explain how language features, images and vocabulary are used by different authors to represent ideas, characters and events.

Students compare and analyse information in different texts, explaining literal and implied meaning. They select and use evidence from a text to explain their response to it. They listen to discussions, clarifying content and challenging others' ideas.

Productive modes (speaking, writing and creating)

Students understand how language features and language patterns can be used for emphasis. They show how specific details can be used to support a point of view. They explain how their choices of language features and images are used.

Students create detailed texts elaborating on key ideas for a range of purposes and audiences. They make presentations and contribute actively to class and group discussions, using a variety of strategies for effect. They demonstrate understanding of grammar, make considered choices from an expanding vocabulary, use accurate spelling and punctuation for clarity and make and explain editorial choices.

More information on The Australian Curriculum can be found at <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>.

Source for curriculum

ACARA: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2011). *The Australian Curriculum v1.2: English Foundation to Year 10 Curriculum*. Retrieved December 2011, from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Curriculum/F-10>

Teaching Notes

It is the Second World War, and Cecily, twelve, and her fourteen-year-old brother, Jeremy, are travelling with her mother to their uncle's house, Heron Hall, north of London. The children's parents think it is no longer safe for them in the city, though Father will stay as he has an important role in the war. While Cecily does not want to leave her much-loved father, Jeremy does not want to be sent away as if he were a useless child afraid of danger. They are joined by a ten-year-old evacuee, May, when Mother is reluctantly prompted to do her bit for the war effort. In the background, the war continues with Hitler's advances across Allied Europe and England preparing for invasion.

A story-within-a story adds a further level of historical narrative and provides for the intersection of the past and the present, when May and Cecily discover two strangely dressed boys hiding in the ruins of Snow Castle on the family property. Their identity and fate are unraveled when Uncle Peregrine recounts a story from history. Connections across hundreds of years demonstrate that past circumstances shape contemporary events, especially for individuals.

This is a meticulously crafted story that would ideally be read and explored slowly, as twists and turns and connections could be discussed and predictions made: an ideal text for advanced study. Some readers will want to immerse themselves in the worlds of the past, and further explore events presented and interpreted here.

Style of telling

- This story will remind adult readers of stories they read as children, especially those set during war. The author is all powerful in this novel and readers are positioned as informed observers of events and people, rather than being inside the heads of the characters.

Gripping opening

- Consider the ways in which author creates tension.
- What indicates that this is a game rather than a serious threat? (e.g. Cecily smiles, p2; she hears 'oof' not a curse; p2 'soft light' rather than the scarier harsh light; light 'radiated' onto the face wearing a gas mask described as 'silvery goggles' but then a 'horrible snout' (p2).
- Well captured is that childhood thrill of loving to be scared, but only to a point.
- Talk about the purpose of such an opening which describes playing at fearfulness, set against the wider context of war (p5): the whole world hiding in darkness more sinister than a child's game.

Characters

- Each of the characters is observed closely, and it would be valuable to construct character portraits of each of them as they are commented on, as they react to events and each other, and through the ways in which events in the novel change them. Each is complex. The author leaves plenty of space for readers to interpret characters and their behavior.

Cecily

- is on the cusp of childhood and adolescence and we see her behavior fluctuate between childishness and the beginnings of maturity. She is completely indulged, and her emotions and reactions are often ambivalent. Does this make her irritating, or understandable, or both?
- P5 she is described as 'chubby and plain'.
- P6 shows resilience as she doesn't let Jeremy's jibes get to her.
- P22 has a kind heart when she sees the evacuee children. Why does she want to take one? She wants 'every homeless kitten and pup she saw'.
- P23 why does she see taking three children as 'greed' and not generosity? What does this tell us about her?
- Her reactions to May are revealing (p33): she wanted someone who felt obligated and grateful.
- P34 'I want to be proud of you' she says to May. Do you understand her motives?
- P40 she is very bossy and constantly criticises and instructs (p43). Does this suggest she is insensitive, or not very bright? She doesn't seem to be bothered about not knowing things.
- Yet, on page 57 we are told she has a kind heart.
- P64 'a follower', needy.
- Bossy, and a snob (p111) and fiercely loyal to her father.
- P264 the sadness of growing up. Why does she wish he had been awake? Is she resisting leaving the certainty of childhood?
- Is it fair to say that Cecily is a mix of contradictions?

