



The Butterfly Shell

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE & THEMES

Marie has discovered that she has a rival for her mother's affections, a perfect child with her name who existed before she did; one she cannot compete against, a child fixed in the memory of time.

Shocked by this discovery, her sense of identity suffers another blow at school when Rachel and her gang exploit her vulnerability.

Demoralized and confused and despite the friendship of Stella, she is unable to break the cycle of destruction and seeks escape in self-harm.

A road accident provides a catharsis, enabling her to reach out to her family seeking assurance and explanation and in the process she finds the courage to accept who she is and disrupt the cycle that has imprisoned her.

The themes explored are:

- Courage
- Self esteem
- Bullying
- Self harm
- Accepting diversity
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Responsibility
- Identity
- Integrity

SUMMARY

When Marie accidentally discovers a cache of letters written by her mother to a sister who died before she was born and whose name she now carries, Marie is confused. The tone of the letters convinces her that the deceased Marie was the preferred child and she becomes increasingly unable to cope with the insecurity she feels.

Transferring to secondary school, she loses the support of familiar surroundings and is vulnerable to Rachel and her gang of bullies

who set about eroding her sense of identity.

Despite making friends with Stella, a strangely introverted girl, Marie hides her anxieties from everyone, seeking comfort in cutting and scratching herself as a way of distracting her thoughts and escaping from the bullies' attentions.

Marie's mother feels that Marie's sense of isolation began the previous year when she was excluded from the preparations for Confirmation, which culminated in the church ceremony and class party, because her parents refuse to participate in the charade of pretending to be Catholic.

The bullying escalates and Marie now begins to be troubled at night by the sound of a baby crying, the source of which she is unable to identify.

The gang begins to text her and Marie wonders how Stella has escaped their attention.

Though she had hoped to enjoy the Halloween disco, Rachel's spiteful remark drives Marie home early, but not before Stella shocks her with a pointed question about hearing voices.

Rachel's bullying pervades every aspect of Marie's life, even threatening to destroy her friendship with Stella.

The family's Christmas break in Connemara provides the only respite from Rachel and the crying that haunts her nights.

Marie's reaction to Rachel's final torment provokes a serious traffic injury for her. Recovering in hospital, the revealed scarring from her 'cutting' provides the opportunity to reveal her anxieties to her mother and enjoy her support, finally understanding the warmth of love behind all her mother's letters.

Returning to school, strengthened, her friendship with Stella intact and her sense of identity secure, she realizes that the bullies no longer have any power over her.

APPROACH

This story, charts the journey of a vulnerable girl as she seeks to establish her identity in the face of a campaign of bullying that encourages unhealthy choices.

The issues raised in the story are important for many children as they struggle to identify safe choices for themselves.

The approach requires sensitivity and awareness and will be characterized by discussion groups, the activities relating easily to the SPHE / PDMU frameworks.

The guide is divided into three sections to accommodate both the development of the story and understanding of the events.

Section 1 The Super Six Pages 7 - 63

SUMMARY

Marie sets out to explain why she believes in ghosts, always wears her butterfly shell and has stopped 'cutting' herself.

Preparing for her first day at secondary school, Marie decides to raid her mother's perfume drawer and discovers a secret cache of letters there.

Having time to read only the first one she grasps they are written to the daughter who died before she was born, the child she is named after, the perfect child.

Before she can adjust to this discovery, she must face her first day at her new school.

The first day is a confusing miscellany of impressions and introductions. Stella is withdrawn and has a strange habit of repeating what she says, Rachel is confident, manipulative and in control.

Rachel assigns everyone either to her circle, the Super Six or to 'others' and Marie is definitely one of the others, Rachel coining

the sobriquet 'Other Marie' to reinforce her position.

Marie realizes that she has become a target for Rachel's malicious intent as the bullying begins with a patronizing sneer at the contents of her school bag.

At home, Marie recalls her parents telling her about the child they lost, her sister, the first Marie, and the charmed abalone shell they buried with her. Later she tries unsuccessfully to find the courage to ask about her lost sister in the hope that her mother might explain the letters, but takes refuge in her reading instead.

At school, the catalogue of petty, malign attentions from the 'Super Six' continues and Marie decides to keep a file on them all.

Marie declines an offer to join her dad on an inspection trip to a wind farm and takes the opportunity to shine in school during a poetry class instead, much to Rachel's annoyance.

Marie's glow of satisfaction is short-lived when Stella's clumsy attempt to warn her of the gum that has been stuck in her hair alerts the teacher and allows Rachel to publicly mock her.

Mysterious baby cries in the night begin to disturb her sleep. Recalling an incident when she heard crying on a beach in Kerry, she begins to believe that she might have psychic powers.

The first text seemed innocuous; the following five confirmed that the 'Super Six' had found another way to reach her.

