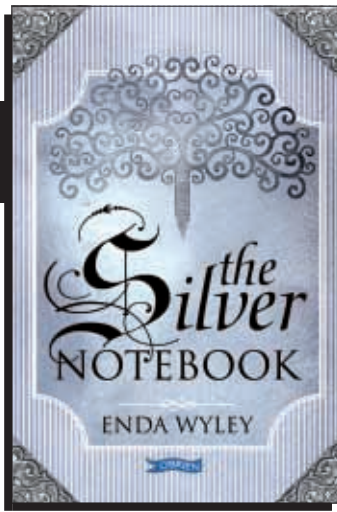


THE SILVER NOTEBOOK

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Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE AND THEMES

The book examines the sensitive issues of loss and bereavement through the stories of Timothy and his mother. The time framework delicately weaves both past and present into the narrative of Timothy's hopes and frustrations, as he dreams of meeting his father again.

The pace of the story matches Timothy's growing impatience as he attempts to decipher the significance of each trace to his past.

The content is suitable for upper primary classes and the themes are presented in a sensitive way that will engage children irrespective of their personal experience of them.

- Bereavement
- Loss
- Relationships
- Personal ambitions
- Friendships
- Fears

SUMMARY

This is the story of Timothy Finn, for whom the past and present are woven together in a mysterious tapestry. He lives by the sea with his mother. Timothy's mother is secretive about the past and he is curious about the mysterious father he has never seen. Armed with a creative imagination, a passion for storytelling, and the encouragement of his best friend Fleur, Timothy struggles to unravel these mysteries and finally discover the truth about his past.

APPROACH

The themes in the story, coping with bereavement and loss, address an

important area of personal development that children can empathise with, and may have experience of. The joyful and vibrant support Timothy gets from his mother, his friend Fleur, and his own strategies for coping with his feelings prevent the story from becoming melancholy.

The book has been divided into three sections and the management of the activities should offer the opportunity for group and whole class discussion.

UNIT 1 THE STORYTELLER PAGES 11-62

SUMMARY

Young Timothy Finn is a storyteller. He conjures words into magnificent stories. Everyone who hears these stories falls under their spell. Timothy loves the effect his stories have on people, especially his mother Julia. Julia is unsettled as she listens to Timothy create a story about the father he never knew. She thinks it will be good for him to begin school, where she hopes he will find distraction in the company of new friends and activities.

The story moves forward to Timothy's eighth birthday. It's Christmas and among his presents is an unexpected gift from his father. It is a silver notebook. The gift disturbs Timothy and devastates his mother. Julia realises that Timothy is ready to hear about his father and tells him of the circumstances surrounding his birth and the disappearance of his father. Timothy does not realise that her explanation is incomplete.

Timothy needs time to think but all has

now changed for him. He uses the notebook to create a presence for his father through the stories that he writes.

Timothy meets Fleur one day while enjoying the peace on the hillside. She is French and is staying with her grandfather who owns the Post Office. After this encounter they become friends. Fleur is enchanting, sophisticated and a perfect foil to Timothy's reserve. She is to start at his school the following day and Timothy has a feeling that his life will not be the same again.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read pp.23-24. Why do you think Timothy liked to make up stories about his father and himself and why do you think his mother wanted him to start school when she heard the stories? Do you think she was right?
- Read pp.40-43. When he heard about his father, Timothy was very upset. Do you think he dealt with his distress sensibly? Think of some other sensible ways to deal with distress.
- Read pp.60. Timothy had seen computers before but he knew that his mother would never approve of one in Boat Cottage. Why do you think she disapproved? Do you think she was right?

ACTIVITIES

1. Bigger and louder

Do this activity in small groups

Read pp.19-22. Timothy uses his imagination to create stories from ordinary events. He does this with 'exaggeration'.

Use your imagination and exaggerate something ordinary that you are doing today to create a story. Each person in the group can add a little to the telling of the story. When you have finished you can listen to each group's story.

2. Timothy's fish

Read pp.21-22. Timothy describes the fish he saw to his mother in such detail that she is able to paint a picture of it. Draw or paint a picture to match his description. What was it about the fish that made Gregory think that it had swum all the way from Africa?

3. First Impressions

Read pp.24-25. First impressions are important because they can give you an immediate feeling of what a person is like. Can you remember the first time you met your best friend? Describe what you noticed first and what made the biggest impression on you. Think about what they said or wore. Perhaps it was their expressions or gestures that you were most aware of. Draw an illustration of your friend.

4. A poem

Read p.30. Poetry can be a very clear and effective way of describing something. Timothy has discovered lines from his father's favourite poem. Do you have a favourite poem? What are your favourite lines from it? Ask someone at home if they have a favourite quote. Write what it is, whether or not you like it and why.

5. My notebook

Read pp.43-46. Timothy has a silver notebook that encourages him to write stories. He uses it to collect his ideas. Get a new copybook and do the same. Decorate the cover and divide it into sections for your ideas on

- Characters
- Beginnings
- Plots
- Words and phrases

Collect your ideas from home/school/the people you meet/the books you read. Use these to write your very own story.

