



The Rainbow Bridge

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE AND THEMES

This book has been chosen for use with fluent and mature readers in secondary schools because it combines dramatic and fascinating historical fiction with strong characterisation, a powerful plot and sparkling, fluent writing. It is a moving and thought-provoking novel in which the following themes, among others, are explored:

- Love and friendship
- Loss
- War
- Abuse and cruelty
- Religion and philosophy

APPROACH

For the purposes of this exploration, the novel has been divided into four units, covering four or five chapters at a time. The pace at which the novel is read is entirely up to the teacher. With a novel as rich and dense as this, it must be stressed that the discussion points and activities are merely some suggested starting points for exploration and development in the classroom.

SUMMARY

Wings Over Delft, Book 1 in the trilogy, ended with an explosion which killed the heroine, sixteen year old Louise Eeden. Only her newly-painted portrait survived. Now, over a century later, Gaston Morteau, a lieutenant in the French Hussars, rescues the painting from its watery grave of a canal in Holland. Master Jacob Haitink, who painted Louise's portrait, not only captured her likeness, but as Louise discovers, he must have succeeded in capturing her very essence, for Louise is able to exist, truly, for Gaston and those

who can see her. As revolution rampages through France, Louise becomes caught up in the lives and loves of Gaston, Colette and the devious and untrustworthy Count du Bois.

UNIT 1

SUMMARY

The story opens in France in 1792 where Gaston Morteau, son of the chief winemaker to the Count du Bois, is spending his last night at home before he leaves to join the army. The next day, he will join the Hussars of Auxerre and play his part in the defence of his country from the Prussians who have crossed the border, seeking to restore the monarchy. France has been in a turmoil of revolution since the storming of the Bastille three years previously. Castles and chateaux have been burned, aristocrats and nobles have been attacked and killed. Many more have emigrated in fear. In the Morteau household itself, repercussions from these horrific events are visible. We meet young aristocrat Colette who has been given refuge there after the brutal murder of her father and tragic death of her mother – a close friend of Madame Morteau. Gaston goes off to war in all his finery, having promised to wave farewell to Colette as he passes by. This he forgets to do. Time passes and, during the historic and timely crossing of the frozen Rhine, Gaston rescues Louise's portrait and their relationship commences.

Read pp.9-69

DISCUSSION POINTS

- In *Wings Over Delft*, we meet the artist Master Jacob Haitink, a central character in the story and in Louise's life also. Read p. 12 where we meet chief winemaker or vigneron, Monsieur Morteau who the author compares to an artist and, later, a priest. Discuss. In what way would a job such as winemaking be considered art? Would it be true to say that any job, done properly, could be considered art? Discuss with reference to the following professions: chef, accountant, lawyer, doctor, footballer, teacher etc.
- The Bastille was a fortified prison built on the city wall of Paris, between 1370 and 1382 in the reign of King Charles V. Used by Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII's Minister, it became an infamous state prison. On 14th July 1789, during the Revolution, it was stormed by the people and completely demolished. Why was the Bastille destroyed? What did it represent to the revolutionaries? Discuss symbols of power and authority in a) school and b) state. What buildings or structures would be the first to go in a revolution in this country and why.
- Revolution is defined as: 'the transformation of a political system or regime through a rapid and concentrated process, often but not always accompanied by political violence.' Do you think it is possible to bring about change without violence? Why/why not? Discuss.
- On p. 17, we read that Monsieur Morteau would not countenance the thought of his vineyard being divided up, even if it meant that a portion of it would be owned by his wife. Once again, the author likens him to an artist and describes the vineyard as 'his palette' and the wines 'his pictures.' Do

SUMMARY

Colette is upset and hurt at Gaston leaving without waving to her, but her upset turns to energising anger and she decides to take control of her life and return home. She sets off and, after an arduous journey ending in the realisation that she now has no home left, she is rescued by Brouchard and brought back to the Morteau household. At his suggestion, she begins to work in the winery and to learn all about the art of winemaking from Monsieur Morteau. Louise has now fully come to life in Gaston's mind and is summoned to his side to be present at exciting scenes in the life of a Hussar. She is there to see Gaston lead the crossing of the frozen Rhine successfully. However, Louise is no passive admirer. Instead, she challenges him asking: 'Where is your noble revolution?' when she sees the havoc wreaked by the soldiers on a peasant farmer. Later, she again forces Gaston to confront the truth in the story of the Pont de Chasse. Gaston goes home to the winery on leave and his friendship with Colette deepens. The unit ends with news that Gaston may be about to go to work for the Sultan of Turkey.

