The Treasure Box

Margaret Wild
Illus. Freya Blackwood

Synopsis

When the enemy bombs the library, all the books in Peter’s town are burned—all except the one his father has taken home to study. It’s a book about their people. He puts the book in a treasure box to keep it safe. As the war progresses, Peter and his father must leave their home and join the throng of people who are journeying over the mountains to escape the conflict. But as they march through the winter, Peter’s father becomes ill.

On his deathbed, he begs Peter to take care of the special book so that their story can live on. When Peter can no longer carry the treasure box, he buries it under a linden tree, safe from bombs and fire. But as he survives the war and grows up overseas, he never forgets about it, and he returns as an adult to dig it up. He returns to his village, where a new library has been built. He places the book back on a shelf, where once more it can be found—and read—and loved.

Activities

- Look at the images on the imprint page.
  - What can you tell about the story from these images?
  - When is it set?
  - What ideas are being foregrounded?

- Consider the illustrator’s use of colour.
  - What is the effect of the sepia tones?
  - What colour is used on the page?
  - What might this tell us about the significance of this item?
‘When the enemy bombed the library, everything burned.’

- Consider this statement. What is destroyed when a library burns?
- Consider both the literal and metaphoric meaning. Is it just the building and the books that are lost?

Many times in war, dictatorial leaders will intentionally burn books. Why might they do this?

What is contained in our stories? Why are they such a significant part of our culture?

What do you think the book was? Why did the illustrator choose never to illustrate the actual book?

Does it matter what the book was about?

How does this help to make the story more universal?

How have words been used throughout the story?

Look carefully at the text used in the illustrations. There are many different languages used. Why might the illustrator have done this?

What is your greatest treasure?

Most people think of treasure in terms of wealth or financial benefits. In what way can words and books actually be seen to be our greatest treasure?

Consider the statement,
‘If you give a boy a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a boy to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.’

How does this statement reflect the ideas in this story?