The Halloween disco marked the end of term and respite for Marie, despite her costume being distinctly underwhelming.

Stella performs a fortune telling act, jolting Marie with the precision of her observations.

Leaving early, Marie walks home, the laughter of Rachel's ridicule ringing in her ears.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p10): Marie's father believes that the local school is preferable to the private one. If everyone follows the same curriculum and sits the same exams, do you think there is an advantage in attending a private school? What do you think are the real reasons why parents choose private schools?
- (Read pp14-15): Marie finds Stella's mannerisms unusual and immediately believes her to be weird. Many people use their first impression of others to define them and it can then be very

difficult to change this view. How do you think this process works? What do you think is noticed first and which signs are given more importance. Do you think that this encourages us to discriminate unfairly?

- (Read pp19-20): Rachel pretends to help; however she only wants the opportunity to display the contents of Rachel's bag and mock them. Do you think our possessions reflect our sense of security and self esteem? Are possessions important to our self esteem and how do we decide what are the right possessions to have?
- (Read p49): Although Rachel orchestrates the bullying campaign; the others are willing to participate. Why do you think that others were willing to follow Rachel's example? How do you think that she was able to control them? Why do you think that bullies usually need a group of compliant conspirators in order to be effective?

ACTIVITIES

1. 3-4-U: (Read p7)

Marie has defined herself in three statements. It gives us a sense of who she is and what is important for her. It is a difficult thing to do.

Could you create three statements, which would define you? Think carefully about what you want each statement to say about you.

2. Perfumes: (Read pp 10-11)

A fragrance can have an intoxicating effect on our memories and emotions, helping to recall past events clearly.

The lavender perfume creates a joyful childhood memory for Marie.

Create a short poem (*Haiku/Cinquain*) to describe a childhood memory of yours that is prompted by a fragrance.

www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/

www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-haiku/

3. From ME to ME: (Read p12)

Marie is staggered to discover letters that her mother has written to her sister. It is like a familiar voice calling from the past, reawakening memories that have almost been forgotten.

Could you write a letter to the person you **WILL** be in 20 years time?

You could describe for them a day in school or a trip / event you have enjoyed and try to

capture for them the sense of fun you think they might have forgotten.

4. Don't let it start (Read pp18-19)

The schoolbag incident is the beginning of Rachel's campaign of bullying.

When she recalls that day, Marie knows that if she had said or done something differently she might have stopped Rachel's bullying then.

Can you work in small groups to create a 'Prevent me from being bullied' advice sheet for Marie?

You could include, how to spot a bully, what to say, good retorts, how to protect yourself, how to discourage a bully, how to help others.

5. Will you wear my shoes? (Read p22)

Marie wonders how her world would be different viewed by another's eyes.

She is captivated by the idea and challenges **YOU** to wear another's shoes and experience how your world is different for them.

Choose one of the children from the sites below and try to imagine what their life experience is like.

When you have finished, write them a polite letter of thanks for the experience and try to outline some of the things in their lives that you admire.

www.childrenincrossfire.org/programme/real-life-stories

www.goalglobal.org/stories

www.trocaire.org/education

6. My Name (Read pp28-29)

Marie discovers why she is called Marie.

Each of us had our names chosen for us by our parents for a reason.

Research at home why you were given your name and what is special about it for you.

Then create on an A4 sheet a large and colourful illuminated version of your name to illustrate the explanation of why you were given your name.

7. The Disco (Read pp58-59)

The principal has offered a small prize for the most interesting poster advertising the disco and Stella and Marie decide to submit an entry.

Rachel and the 'Super Six' are determined to win and also submit an entry.

Working in small groups and using the

information you have about the people involved, could you create the entries that each of them submitted?

How do you think they might be different?

Section 2 Other Marie Pages 64 - 120

SUMMARY

The sound of a child crying dominates Marie's sleep yet she is reluctant to confide in her mum, taking the opportunity of the Halloween break to work on her school project and update the 'black information' she is compiling in her Rachel and the 'Super Six' file.

When Stella visits, Marie questions her observation at the disco. Stella explains that Marie's constant head twitching in class suggested that she was listening to sounds that the others could not hear, explaining that close observation was the secret of her seemingly 'magic' skills.

Cheered by Stella's visit, Marie acknowledges her mother's concern over her lack of friends. Her mother attributes this to Marie's reserve, but Marie knows that it is the curious feeling of stillness in the house, which makes her reluctant to invite people to visit.

She recalls the stinging isolation experienced the previous year at Confirmation because she did not take part and the blazing argument her mother had with the school over their refusal to include her in any of the events.

Her sleep is governed by the sounds of a child crying.

When she is asked to read her project to the class, their applause is warm and spontaneous.