Read pages 70-127

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Chapter 5 opens with Colette feeling miserable and defeated after Gaston's 'drunken departure'. Discuss how these feelings turned to anger. With anger came energy. How and why do you think this would happen? Anger is often seen as a negative and destructive emotion. Discuss the notion of anger as a positive and energising force. How can it be harnessed effectively?
- On p. 77, Colette looks at Monsieur Brouchard and thinks that his face belongs to 'them' rather than 'us'. She then remembers that all has changed. Has it? What of society today – is everybody equal?
- The relationship which is developing between Gaston and Louise is realistic and vivid. Louise is unafraid to challenge Gaston and argue with him. (see p. 88) Contrast this exchange with the flirtatious one between Gaston and

you think Morteau is making a wise decision here, at such an uncertain time politically speaking?

- Colette has feelings for Gaston, though she hasn't acknowledged them yet. Read p. 18 and discuss. Later, on p. 39 we read of a shared moment between them which remains 'lodged deep inside' Gaston 'where it would act like the grain of sand that provokes an oyster to make a pearl.' Do you think this image works? What makes it so powerful?
- Read the scene where an angry mob descend on the house pp. 34-39 and examine the roles played by Monsieur Brouchard (the miller), Monsieur Morteau, the Count and Gaston. Between them, they managed to alter the bloodthirsty mood of the crowd. How did they do it?
- Louise has been able to live again in the mind of Master Haitink, the artist who painted her. But for Pieter, who loved her, she 'held back'. Why do you think she chose to do this? Pieter later married and eventually finished her portrait, painting her name on the plinth of the urn. What qualities and strengths do you think Louise required in order to watch the life of the boy she loved unfold without her?

ACTIVITIES

1) La Marseillaise

Use an internet search to look up 'La Marseillaise', the French national anthem, composed in one night during the Revolution (24 April 1792). Listen to an audio file and print off the words. Do you agree with Gaston that the song is about 'country, and patriots, and blood'? Now examine the words of our national anthem (in Irish or English). Find out who wrote it, when it was written and what language it was written in? Discuss Maman's question; 'Why does it always have to be blood?'

2) Liberty, equality, fraternity

This was the rallying cry of the French revolution. Look up The Rights of Man (encyclopedia/internet). This declaration of the Rights of Man was approved by the National Assembly of France in 1789. It states: 'Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else'. Do you agree with this statement? What rights do children have? How might they differ from those of adults? Write a declaration of the Rights of Children.

3) Margot and Lucien

On p. 18-9, we read of Margot's romantic ordeals with the faithless Lucien. Write the dialogue that might ensue between the two of them as she confronts him with the flouting evidence of his infidelity.

4) Uniforms

Hussars were originally mounted troops raised by the King of Hungary. As good light cavalry was scarce, other countries soon developed their own hussars. The uniform of the French Hussars was dramatic and dashing, with a blue and silver jacket, breeches, boots and spurs, and the shako – a tall cylindrical peaked cap, adorned with badge and feather. Gaston would have been armed with a sabre also. Draw a picture of Gaston in his uniform, based on the description on p. 22 and information from a website such as en.wikipedia.org.

5) Chivalry and Don Quixote

Chivalry was the code of behaviour practised in the Middle Ages by the mounted soldier or knight. It was a fusion of Christian and military concepts of conduct. A knight was to be brave, loyal and the protector of women. It is chivalry which ensures that Gaston leaps into the freezing water to save the lady (p. 46), ordering his men to 'defend her honour with your lives.' Gaston then thinks wryly of a 'lean and foolish Spanish knight' while a windmill turns lazily in the distance.

