



Where the Stones Sing

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE & THEMES

Dublin in 1348 is a bustling port. The inhabitants are preoccupied with daily life; however, they are also superstitious, always ready to condemn anything that appears unusual.

Even the tranquillity of Christ Church masks division.

When plague strikes the city, signs are sought for anything that will explain the pestilence.

Into this cauldron come Kai and Edward, strangers and outsiders: Kai to sing in Christ Church's choir and Edward to train as a stone mason.

But Kai has a secret – she is masquerading as a boy. When her secret is uncovered, Kai finds herself tested by the fury of superstition.

The story is charged with adventure which spans the spectrum of emotions from trust and justice to superstition and cruelty.

The themes include:

- Prejudice
- Discrimination
- Injustice
- Trust
- Courage
- Friendship
- Suspicion
- Superstition & Beliefs
- Relationships
- Power & Corruption

SUMMARY

Kai and Edward accompany their father Ned, a trickster, to Dublin. While the children sing for pennies in the streets, they meet Bro. Albert and Dame Maria who offer to recruit Kai to Christ Church's choir. Ned is surprised but agrees to let Kai stay

and join the choir. Edward tells his father that he too wishes to stay in Dublin and become an apprentice stone mason.

Ned returns to the road, promising to return either if danger appears or if Kai's secret is discovered.

Kai appreciates the peace and order of Christ Church after life on the road, becoming friends with the other choristers, Tom and Jack. However, she is unable to make friends with Roland; his cruel teasing and superior attitude raising an impossible barrier.

When not singing, Kai, Jack and Tom share adventures on the bustling streets and docks of Dublin.

Everything changes when the plague breaks out and affects each of their lives. Edward is unjustly accused of theft and is forced to leave the stone masons.

Traumatized by the tragic death of her dear friend Jack, Kai seeks refuge singing alone in the cathedral where her voice seems to draw an accompaniment from every child who has ever sung in the cathedral – from the very stones of the building.

Unseen, Roland witnesses this strange chorus and learns Kai's secret – that she is a girl. Seizing his opportunity, he denounces her as a witch.

Eager for a scapegoat, the townspeople believe that Kai's witchcraft is the cause of their woes and Kai is condemned to be burnt at the stake.

As the fire is prepared, Ned suddenly appears and eloquently guides the mood of the crowd towards reason. Kai demonstrates the power of the voices in the stones and Bro. Albert denounces those who would call it witchcraft. The voices enchant the crowd and their mood softens. Defeated, her accusers slip away.

As a girl Kai can no longer sing in the choir, but is overjoyed when Dame Maria asks her to live with her.

APPROACH

The story tackles several SPHE issues, specifically discrimination.

Whole class and small group responses will facilitate discussion and the development of ideas and thinking skills.

The activities and discussions suggested will lead to responses covering a broad range of communication forms.

The activities have been divided into three sections to facilitate the development of the story.

Unit 1 Settling in pp7-69

SUMMARY

Kai and Edward are about to abandon their singing as futile when an insult from a Christ Church chorister provokes a fight. Bro. Albert intervenes and then proposes that Kai join the Christ Church choir.

Edward too decides to remain in Dublin as an apprentice stone mason and Ned returns to the road.

Kai makes friends quickly with Tom and Jack; her erstwhile sparring partners; however, she finds it impossible to make friends with Roland, who had provoked the fight.

Kai settles into the routine of the priory, careful to mask her true identity. Becoming friends with Dame Maria, she learns of the tragic drowning of her son Philip.

Brother Albert teaches the children and shows Kai the many wonders of the cathedral. Kai decides to ignore Roland's

sour comments and delights instead in the singing and the beautiful cathedral.

Taking the opportunity of a free afternoon, Kai visits Edward at the stone mason's yard. She finds him happy and settled.

That evening, unable to sleep, Kai is surprised to see her father in the courtyard. He brings troubling news of a deadly plague spreading throughout Europe and he pleads with her to join him in fleeing the city. Reluctantly Kai refuses.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p31):** Because of her experience, Kai does not believe in things that she cannot explain. Why do you think that people believe in miracles? What do you believe in and how can we explain the things that we don't understand?
- **(Read p36):** Dame Maria doesn't believe Kai's explanation. Sometimes our words, the tone of our voices or our body language let people know when we are lying. Why was Kai's explanation unconvincing? How would you tell if someone was lying to you? What signs do you look for?
- **(Read p47):** Roland is mean and nasty. Why do you think he behaves in this way? Might he be insecure? Do you think that some people are just born to be mean or can there be reasons to explain their attitudes?
- **(Read p64):** The mayor had been complaining about the entertainers who he feels do no work. Does work always have to produce something? Has the mayor a valid point of view? Why do you think we need entertainers? What do you think the mayor would say about today's entertainers?