6. I love words

Work in small groups for this activity

Read p.43. Timothy loves words. They are his special friends. Do you think he has a favourite word? What do you think it is? Choose a favourite word for your group. Write your favourite word carefully and take turns in saying each person in your group's favourite word slowly. Listen carefully. What other words seem to fit with yours? Choose one matching word each. Use your favourite word and the word matching it to create a short (100 word) piece of writing. Compare what each of you has written when you are finished.

7. Fleur

Read pp.55-59. Timothy and Fleur meet for the first time and become friends. Why do you think they like each other? After they meet Timothy takes a new page in his book and writes Fleur at the top. He draws a picture of her and writes a short explanation of why he likes her. Fleur uses the internet to send a short email to her mother about Timothy. Write what you think both would have written. How might their styles differ?

Unit 2 FLEUR PAGES 63-130

SUMMARY

Meeting Fleur energises Timothy and he becomes more persistent in trying to discover as much as he can about his father. His mother asks him to go and play as she needs to be alone. Timothy decides to watch her and is troubled because she seems so sad. As a result of his persistence he is thrilled to discover that he is named after his father.

Fleur joins Timothy's class at school and their friendship develops. Fleur invites Timothy home to her grandfather's. While pretending to sleep in the garden, she listens to Timothy read one of his stories about his father. Fleur is overcome with sympathy for her new friend and immediately resolves to do her best to help him.

Fleur's enthusiasm is infectious and she and Timothy spend more time together after school. Fleur's grandfather collects old photos of Rowanstown. Fleur finds a photo of Timothy's mother as a girl in her

grandfather's collection. She shows it to Timothy and he decides to ask his mother about it. Julia laughs and explains that she used to spend her summers in Rowanstown as a child. Later Timothy sees what Fleur noticed immediately. There is a boy in the photo who is the exact image of himself. Is he looking at a picture of his father?

Timothy continues to write marvellous stories and his teacher says that he is clearly a writer. Fleur has a surprise for him after school. She has discovered the whereabouts of a reclusive writer who lives close by. They decide to introduce themselves and show the writer Timothy's stories to see if he can offer him any advice.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read pp.72-73. Sometimes people exaggerate and invent stories when they are feeling insecure or want to be part of a group. They try to appear bigger, brighter, better than they are. Why do you think that they do this? How does it make others feel? How would you know if someone was exaggerating?
- Read pp.64-65. Everyone gets sad sometimes. Do you think Julia deals with her sadness sensibly? Why do you think some people want to be alone when they are sad? Is this wise? Is it a good idea to tell someone when you are sad? What are good things to say to someone who is feeling sad?
- Read pp.84-85 and p.92. Why does Timothy get annoyed with Fleur for asking questions? Is it important to have secrets? Are there different types of secrets? Is there ever a time when you shouldn't keep a secret? Who do you share your secrets with?
- Read pp.122-123. What is your imagination and how useful do you think it is? What can you use your imagination for? How does having an imagination benefit you? In what ways do you think your life would be different if you had no imagination?

ACTIVITIES

1. The Picture

Read pp.65-66. When someone paints a picture it is another way of communicating – just like words or music. Julia uses her paintings to express her great anger and sorrow. How does an angry picture will differ from a happy picture? Think of colour, shapes and subject. Draw two different pictures of the same thing – one happy and one angry. Explain how and why they are different.

2. My Friend

Read pp.56-60. It's very important to have friends. You can share your feelings with them and friends can support you when you are feeling sad. Not everyone will suit you as a close friend. Write a 'Person Profile' for the ideal friend for you. What type of person would they be? What would their interests be? Add an illustration to give an idea of what they might be like.

3. The Name

You should do this activity as homework

Read p.69. Timothy is thrilled to discover that he is called after his father. Our names are very important to us because they tell us who we are. Do you know why you were given your name? What do you think of your name? What does your name mean? Do you know anyone whom you admire who has the same name as you? Make a bookmark with your name illuminated on one side and a motto for yourself on the other.

4. A Good Story

Work in small groups for this activity

Read pp.77-79. Miss Cornellie praises Timothy's story and the class discuss why they think it is a good story. Make a list of the things that you think make a good story. When you have completed your list, you can share it with everyone. Make a short list of four or five things that Miss Cornellie praises Timothy's story and the class discuss why they think it is a good story. Make a list of the things that you think should be in a good story, for example:

- Character (e.g. Grumpy old man)
- Setting (e.g. in a restaurant)
- Theme (e.g. being kind to each other)

- Genre (e.g. Humorous)

When you have completed your list share it with everyone else in the group. You can then try to use each other's lists to write a story.

5. The Meal

Read pp.100-101. Fleur invites Timothy to a meal with some very unusual sounding dishes. Pretend you are cooking for your friends and create a similarly interesting menu. Design and illustrate a menu card describing what you would cook and serve for them.

6. The Photo

Read pp.102-108. Photographs are very interesting. They hold information and memories. Find an old photo at home and bring it in to class. If there is anyone in the photo, tell the class their story. If it is a photo of a place, see if you can find a recent photo of the same place and compare them both. Pretend you are one in one of the photos and give a short description of what you can see.