Don Quixote de la Mancha is a novel by the Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra published in two parts in the 1600s. The book tells the story of Don Quixote, a man who has read so many stories about brave errant knights that he decides to become one himself and to fight injustice in the name of his beloved maiden Dulcinea del Toboso. Quixote's adventures tend to involve situations in which he tries to apply a knight's simple morality to situations where far more complex issues are at hand. This book was popular during the French revolution due to its central ethic that individuals can be right while society is quite wrong.

Look up the adjective 'quixotic' and the expression 'tilting at windmills', both of which have derived from this ground-breaking story.

Write an adventure in the style of a chivalrous quest.

the maid (p. 89, 90)

- Read the two different versions of the battle at Pont de Chasse as told by Gaston. Discuss the realities of war in terms of human cost and suffering. Look up the meaning of 'propaganda' and discuss in relation to more recent wars that you have heard about. (p. 92-98)

ACTIVITIES

1. Decisions

Colette felt 'suspended between her past and her future' and that she doesn't belong anywhere now (p. 78). Then she recalls that from now on, she has vowed to decide her own life. Arrange a class discussion/debate on the topic: Is life something that happens to you? Then write a list of decisions for yourself concerning your own life. Begin each line with the words: 'I decide –'

2. Costume

On p. 83, Louise is delighted to find herself riding alongside Gaston dressed in the hussar outfit he had thought up for her. Choose a friend or family member and decide on an outfit or costume that you think would suit them. Draw a picture of them in it and write about the clothes you have chosen and why you chose them. The outfit can be up to date or historical. Be imaginative!

3. Letter-writing

On p. 94, Louise wonders if she should dare to challenge Gaston or if it would be 'kinder to let him continue in his dream.' After reading the second, moving account, what do you think? Imagine you are Gaston and you decide to write a letter to the widow of the dead landowner. What comforting words would you use?

4. Putting Down Roots

Chapter 8 is entitled 'Putting Down Roots' and is a pun or play on words. As Colette learns all about the vines, she is becoming grounded and rooted to the land in a way which brings her health and strength. Read p. 100-106 then write a diary entry for Colette after a busy day during the grape harvest.

5. Capital Punishment

The guillotine came to prominence during the French revolution as an instrument used to inflict capital punishment. Is capital

punishment still practised in France? Find out what states or countries still use capital punishment. What crimes is it used for? Do you think that capital punishment is justifiable? Organise a class debate on the topic.

5. Napoleon Bonaparte

The unit ends with a meeting between Gaston and General Napoleon Bonaparte. Use an internet search or encyclopedia to look up Napoleon and write a paragraph about the legendary general.

UNIT 3

SUMMARY

Gaston is on the verge of committing himself to serve with Napoleon as a mercenary. However, Louise becomes convinced that the life of a soldier is soul-destroying for Gaston and their deepening friendship encourages her to confront him with this belief. Her instinct tells her to find a 'chink in Gaston's armour' which she does by finally forcing him to describe the Noyades. After describing the horror of this event to Louise, Gaston realises that Louise is right - he should try to get out of the army. He decides to try to buy the land from the Count and return home to work the vineyard. But plans change and he is sent home on leave. He brings the portrait with him and, after observing Gaston's family and, in particular, Colette, Louise asks Gaston to leave her there when he leaves. It's not long before Louise appears for Colette also, and the girls though initially rivals for Gaston's affections, become friends. Colette has become very friendly with Monsieur Brouchard, the miller, and he warns her that the Count is involved in plans for a royalist uprising. Together, they decide that the only way to save the vineyard is for Gaston to buy the land. But the Count has doubled the price and there is no way of raising that amount of money, unless they offer the portrait as security which Gaston, reluctantly, decides to do.

Read pages 128-196

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Before witnessing the Noyades, Gaston

was a different man, 'full of zeal' and idealistic about the glorious Republic. (see p. 131) However, after hearing the terrible cries of the drowning, Gaston is repulsed to the point of vomiting, and he says 'the soldier in me died by that tree.' Discuss the main events which led to the death of that soldier.