ACTIVITIES

1. Bird's-eye View:

(Read pp7&8) The gull had a perfect view of the city and the plan of the streets.

Read the description carefully. Do you think that you could create a bird's-eye view of somewhere that you know well and describe the details of it? How do you think it would look from the air?

2. My Card:

(Read p13) Ned (Longshanks) Breakwater is a man of many talents. It is very important that he creates a good first impression when he meets someone; otherwise he may not be able to persuade them to employ him or use his talents.

One of the ways that people do this today is to hand out leaflets or business cards.

Design a leaflet or card for Ned (Longshanks) Breakwater. Think of the type of information that needs to be on it and the language that might be used. What colours and illustrations might work well?

2. Kai:

(Read p15) Jack, Tom and Roland look on in astonishment as Bro. Albert recruits Kai into their choir. What thoughts do you think are going through their minds as they look at their latest recruit?

Draw the expressions on each of their faces to show how they are feeling about Kai. Include a speech bubble for each of them to show what their first thoughts are now that Kai is to join them.

3. I Need Some Help:

(Read pp15-16) Kai needs your help to make her decision. Work in small groups to create a short list of 4 arguments for and 4 against accepting Bro. Albert's offer.

Score each argument out of 10 (10 being the most powerful). Decide which one you think is the most persuasive and explain why you think it might help Kai make her decision.

4. The Garden:

(Read pp37-38) Kai is captivated by Dame Maria's garden. Each of her senses is engaged. There are things to see/touch/smell/taste and hear.

Draw a plan of your own garden and describe how your garden might stimulate the senses. Plan a walk through the garden so that each sense is charmed. How would you use silence in your garden?

5. The Window:

(Read p52) medievaleurope.mrdonn.org/stainedglass.html

As Kai gazes at the windows in the cathedral, she thinks that she would love to create just such a window.

What theme do you think her window might have and how could the design tell its own story. Draw and illustrate the window and create a history or story for it.

6. The Cathedral:

(Read pp42&53-54) Bro. Albert has shown Kai around the cathedral and she is amazed at the size and layout of the buildings.

She has decided that she needs to draw a

map to help her find her way around.

Work in small groups, use Bro. Albert's information to draw your plan.

Now compare your plans. Are they all exactly the same? If not, can you persuade the others groups why your map might be the more accurate one?

7. The Golden Stone:

(Read pp61-62) Edward explains to Kai that one day he will have the opportunity to carve a stone panel that will last for hundreds of years. He will be able to put his own mark on it so that it will always be recognised as his work.

Use modelling clay to create a tablet of your own design that you think would last for hundreds of years. What sort of design would you create and how would you mark it so that it would always be recognised as being yours?

8. Dear Father:

(Read pp67-68) After Ned leaves, Kai feels guilty about the way she refused to go with him. She knows that her father will stay with Ymna for a while before leaving Dublin and decides to write a letter to him explaining why she wants to stay.

Help her to compose a message? It will have to be brief as she does not have very much time before he leaves.

Unit 2 Plague arrives (pp69-127)

SUMMARY

Kai likes living in the cathedral but is unable to relax in case it is discovered that she is a girl. She enjoys Bro. Albert's lessons, despite Roland's constant negative input.

She has begun to sing in the cathedral and notices that Dame Maria seems to be talking to someone that she cannot see.

Her friendship with Jack and Tom strengthens. When Jack offers to help a groom unloading horses at the docks, he turns out to have a special way with horses and they are all rewarded with a day's pay.

Autumn draws in and Bro. Albert grows worried. As he visits the sick, he is alarmed at the increase in disease in the city.

Kai enjoys spending time with Dame Maria, but has to be careful not to arouse Dame Maria's suspicions that she is too gentle to be a boy.

On a trip to the mill beyond Kilmainham where Tom's family live, Tom discovers that his younger sister Edith is ill and cannot rise from bed to join in their fun. His mother reassures him that it is only a summer cold, but Tom is unconvinced. Kai has been given a kitten by Tom's mother and Bro. Albert welcomes the new arrival in to the cathedral.

Tom's fears are confirmed when news reaches him that Edith has died. The gradual trickle of sickness has become a flood. Plague has gripped the city and Tom is unable to leave to be with his family.