Jeremy

- P5 slender and moody, haughty, not pleased to have a sister, in Cecily's view. Blond, brown eyes. Very bossy and critical of his younger sister.
- P13 Cecily thinks he has 'towering dignity', but he is still a boy.
- Wants to stay in London. Not afraid. Doesn't want to be seen as a child.
- P55 Is he a snob as his remarks about the village school might suggest?
- P120 wants to be an archaeologist but won't be allowed to. May, from a different background, doesn't understand this, that he is bounded by the restrictions and expectations of his class. Jeremy is on the cusp of change, not only personally: does he represent the necessary change in the conservatism of his class that the war challenges?
- P129 why does he shout that he could kill a man?

- P131 Is the housekeeper right? Does Jeremy just want to be useful, or is it more complicated than that?
- Does he display the courage of youth, or naivety?
- P134 he makes himself useful to the girls – educating them. What is his motivation here?
- P244 after he returns from his experience in London, he has the 'air of a prophet'? Is there any connection with the biblical story of the Prodigal son? Jeremy moves from childhood to adulthood. Consider that this is one of the ideas in the novel – the crossing of thresholds.
- P250 describes what he does in London to save the family.
- P256 he thinks of the power of the boys against the Duke, and that gives him strength. Power is a major theme of the novel. Consider what Jeremy says about what he did on page 257: 'Mightier than what power was doing, with its bombs and guns'. Discuss the significance of what Jeremy did – the value of action on a personal scale rather than on a national or global one.

Mrs. Heloise Lockwood

- From the way she is described, it appears that the author is not fond of Mrs. Lockwood. For example, on page 13 she is depicted as making a 'viper noise'.
- P17 tells us that she is distanced from her children: she 'observes them'. Is she also constructed by her class about how she should behave?
- P21 she is worried about her possessions and how valuable they are.
- P24 she is vain: she won't argue fearing it will give her wrinkles.
- P25 she is wearing 'her martyr's smile'.
- P22 her relationship with her son is complex: she 'always paused for her son', and yet later she threatens to send him away.
- P67 Look closely at what Cecily says about her mother: 'you can be mean and nice'.
- P85 '...her voice had more icing than the lemon cake.'
- P86 she is the kind of person 'who disliked, and was disliked'. This exchange on pages 84-86 would make for a revealing example of readers' theatre.
- P86 she not interested in what the girls are interested in, 'perched atop a high wall of boredom'.
- P111 she does nothing towards the war effort. She has lived a life of privilege.
- She is judged harshly by the author. Why is this? Is she eventually redeemed? Do you think the author is asking us to look beyond the personal here and think about the society that has produced Mrs. Lockwood?
- Imagine you are inside the head of Mrs. Lockwood. How do you feel – constrained, purposeless, frustrated, bored, and unhappy? What leads you to feel this way? Write a short diary piece, for example about your feelings about Jeremy.

Mr. Humphrey Lockwood

- Although he only appears briefly at the beginning of the novel, he is a presence throughout – Cecily loves him dearly and fiercely, and Jeremy longs to prove himself to his father.
- P7 Mr. Lockwood is realistic about the war, even pessimistic, believing that England will fall after France.
- He is a loving father but the children know he has an iron will.
- He understands his daughter as his letter reveals (p57).