- Later, Louise asks Gaston what took the place of that soldier and he replies: 'The clown that you know – the parody of the chivalrous knight.' Do you feel that this is an accurate description of himself?
- On p. 174, Monsieur Morteau likens his wines to ambassadors and he goes on to mention the occasions where his wines might be enjoyed – 'a moment of celebration, or to ease a hurt, warm a heart, or stiffen the resolve of someone who needs it.' That is a far cry from alcohol being used purely as a drug to alter reality. Alcohol is all around us in society. Is this a good thing? Discuss.
- Louise recalls her old nurse, Annie, assuring her that God had a purpose for her and was guiding her every step. (p. 187) But Louise felt that not to be true and had 'turned to science' like her father. Now, however, she wonders 'what if her real purpose was inside her, rising like a spring, bubbling up from every facet of her existence?' Discuss Louise and her sense of purpose. Is it possible to enjoy life without purpose?

ACTIVITIES

1. Justifying Cruelty

The Noyades of Nantes which Gaston witnessed and which so affected him took place under the leadership of a revolutionary named Jean-Baptiste Carrier. He had been sent to Nantes under orders to suppress the revolt there by the most severe measures. Under his command, victims were sent to the guillotine, shot, cut down en masse in the prisons and later, for maximum efficiency, put on board vessels with trap doors for bottoms and sunk in the Loire. Carrier gained a reputation for wanton cruelty, unsurprisingly, though it has been suggested that his mind had become unbalanced by the atrocities committed by the Vendean and royalist armies. Imagine you are Carrier, called to account for your murderous actions. Write a defence of your position and justify your behaviour.

UNIT 4

SUMMARY

Gaston and a small number of troops steal upon the Count in the chateau. They discover that the Count is involved in a plot with a group of Royalists. The Count, a smooth and sinister flatterer, tries to bribe Gaston to forget what he has just discovered by offering him the land he so desperately wants. But Gaston refuses the bribe, showing his true strength of character at last. Instead, he forces the men to swear an oath that none of them will ever again take up arms against their fellow countrymen for any cause. If one of them breaks the oath, the rest of them will be brought to justice. Gaston insists on paying for his land and hands over the portrait, though the Count is frightened by the painting and asks 'is she a witch?' Gaston has to go off on another mission as he is still bound by law and oath to serve his country. Alone at the chateau, Louise discovers the truth behind the folklore and myth - a young boy is being abused by the Count and is powerless to stop it. Louise befriends the boy and helps him find a way out, but not before her very existence is threatened. Time passes and Louise is kept informed of developments by Colette, Gaston and Pierre. She is there when Gaston loses a leg and stays with him so that Pierre can fulfill their mission. The story ends with marriages between Jacquot and Marie, and Gaston and Colette at last. Louise bids farewell to Gaston and Colette and, finally, to Pierre. Her portrait is bought by a new owner and the story ends, for now.

Read pages 197-265

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What would it be like to live as Louise does, suspended between life and death, between childhood and adulthood, between centuries? On p. 198, she says that she 'chose reality rather than heaven because I loved the world, but I'm only now realising the cost of love.' What does she mean by this? Is her choice one that will stand the test of time and further adventures?
- Louise has been Gaston's conscience and adviser, his true friend. However,

2. Gaston Growing Up

Much of this story is about Gaston's journey from idealistic, naive boy, playing at being soldiers to the thoughtful, mature young man at the close. On p. 135, after telling Louise about the Noyades, he still intends to remain a soldier, however, as he sees no other option. Only when Louise challenges him once more is he forced to come up with a better plan. Make a list of the main events that finally opened Gaston's eyes.

3. Slavery

The beautiful but heartless girl who Gaston met in Nantes tells him that her father is the port's doctor whose job it is to certify the slaves from Africa for transportation to the colonies. Slavery was widespread at this time with African slave labour used in the plantations of the Caribbean and the southern states in the USA during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Use an encyclopedia or internet search to look up slavery and such humanitarians as William Wilberforce who helped put an end to this atrocity.