As the plague sweeps all before it, the monks and Dame Maria try their best to help; however there is little they can do.

Kai visits her brother Edward to find that he is well but exchanges angry words with Paul, another apprentice, cast from the same mould as Roland, and encounters the prejudice that would scapegoat the plague onto outsiders like her.

Dublin is in turmoil as strange Hellfire sects appear in the streets, preaching deliverance; and when Roland's disorientated mother storms into the priory to take Roland away, Bro. Albert steps in to stop her.

Roland, humiliated, flees to the kitchen, where later Kai witnesses his cruel treatment to Dinny, her kitten.

Fear and confusion reign. The death toll mounts as the sickness reaches the priory and Tom, Jack and Bro. Robert, the prior, fall victim to it. Kai helps Bro. Albert to nurse the victims but is unable to save Jack or Bro. Robert who slip away together.

The sadness in the priory is laced with tension as the brothers must now elect a new prior immediately, to protect their lands, and Kai is relieved when the new prior is to be Bro. Stephen.

Kai visits Edward at the stone mason's yard and learns that he has been accused of theft and dismissed. No one knows where he has gone, not even Ymna.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p72):** Kai and Roland argue about how animals should be treated. Bro. Albert says that every living thing should be treated kindly. Do you think that we treat animals kindly? We farm them and use them for experiments too. Do you think that the way we treat animals is closer to Roland's way of thinking or Kai's?
- **(Read p98):** Dublin was a very

frightening place. People lived in great fear for their own safety and lives. This made them behave towards each other in terrible ways. Why do you think that they behaved in this way? What do you think you REALLY might do if you thought that your own life was at risk? Why do you think that the monks and Dame Maria were different?

- **(Read p101):** When things happen that cannot be explained, people sometimes look for an explanation in strange places. Some people think that the position of certain stars in the sky will determine how we behave and affect what happens to us. Do you think that this is really possible? Why do you think that people are prepared to believe in astrology and what effects do YOU think that the stars might have on our lives?
- **(Read p124):** When the statue was discovered in Edward's bundle, suspicion fell on him immediately. When Edward tried to explain, he was dismissed. If there was no other evidence against him, why do you think that no one tried to investigate what had happened but just assumed that he was a thief?

ACTIVITIES

1. A Note for Ymna:

(Read p69) Kai knows that Ymna does the laundry for the priory and is worried that Ymna might give away her secret.

She decides to write a short note for Ymna and hide it in the laundry.

What do you think she might say to explain things to Ymna? What reasons do you think she might give to persuade Ymna not to expose her disguise?

Help Kai to compose the letter.

2. Paradise:

(Read pp73–74) Bro. Albert questions the choir on what they think their own individual version of Paradise might be like.

If you could design your own version of Paradise, what would it contain?

Give a brief description of the main features. What would you definitely include and definitely exclude? Add an illustration.

3. Edith's Diary

(Read pp87&90) Edith is disappointed that she has missed joining in with Tom's friends during their visit.

She knows she is very ill and she is determined to leave Tom a message and decides that she will write in her diary what she thought of their visit and how it cheered her to see them all, especially her brother Tom.

If she suspected that she might never be able to speak to him again, what kind of entry might she compose in her diary? See if you can help Edith write her message?

4. Therapy for Roland:

(Read p93) (You can work in groups for this activity)

Roland is a very unhappy boy and Bro. Albert is anxious to help him. However, he is unable to decide what to do.

If you were to advise Bro. Albert what strategies would you suggest?

You will need to think carefully about Roland's behaviour and what you think might be causing him to behave in the way that he does? What do you think is missing from his life that is making him unhappy and how might Bro. Albert help him?

Use three headings: Behaviour, Cause, Strategy, write down 3 examples of Roland's behaviour and think about the causes and strategies Bro. Albert could use to help Roland.

5. The Lord Says:

(Read p99) Bro. Malcolm refuses to have anything to do with the sick. He justifies this by suggesting that he needs to keep himself safe to pray and says that the sick are somehow personally responsible for their own illnesses.

If you had the opportunity to speak to him; what would you say to convince him that he was wrong?

Criticising him will be pointless. However, he is a monk and perhaps reminding him of some of the advice and stories from the Gospels might work. How would you present this to him to help him realise that he was being selfish and lacking courage?

6. Old Cures Are Best:

(Read pp102 & 110) Kai and Jack help Dame Maria to make medicines and Bro. Albert instructs them on how to look after the sick.

In years gone by people often had to rely on strange remedies when they fell ill.

Do some research among your grandparents to discover some of the old remedies that were used then and what they were supposed to cure.