Mr. Peregrine Lockwood

- Is a central adult figure in the book. It is worthwhile noticing how Cecily and May in particular, respond to him, and he to them.
- The author tells us on page 20 that 'around him, the world fell gracefully into place'. Is this complimentary? Does he attract this circumstance or does it signify privilege?
- P35 'a gentlemen who preferred not to be rough-housed'.
- P36 he appears to May on her first encounter with him 'like a wily criminal from an adventure tale': tall and lean with long hair, black eyes, mysterious. There is an air of tragedy surrounding him because of the death of his wife and child.
- P36 there was something about him that made you feel he knew more about you than you did – is he wise then?
- Why does May bow? Why is Jeremy not surprised when she does?
- He had polio and walks with a limp. Besides a link with Shakespeare's version of Richard 111, why do you think the author gave him this physical imperfection? Does it suggest vulnerability, or perhaps incite compassion, or signify something else entirely?
- P54 We can tell he likes May by how he banter with her.
- Pp61-2 'Peregrine Lockwood was clever, and like all clever people he liked to share his cleverness around.' Does this suggest he is arrogant or genuinely knowledgeable?
- P140 lion imagery – 'mane of hair', a 'lean lion' suggests associations we make to 'king of the jungle' or 'king of the beasts'. Is the world a jungle: there are certainly many references to animal like behavior throughout the story?

May Bright

- Her name is no accident, so consider the associations readers make, and expectations they have of her from her name.
- Although two years younger, she is a complete contrast to volatile, messy, clumsy Cecily.
- P27 when Cecily first encounters May she thinks that 'the glint in her eyes suggested she could live could live off scraps and sleep soundly in hay'. She is not impressed by Cecily's offer. How do readers react to their introduction to May?
- P30 she says of herself 'I'm not scared of anything'. Is this bravado or do you believe her?
- P31 she chooses not to share a bedroom with Cecily. Does this reveal her quick recognition that she will be under Cecily's rule and that she values her independence?
- P32 her reaction to Cecily's demonstrations of wealth is matter of fact and without the envy Cecily intends to engender: 'My family

doesn't have lots of money like yours does'. Why is she not overawed by such wealth?

- P38 she reveals that her father is a soldier in France: he volunteered (observant readers will not a reference to 'king' here).
- P44 she makes herself at home at Heron Hall.
- We are told who and what May likes – the staff and the countryside, whereas Cecily does not. At this stage in the story are we meant to like May more than Cecily?
- Her father was a teacher and she is better educated than Cecily: she knows a lot more. P59 the education/interest offered by her father. Is this as much about him as about May?
- She is a serious little girl, but we discover why. Why do you think she does not reveal the fate of her father until late in the story?

Princes' story:

- P143 Edward is twelve years old and well educated. If students don't know the story of the princes in the tower then there is some opportunity here for speculation, and possible research of the historical record.
- P143 we are given his mother's expectations for him. Are there resonances with Mrs. Lockwood's for Jeremy, such as her desire for him to inherit Heron Hall?
- P151 he is clever and understands what is happening to him. Again readers can be invited to imagine how he feels and write diary entries while he is in the tower.
- P152 Richard is only nine when he joins his brother in the tower. Jeremy asks (p153) whether Edward was glad to see his brother. He and Cecily have different opinions on that. Invite readers to role play that meeting taking Cecily's view, and then Jeremy's. Whose view do readers agree with?
- How do readers reconcile the princes in Peregrine's story with the ones the girls meet at Snow Castle?

Stages in the plot:

This story has complex plotting: there is a story within a story that nevertheless, is not independent of the main narrative but connects intimately with it. Below are some examples of significant moments in the story. A valuable activity during the reading and sharing of the story could be for readers to plot what they think are major stages in the development of the events being told, and why. Predictions can be made from the chapter titles.

- Opening chapter: this is careful scene setting. Consider its purposes and how the reader is invited into the story. What sort of story do readers predict will unfold?
- Evacuation: Cecily and Jeremy want to take an evacuee: Cecily because she has a soft heart and Jeremy because it is the right thing to do.
- P24 Jeremy tells Cecily to choose one who will be her friend. What does that tell us about him? P26 Cecily chooses May, ten years old – dark shiny hair, cobalt blue eyes.
- P51 May finds the ruins of Snow Castle – 'as hard as winter' (p60). It is over five hundred years old and built of white marble.