4. Marriage

On p. 150, Gaston tells Louise that he realises that Colette is the woman he wants to marry. The institution of marriage is centuries old and still going strong. Write then conduct an interview with either a married couple or engaged couple of your acquaintance. See if you can discover at what point they knew they wanted to marry their partner. Interview the partners separately and compare findings!

5. Wordplay and symbols

In this novel, vines and winemaking feature both as part of the plot, but also as symbols. On p. 151, Gaston says 'that vine is coiling itself about our necks, it is strangling us, Louise. We must cut it through!' What does he mean by this? Later, Louise realises that she and Colette were 'both like shoots from the same vine'. Find other references to the vines and discuss.

6. Art and Artists

Another theme which runs through the story is art and artists. Parallels are drawn between Monsieur Morteau and Master Haitink, the artist who painted Louise's picture. The author makes a pun with the use of 'palate' and 'palette' on p. 141. What does he mean by this?

even she forgets her resolve when faced with the prospect of being left alone in the chateau with the Count. Read p. 206, where she says: 'Oh, Gaston, yes! If you accept, then we can all go home!' What gives Gaston the strength to resist both the bribe and Louise?

- Read the moving scene between Pieter and Louise (p. 215-217), when we discover the meaning of the rainbow bridge. What is it that stops Louise from crossing over? Do you think anything could change which would enable Louise to cross the bridge?
- The Count had been abusing Jacquot for a long time, but had justified his horrific actions so as to absolve himself of guilt and responsibility. What were the excuses and justifications he used? As she does with Gaston, Louise forces the Count to face facts and to face himself with all his failings. She says 'You had forty years to bring happiness to the world; those years are irredeemably lost: that is damnation.' Are there crimes which are beyond redemption and forgiveness?
- After the months of abuse by the Count, the most chilling damage of all is that Jacquot feels unable to respond to Marie's advances appropriately and wonders if he is doomed to become like him. Louise helps Jacquot overcome this by helping him have a healing dream in which he is 'washed clean'. This visualisation works for Jacquot. What is your opinion of visualisation? Discuss.
- After the loyalty, love and courage shown by Louise, she deserves a love of her own. Discuss.

ACTIVITIES

1. Your room

After Gaston leaves, Louise feels herself returning 'home' back inside her portrait, into the room the master had painted for her. In it, she is surrounded by objects that reflect her interests; books, music and science. Imagine you are going to have to spend a long time in a single small room. What would it have to contain in order to sustain your interest? Draw and write about your room.

2. Major and Minor Keys

When Louise and Pieter finally drift apart, Louise is left carrying a memory, 'like an unresolved chord in a minor key'. Find a

volunteer from your class who plays music and discuss the difference between major and minor keys. Listen to various chords, including one as described by the author. Does this capture her longing and sorrow?

3. Fairy tales

Charles Perrault (1628-1703) was a French author who laid foundations for a new literary genre – the fairy tale. Many of our best-known fairy tales are adaptations of cruder folk tales, which Perrault remade into moralised, succinct and witty stories, with the coarseness removed. Use an internet search or encyclopedia to find as many familiar Perrault stories as possible. Think of an event that happened to you or your friends. Now, write it in the style of a fairy tale, with drama, action and a good moral at the end!

4. Rules to live by

John Calvin (1509-64) was a French Protestant theologian and reformer. He attempted a re-ordering of society on reformed Christian principles, with strong and sometimes ruthless control over the private lives of citizens. On p. 240, Louise feels that Annie, her old Calvinistic nurse is at her side 'not letting her waver even an inch.' This is not the first time that Louise has felt Annie's firm, unwavering influence. Imagine you have to invent a set of principles by which everybody should live, a set of commandments if you like. Write and discuss in class. Is there a set upon which everyone agrees?

5. Lapis Lazuli

Lapis lazuli is mentioned both in *Wings Over Delft* and this novel. It is a stone with a history stretching back to 5000 BC and was widely used by artists to make the pigment Ultramarine for tempera paint. Look up Vermeer (the Dutch artist) who was a master in the use of the blue colour.

See also 'Lapis Lazuli', a poem by William Butler Yeats. (This poem can be found at <http://www.readprint.com>.)