Compare these with treatments that you receive today. Do you think that any of these remedies might be more effective than today's cures? Can you find any treatments that would still be in use?

Do a treatment chart from then & now for common illnesses and add illustrations.

7. Dear Father:

(Read p109) Roland is terrified by the spread of the plague. He is determined to get away and writes a desperate letter to his father, asking him to help.

What arguments do you think he would use to persuade his father to come to his aid?

What do you think his father's reaction might be when he reads the letter?

In small groups write both the letter that Roland sent and the reply from his father.

8. Delirium:

(Read p112) Tom is very ill and his delirium has caused him to have very strange dreams.

Create an illustration for his nightmare. What images and colours would be best to use?

9. Jack Has Gone:

(Read p14) www.handsonscotland.co.uk/topics/life_events/bereavement.html
www.bbc.co.uk/health/emotional_health/bereavement/bereavement_helpchildren.shtml

Jack has died quietly in the night and Bro. Albert tries to comfort Tom and Kai.

Create a class leaflet on how you might support someone from your class who has lost someone who was dear to them? Think of what to say and what not to say.

Unit 3 Trouble (pp127–204)

SUMMARY

Jack has died, Edward has disappeared and Kai wanders the streets in a daze. Seeking comfort, she goes to the cathedral and begins to sing. As her voice swells in the empty space, she feels an energy pulse through her and realises that she is being accompanied.

The accompaniment sounds familiar and, with a start, she realises that it is Jack. His ghost has joined with the ghosts of all the

others who have ever sung in the cathedral and accompanies Kate (he now knows her secret).

Anxious to return to the priory, Kai does not tell Tom about her encounter. Tom is recovering and they both decide to visit the mason's yard to recruit Joan's help in proving Edward innocent of theft.

Joan traps Paul into an admission, but when he retracts, her father accepts Paul's version. Kai and Tom decide to scare him into confessing and when Paul is sent into the crypt to mend some stonework they lie in wait and frighten him.

Kai and Tom both miss Jack. Tom notices that Kai is becoming secretive. As Kai is about to tell Tom about the voices, Roland appears and accuses her of being a witch.

Kai reacts aggressively, the memory of a past incident stirring. She tries to walk off, but Roland persists and when Kai pushes him he stumbles into the river.

He cannot swim and Kai and Tom are forced to jump in to rescue him. Gasping, Roland accuses Kai of malice and vows revenge, but Kai has already gone, back to the priory.

Tom is rebuffed again when Kai goes alone to the cathedral and when Roland enquires about her whereabouts Tom casually directs him to the cathedral.

Roland witnesses Kai's exchange with the voices and discovers the secret that she is a girl. Immediately he denounces her to Bro. Malcolm who sees his chance to create a public outcry and have the election of Bro. Stephen as prior reversed in his favour. Roland's father has returned and together they seize Kai and announce that they have captured the witch who is responsible for all the woes that have visited Dublin. They arrange a public trial and burning for the next morning.

When news reaches Tom he contacts Ymna who sends him to find Ned in the wild country beyond Dublin.

Uproar rules the streets as the crowds gather to burn the 'witch'. Bro. Albert's and Dame Maria's pleas are powerless.

As the flames begin to consume the pyre, a distraction splits the crowd. It is Ned at the head of a band of musicians. His reason deflects the crowd and they carry Kai off to the cathedral to test the virtue of the voices she has heard.

Moved by what they hear and rebuked by Bro. Stephen, the crowd join in with the singing and their threat dissolves.

Her accusers fled, Kai/Kate is now safe living with Dame Maria and content with her new life.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp127&133):** Edward is the son of a fairground musician and traveller so he must be to blame for the theft. Do you think it is fair to assume that he is to blame? What do you think was influencing Master Giles when he made his decision? Do you think that we can make the same sort of decisions today about people? Why do you think that it is sometimes very easy to become prejudiced about people or things? Do you think that you have any prejudices?
- **(Read p160):** Dame Maria tells Kai that Roland fears that he does not meet his father's expectations of him. What sort of effect do you think that other people's expectations of us can have on our behaviour? If expectations are unreasonable, how do you think that might influence how you felt about yourself and how you behaved?
- **(Read pp180–181):** Our opinions of people can sometimes change because of unexpected things that they do. Dame Rachel surprises Kai with a simple act of kindness and causes Kai to think that she may indeed be saner than her husband. Why do you think that Dame Rachel helped Kai and how might she have appeared to be saner than her husband?
- **(Read pp194–195):** The mob has refused to listen to reason and is determined to burn Kai as a witch. Do you think that if there were only a few people there instead of a crowd they would still be prepared to kill her? What do you think happens to people when they act as a crowd? How does this encourage gangs and bullying?