UNIT 3 THE MAN IN THE WOODS PAGES 131-200

SUMMARY

Fleur is determined to find Philip Montgomerie, the reclusive author, because she wants him to help Timothy become a real writer. Using a map that her father sent her, the pair set off through the woods until they come to his house. They drop coloured beads as they go along in case they get lost. As they approach Philip's house a storm breaks and they are drenched. Philip finds them outside his window, forlorn and soaked.

Philip's reaction is swift and unexpected. He chases them away and in his annoyance, he flings his own precious notebook at Timothy. Fleur and Timothy flee and it is with relief that they return to her grandfather's garden, still clutching Philip's notebook.

When Timothy reads the story in the notebook, he recognises it as his own and assumes that Philip must be his father. He

resolves to return the notebook and discover if Philip is indeed his father. Timothy returns to Philip's house by himself and receives a better welcome. Philip and he spend time sharing stories. When it is time to go Timothy realises that Philip cannot be his father, as they do not share the same first name.

Later while playing hide and seek with Fleur among the gravestones of the ruined abbey, the final piece of Timothy's jigsaw falls into place with devastating effect. Timothy is horrified to find a tombstone with his name on it. Only his mother Julia can explain.

The final explanation is painful for them both. Timothy's father died from cancer. He chose to die alone in an effort to spare his wife the grief of watching him die. By coincidence they both chose to move to Rowanstown. Philip Montgomerie was a close friend to both of them and offered Timothy's father a place to stay in peace. Philip arranged a final meeting with him, his wife and newborn son. Julia explains to Timothy that he did see his father just before he died. Timothy was a newborn infant at the time but it comforts him to know that he did indeed meet his father. Julia phones Philip and invites him to Boat Cottage and everything is finally and fully explained to Timothy. With Fleur and her father arriving to meet them, the story finally achieves its happy ending.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read pp.135-139. Timothy and Fleur go to find Philip Montgomerie. They tell nobody where they are going. It is to a place they have never visited before. Do you think that this was wise of them? In what ways have they placed themselves in danger? What sensible precautions might they have taken before they set off?
- Read pp.152-159. Everyone has kept what happened to Timothy's father a secret. No one is prepared to talk about it and Timothy is left to guess about what happened. Is this the best way to deal with painful feelings? Why do you think everyone stays silent about Timothy's father for so long?
- Read pp.184-187. Timothy's father is seriously ill and this makes him behave in a way that hurts his wife and son.

What do you think he was feeling and thinking when he decided to go away? Do you think he was thinking rationally? Why do you think Julia decided not to tell Timothy the truth? Do you think it is easier for people to deal with painful things if they know the truth? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITIES

1. The Harbour

Read p.151. The description of Rowanstown harbour is very clear. Draw or paint a picture of what you think it might look like based on this description.

2. Philip Montgomerie

Read pp.43-144. It seemed that the Philip that Fleur and Timothy met on the first day was completely different from the Philip that Timothy met on the second day. What caused the change in his behaviour? What do you think he was thinking on both days? Pretend Philip kept a diary for that week and write his entries for the two days he met Timothy.

3. A Story

Read pp.168-171. Philip Montgomerie shows Timothy how a writer can create a story by just using their imagination. Bring in something interesting from home that you think might prompt a good story. When everyone in your class has brought in an object, put them altogether and get everyone to pick one. Don't choose the object you brought in. Write a story inspired by, or based on, the object that you picked. When the story is finished share it with the person who brought the object in.

4. The Card

Read pp.184-187. When Timothy's father became ill his personality changed as well. He became very frightened and behaved strangely. Now that Timothy understands this, he has decided to make him a little card to explain how he feels and to give him the comfort he would have liked to have given him if he had been able to speak to him in person. Make a card like the one you think Timothy created. What memories do you think he would share? Do you think he would include a quote from a poem that he liked as well? What sort of illustration might he include?

5. The Gift

Do this activity in small groups

Read pp.190-191. Timothy's father wanted Timothy to know that he loved him, so he left him the notebook as a gift. If you were to give a gift to someone to show how you felt about them, what would you choose? Who would you give it to?

6. The Documentary

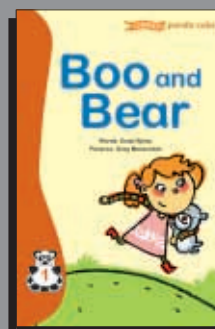
Read pp.184-187. Fleur's father has now completed his documentary on Philip Montgomerie and it is about to be shown on television soon. As part of the advertising for the programme, they need to create a poster and a short (100 word) commentary to be included in the television section of the newspaper. Help Fleur to write a piece for the television guide and create the poster to accompany it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, ENDA WYLEY



Enda Wyley is a poet and has had several books published including *Eating Baby Jesus*, *Socrates in the Garden* and *Poems for Breakfast*. Enda has written *Boo and Bear* for younger readers and one of her poems is included in the spectacular children's poetry anthology, *Something Beginning with P*.

Other books by Enda Wyley



Enda has written *Boo and Bear* in the O'Brien Panda Cubs series for beginner readers.

Enda is also one of the contributors to the acclaimed poetry anthology *Something Beginning with P*.