- P72 Cecily meets the two boys for the first time.
- P73 the boys don't reveal their names, creating a sense of mystery about them. Consider what they are wearing, their longish hair; they are as different as May and Cecily are different. Why would the girls need to be safe about not knowing them?
- P76 the puzzle of the boys – why do they say 'peasants'? Why do they say Snow Castle does not exist?
- Consider the deliberate juxtaposition of children being sent away – the boys and May.
- P79 Cecily makes wrong assumptions; May is more insightful about them. Why do you think May knows more?
- P82 their clothes remind Cecily of a pantomime.
- Pp129 the argument between mother and son; p177 Heloise threatens Jeremy with boarding school.
- P192 May starts to identify the boys in the ruins. Do readers already know who they are?
- P202 why is May desperate to talk to ghosts? We are beginning to understand about her father.
- P203 Jeremy leaves.
- P215 Cecily is horrible to May and blames her for Jeremy's disappearance.
- P219 completion of Peregrine's story.
- P233 May tells Cecily they are not friends, and they go to find the boys.
- P239 the boys work out that May wants them to find the ghost of her father. Is that their purpose in appearing to the girls?
- P240 are the boys sacrificed so that Jeremy can grow up – grow old? Edward understands the future his brother is giving up. Consider this in the light of the beginning of the story when Father says it is the duty of children to live to grow older (p10).
- P241 This time it is May offering her father to help the boys rather than Cecily. How important is this to May?
- P242 for the second time May bows. What does this suggest?
- Pp243 Jeremy comes home and tells of his time in London. Notice that the chapter title is 'A Hero Found'. In what senses is Jeremy a hero?
- Final chapter: 'What is true': p259 Peregrine understands why Jeremy had to go? Discuss readers' opinions on why he had to go.
- P260 do you agree that it was Jeremy's anger that gave him strength, or like May, that the ghost boys' final act was to pave the way for Jeremy's brave, self-defining act?
- Pp263 when Jeremy finds his father asleep, he initially sees this as signifying his father's cowardice. When his father awakes, he sees him as the man he loves. What is the significance of this change in perception?
- P265 Cecily comforts May by reminding her of what she remembers about her father: have all the qualities of Cecily come together here? Is she crossing the threshold to maturity?
- P266 why do you think Peregrine and May become surrogate parent/child to each other? Why does Peregrine give May the locket, and who is the portrait of? What does it suggest about the

connections between Peregrine and the story he told of the princes and the Duke?

Language: Animal metaphors and similes

- Readers will notice the frequent use of animal references, such as (p4) cuddled her 'like lion'. What does it tell us about Father?
- There are many such references throughout the novel and readers can be invited to consider what each suggests, such as the relationship between animals and humans, especially children, and/or perhaps that in the context of war our animal instincts come to the fore.
- Readers can be invited to identify those they find evocative, and to consider their resonances.
- This also applies to vivid similes and metaphors, analogies, strong verbs, neologisms, which can be stimulating models for students' writing. Students can be encouraged to enrich their own writing through thinking of original similes, metaphors, analogies, personification etc, rather than reverting to adjectives and adverbs. Some examples follow but students can be encouraged to identify ones they enjoy.
- P8 face 'as stony as a marble Madonna's'.
- P13 her fingernail is 'singing a siren's song'.
- P20 'wide-eyed and wittering': use of alliteration and a neologism.
- P65 May's 'treasure-chest eyes'.
- P68 use of comparisons to describe the scale of the castle: '...arched doorways wide enough for processions to pass through...'
- P114 Cecily 'puddled to the floor'.
- P117 'the books...puffed out clouds of elderly breath when they were opened'.
- P167 '...his voice was like the skeleton of a leaf, his smile a cradle for all the sorrow history has known.'

Imagery

- There are plangent descriptions in the text using vivid details, such as Pp-413 the picture of the railway station full of children.
- Pp68-9 the description of the ruined castle is similarly detailed and evocative, as is the description of the bombing of London (pp135-9), but most of all London as seen through the eyes of a shocked Jeremy (pp246-257).
- Again this is stimulating for students' writing: identify the amount of detail included to take reader inside the city, right into the destruction and how it feels to be there.
- Invite students to imagine themselves in a similar scenario: it could be in the past, now, in the future. Have them record what they are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling.