ACTIVITIES

1. Echoes in Time:

(Read pp131–132) Kai has discovered that Jack and the other children have managed to leave a reflection of their musical talents as a sort of echo in time.

The echo has attached itself to the stones of the cathedral because that is where they were happiest in life.

Each of us has a talent, something that we like to do.

What and where do you think that the echo in time of your talent might be?

Give a brief description and illustration.

2. Author's Assistant:

(Read pp140–141) When she was writing the story, the author Eithne Massey wondered if Kai should tell Tom her secret at this point.

What do you think?

If Kai did tell Tom her secret, describe three main changes to the plot that would then have to happen. What would the characters do differently, particularly Tom? How might the end of the story change?

3. Memories:

(Read pp142–143) The stones in the cathedral hold the memories of all the children who have ever sung there.

Choose a place that you know, perhaps your classroom/street etc, where people have been living for a long while.

What memories do you think are woven into the fabric of the place? They could be sounds, stories, colours, smells, an atmosphere.

In groups, take a sheet of A3 paper and decide what memories you think are there. How do you think you might best show these?

4. Roland's Report:

(Read pp161 & 167) Sir Patrick, Roland's father, has returned and Roland has been allowed to return home for a few days.

Sir Patrick has asked Bro. Albert for a report on Roland's progress.

Write the report. Remember that Bro. Albert is a kindly man and he does not want to provoke Sir Patrick. He will try to tell the truth but in a diplomatic way.

5. Can I Speak to You?

(Read p163) Kai finds it comforting to be able to talk to Jack's ghost and listen to the stories from the other children from the past.

If you could talk to someone from the past, whom would you choose? Explain why you would like to speak to them and what you would ask them.

What information do you think you might discover?

6. Roland's List:

(Read p166) Roland has begun to watch Kai very closely. He is convinced that there is something very strange about her.

He has begun to make a list of what he sees in order to present this to his father. He has two columns in his list: one for his **suspicions** and one for the **evidence** that he thinks will support them. Create the list that he wrote.

Use the two columns that Roland chooses. Remember that Roland will try to put the worst possible interpretation on every thing that he finds out about Kai.

7. Kai's Lawyer:

(Read p177) Bro. Malcolm and Sir Patrick do not allow Kai to speak in her defence. Each time she tries to speak they add a new charge to her indictment.

She needs someone to speak on her behalf, to defend her against the charges they have laid.

Prepare a defence brief for her.

Work in small groups and take each of the charges separately. You will have to prepare a defence statement for each one of them that can be read out to her accusers.

You could even do this as a performance in class, with some of you reading the charges and others reading her defence.

8. The Voice of Reason:

(Read pp191–194) When the crowd begin to chant, it seems that it will be impossible to save Kai. The voice of reason has been drowned in the chanting of the crowd.

The crowd will not listen to reason or any explanation; however, an opposing chant might work: something that contradicts the charges or draws attention away from them. It will have to be short and easily heard and understood.

Decide on 2 or 3 chants that distract the crowd and frustrate the efforts of Bro. Malcolm and Sir Patrick.

Perform your chants for the class.

9. The Window:

(Read pp201–202) www.storyboardtoys.com/gallery/medieval-tapestry-lesson-plan.htm

Things have improved in Dublin. The worst of the plague has passed and Kate is now living with Dame Maria. One evening she overhears Dame Maria and Bro. Albert discuss all that has happened.

Dame Maria would like to commission either a window for the cathedral or a tapestry, to celebrate their deliverance from the plague and dedicate it to the memory of all the children who had ever sung in the choirs of the cathedral down through the ages.

Kate immediately offers to help. She will need a team of people to assist. Help Kai to decide whether a window or a tapestry would be more appropriate and then design and create the piece for her.

CLASS PROJECT

Medieval Europe and particularly the events of the Black Plague offer a lot of opportunity for extending the scope of the novel.

The topic would more appropriate as research-based projects with the children presenting their information. E.g

- The mayor of Dublin has commissioned a report on the plague. Help him to write it? Include witness statements as well as facts?
- Bro. Albert has asked you to help him to record in the annals of the priory an impression of life during the plague.

Useful information can be found at:

medieualeurope.mrdonn.org/plague.html

www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/black_impact_01.shtml

www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/England-History/GreatPlague.htm