



Teachers' notes by
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The Treasure Box by Margaret Wild with illustrations by Freya Blackwood

From two of our most talented picture-book creators comes this celebration of things that can't be destroyed by bombs or fire. A haunting and beautiful tale of the power of words, the importance of stories and the resilience of the human spirit.

When the enemy bombed the library, everything burned.

As war rages, Peter and his father flee their home, taking with them a treasure box that holds something more precious than jewels. They journey through mud and rain and long cold nights, and soon their survival becomes more important than any possessions they carry.

But as the years go by, Peter never forgets the treasure box, and one day he returns to find it...

Plot

On the very first double page spread, the reader is presented with a bombed and burned village. A boy, Peter, and his father survey the damaged landscape around them and we learn that the library has been destroyed. All the books are gone, except for one special book that Peter's father was studying. This book becomes their greatest treasure, a book of their people and their stories. While fleeing their war-torn village, Peter and his father carry the book in an iron box, keeping it safe and dry. The journey is long and when Peter's father dies, the boy continues to guard and protect the book. Unable to carry the treasure box over the mountains, Peter buries it under an ancient tree at the edge of the village, vowing to come and find it one day. The years pass and Peter grows up in a faraway country, but he never forgets the treasure box and he is eventually able to return to the village and retrieve the book.

Using very few words, Margaret Wild has created a lyrical text that beautifully evokes the sadness and hope of Peter's journey. Freya Blackwood's illustrations capture the mood through the use of muted colours and paper collage. It is a perfect combination. Both the text and illustrations seem simple on the surface, but there is much to explore and discuss.

This book is suitable for a number of different year levels, from middle primary upwards. These notes have been written to connect with the lower secondary curriculum; however, activities and discussions can be modified for younger or older year levels.

Initial Discussion

Before Reading – look at the cover and endpapers.

- What do you immediately notice about the illustrations? What types of media have been used?
- What is "the treasure box"? Can you guess what the treasure might be?
- Look at the boy's clothing. In which time period do you think the story might be set? Why?
- The end papers are made from text in a language other than English. Can you identify the language? Does this give you any clues as to where the story may be taking place?

Reading the text – read the book all the way through, then go back to the beginning.

- The book opens with the mention of an "enemy". They are never mentioned by name, nor are we told when or where the book is set. Are there any further clues as to the time period or geographical setting? Do these clues come from the text or the illustrations?
- Who is "the enemy"?
- Peter's father refers to the book as being "about our people". Who are Peter's people? What might the book be and why would it be so important?
- What is the purpose of being vague with such important details? How do the illustrations and text work together to 'fill in the blanks'?

Treasure

The Oxford English Dictionary defines treasure as “a very valuable object”. To many, an old book would not be considered worth saving. Indeed, when Peter is forced to choose between his suitcase and the book he is told to “leave the iron box...we have a long way to go”. Even Peter himself requires some convincing that the book is a treasure as it is not rubies, silver or gold.

- Why does Peter’s father consider his book to be treasure? What makes it so valuable, if it’s not the monetary value?
- Is sentimental worth as important as monetary value?

Activity: Imagine you are being forced to flee your home. You are able to take one precious item with you. Think carefully about what it might be and why you think it is worth saving. Prepare a short presentation to the class on your “treasure”. Explain why the object is so important to you and what it would mean to you should you lose it.

Visual Literacy

“People caught the words and cupped them in their hands.”

- Look at the words falling from the sky. They are the only words, within the illustrations, in English and would have been chosen deliberately. *Hope, forget, sang, gentle, jewels, comfort, silence, great empty*. How do you think these words apply to the story?

Blackwood’s illustrative style has a 3-D effect. On her blog, Blackwood says “It wasn’t the easiest book I’ve worked on, mostly because I decided to create each illustration in layers, cut out and stuck one upon the other like a paper diorama. This meant the illustrations had to be lit and photographed rather than scanned. There were many technical learning curves.” (<http://freyablackwood.blogspot.com.au/>)

- Why would she make the decision to create the illustrations in this way?
- How does she achieve this and what does it add to the illustrations?
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Language Yr. 7: Analyse how *point of view* is generated in visual texts by means of choices, for example gaze, angle and social distance (ACELA1764)

Blackwood uses the fore and backgrounds to great effect in her illustrations. Consider the choices she has made, and why she would have done so. She also uses framing, almost inviting the reader to look through a window into the lives of the characters. Each illustration is a double page spread, often with more than one image.

- How does Blackwood use these devices to tell the story and indicate the passage of time?
- How does she portray distance?
- We often can’t see the faces of the people leaving their homes, yet the reader feels a strong emotional pull towards them. How does Blackwood portray the emotions

of the people without using their faces (think about colours and body language)?
How are they feeling?

Look at Blackwood's choice of colour palette throughout the book.

- How does it change? Why? Is this same change reflected in the text?
- Blackwood has used torn paper for a variety of images. How many can you find?
How has she used it in different ways? Why use paper and not watercolour and pencil as in the rest of the images?

Activity: using your "treasure" as the focal point, create a montage representing your special object and what it means to you. You may like to use photographs, paper clippings, drawings, words, charcoal, pencil, etc. Look at some of the techniques Blackwood has used (multiple points of focus, framing, colour, etc.) as inspiration for your piece.

Literacy Yr. 7: Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, selecting aspects of subject matter and particular language, visual, and audio features to convey information and ideas (ACELY1725)

Activity: In groups, create a short film version of the text. You may like to use animation, still images, live action and/or music. This could be a term long assignment at students will need to storyboard their ideas, film and edit their finished pieces. Hold a film festival at the end of the assignment where the students will critique each other using a rubric. Pay particular attention to aspects of the book that you might want to incorporate into the film: dialogue, collage, framing, etc.

Refugees

- How is this a story about refugees?
- What do you know about refugees? Where does your information come from?

Literature Yr. 7: Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1619)

Go to

http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOWFqG/b.6235807/k.515C/Additional_Resources.htm and download Poems.

- Written by children who are themselves refugees, do these poems share anything in common with Peter's story?
- Many of these poems are about education. In western society we often take education for granted, why is it so important to these children? Do you think Peter's father values education in the same way?

Activity: imagine you are Peter, sitting alone, in the cold, on the night your father dies.
Write your own poem to express how you are feeling at this moment.

Language Yr. 8: Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts (ACELT1807)

Armin Greder's *The Island* is also about a refugee but from a very different perspective. This book looks at the fear the island people have of the refugee and their subsequent harsh treatment of him.

- Why might the people of the island be afraid of the refugee?
- Do you understand their fear?
- How might the refugee be feeling?
- Having read *The Treasure Box* do you have some understanding about the emotional place the refugee is coming from?
- Is it possible that Peter may have experienced similar treatment in his new home? What clues can you find in the illustrations about Peter's life after arriving in his new home? Is it a happy life?

Literacy Yr. 8: Use a range of software, including word processing programs, to create, edit and publish texts imaginatively (ACELY1738)

Activity: Online Journal

Create an online journal/blog for Peter that tracks his journey from home to his new life. Imagine that he is able to update it every few days, giving details about where he is, how he is feeling, the health of his father, his hopes for the future. Include copyright free images to illustrate various aspects of the account.

Related Texts

Picture Books

The Arrival by Shaun Tan

The Island by Armin Greder

Ziba Came on a Boat by Liz Lofthouse

The Rabbits by John Marsden & Shaun Tan

Novels

Hana's Suitcase by Karen Levine

Once by Morris Gleitzman

Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park

The Silver Donkey by Sonya Hartnett