Ideas

- Apart from its major preoccupations with the effects of war, power (p151): 'Children have always borne the brunt of decisions made by adults...children have no power, that's why') change, and the shaping roles of societies and historical periods on individuals, there are many moments in the text worth exploring in terms of the story

itself and wider resonances. Some are indicated below, but there are sure to be others that readers will want to talk about:

- P10 'Your duty is to live to grow older'. Does this mark a clear difference between views of child and parent? How can living be a duty?
- P14 evacuating children without parents – hearts broken for their own good: the gap between adult and child world again. Discuss how readers view this – as abandonment or care.
- P15 class differences: first class for the Lockwood's and cattle class for the children.
- P56 attitudes to war: 'But there are times when men's lives can't matter as much as what they must be used for.' Do readers agree? Does this apply to women's and children's lives as well?
- P61 'Ghosts are nothing to fear. It's *real life* you should worry about.'
- P80 May's outburst about living with strangers, being separated from her parents. In retrospect we understand the particular poignancy of this comment.
- P90 'No one fights your battles for you.'
- P99 Barbaric times: Peregrine's story against the backdrop of war in which they are living.
- P101 the Duke lives in an era when 'might crushes right'. Does that still apply today?
- P102 Peregrine identifies the theme of power in his version of the story.
- P104 'One can choose what one will and won't do.' How true is this for the characters in the story, and true in daily life now?
- P109 what do you think of Peregrine's definition of destiny as 'something we think should happen, until it does not'? How would you define it?
- P140 Is 'winning' going on with life as usual? You might consider reactions to September 11.
- P141 'History repeats itself – we might learn something from [our Duke].' Has anyone in the story learned anything from the Duke?
- P148 'Acts of tyranny...are often deemed understandable by people who might benefit from them.' Is this a cynical view, or can you think of contemporary examples that support its contention?
- P150 lessons learned in childhood have made the Duke who he is. Do you agree with this? Are we all constructed by the time and place we live in? Invite students to identify the values of the current society that shape their behavior and view of the world and themselves.
- P152 parallels between then and the war the characters are living through. Why do you think the author chose to put these two stories together: evacuation during the Second World War and the story of Richard 111? Consider parallels between progress of the war and the story of the Princes.
- P163 parallels between Cecily and Jeremy and the two boys.
- P180 Cecily says that Heloise is scared of Jeremy because he won't be what she wants him to be. Do you agree with her? Why might this be important?

- P189 '...in the quest for power, truth is always the first thing left behind' and 'wickedness often wears fancy clothes ...but it never seems to know joy'. Discuss in terms of the story and current society.
- P224 how power warps into 'something barren and foul'. Do you agree that it is the nature of power to do this, or can it be used for good?
- P226 the connectedness of everything, down to Jeremy running away.

Responses

- P25 Imagine you are one of the evacuee children – one being separated from a brother or sister for instance. How do you feel – sad, rejected, angry, bolshie? Act out your reactions when you are not chosen, and then when you are. What is going on inside your head? Imagine being chosen by someone you don't like the look of.
- P27-26 Imagine you are May assessing Cecily. What is May thinking? What makes her decide to go with Cecily? Lots of motivations are left to the reader to impute – we observe.
- Why put the story of this family during the Second World War together with the story of Richard 111 and the Princes?
- History lives forever and touches everything (p199) and is open to interpretation. The author gives a particular view of Richard 111 in this book which is different from Shakespeare's. Do some research about the historical figure of Richard 111 and the Princes in the Tower noting the varied interpretations. Why might Shakespeare have presented Richard as he did? Why does this author present him more sympathetically?
- P230 what does Peregrine's wink to May mean? Write down or role play what that wink expresses.
- The title: what are the possible interpretations of who is the 'king' in the title?

Related reading

Carrie's War by Nina Bawden
Orphans of the Queen by Ruth Starke
Horrible Histories
Richard 111 by William Shakespeare
Macbeth and Son by Jackie French
Princes by Sonya Hartnett
The Daughter of Time by Josephine Tey