Buoyed, she fails to see the trap when Rachel invites her to join them for lunch. Believing she has been accepted in the group, too late, she realizes that doing Rachel's homework is the price of admission and rejects the offer. Rachel however makes it clear that her refusal will have consequences.

That evening at home doing her sewing homework, Marie uses the needle to cut herself, experiencing a release of tension. Untroubled for the first time in ages by the nightly crying, she wakes refreshed, secure in her new distraction and protected from Rachel's onslaught.

The spiteful texting resumes, forcing Marie to capitulate and agree to do Rachel's

homework, her cutting high up on both arms, out of sight and soothing.

Doing Rachel's homework is now routine, however the intimidation has not ceased and Marie has become adept at creating anecdotes to allay her parent's concern about how she is adjusting to her new school.

Bumping into Rachel in the shopping centre Marie is relieved when her mum isn't spotted, realizing that her mum being overweight embarrasses her. The guilt intensifies the cycle of cutting and disturbed sleep. The only respite will be the Christmas holidays.

The day before the holiday, she learns during a visit that Stella has a potentially life threatening allergy and promises to keep the information a secret.

Christmas in Connemara is a blissful relief. The routine of a family celebration eases her need to cut and silences the night cries, while an unexpected present of a puppy is the perfect gift for her.

Activating her phone at New Year, Marie discovers them, six texts, reminding her that the joy of Connemara is temporary. School and Rachel's 'Super Six' are waiting for her.

Back at home, the night crying resumes and Marie almost takes the opportunity of some quiet time with her mum to share her fears, however the moment is lost in silence.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read p67-69**): Marie has compiled a file of negative information on Rachel and her friends. Do you think that this level of intrusion is appropriate? How would you justify her actions? What does it tell you about how Marie is coping with being bullied? What advice would you give her?
- (**Read p79**): Marie's father is adamant that she will not be confirmed. The attitude of the school and the parents are encouraging everyone else to be confirmed. Do you think that children should be allowed to choose for themselves? Do you believe that choice of religion, like the right to vote and marry should be deferred until children are older? How would you argue this?
- (**Read p82**): One of the most important tasks for a school is to create an atmosphere where each child feels valued. What things can a school do to create this feeling? What things can erode or destroy a feeling of being valued? Do you think Marie's school succeeded in this?
- (**Read pp100-101**): Marie is embarrassed

in case Rachel discovers that her mother is overweight. Is this a sign of her disloyalty? Is it acceptable for children to be embarrassed by their parents? How might a parent feel to discover that they embarrass their child?

- (**Read pp114-119**): Marie's mum is concerned about her and makes a number of attempts to encourage her to discuss what is worrying her. Each time Marie resists the urge to confide in her mum. How should her mum begin the conversation? How can Marie find the words to explain? Do they need another person with them?

ACTIVITIES

1. Detail (**Read p71**)

Stella explains that she is able to observe things in the tiniest detail.

If she were to spend 30 minutes in your class, what detail would she notice?

Could you write her description of the things she sees and hears in your room?

You will have to be very alert because Stella will see and hear things that you have forgotten to notice.

2. Noise and Colour (**Read p75**)

Marie feels that although her home lacks noise and colour in the air, she does like her own bedroom.

If you were asked to describe your favourite place using only noise and colour, how would you share your sense of enjoyment?

What are the noises and colours that fill the air of your favourite place like?

Could you use write a very short description using onomatopoeia? You can draw your description if you like. Use the sites below for ideas.

www.poetry4kids.com/blog/news/onomatopoeia-poetry-lesson-plan/
www.ereadingworksheets.com/figurative-language/poetic-devices/onomatopoeia-examples/

3. Dear Chairman (**Read pp80-82**)

Marie's mum is furious at the way the school has treated Marie because she was not involved in Confirmation.

She decides to write to the governors outlining her concerns and pointing out how the school's behaviour falls short of their Christian values.

Could you help her to write the letter?

4. Faces (Read p90)

Marie is disturbed by the six silent, staring faces, each different, but each equally nasty.

That evening she decides to add a group drawing of their faces to her 'Super Six' file.

Can you help her to create the drawing?

5. Stella Says (Read pp93 & 96)

Stella watches Marie carefully and realizes what is happening.

She decides to write a note for Marie to support her and leaves it under her book.

What sort of advice would Stella give and what sort of language would she use?

Do you think she would have any sharp, sensible sayings to support her advice?

Can you help her write the note?

6. The Baby (Read pp108-109)

Marie listens to the adults describing the baby and remembers that they usually use parents' features as well. I.e. dad's eyes / mum's nose etc.

To entertain themselves, she and Mairead decide to write a funny poem describing the baby using only ridiculous comparisons.

Can you help them to compose the poem and then draw what you think the baby might look like from the descriptions?

7. Texts (Read pp116-117)

Marie is tormented by unpleasant and intimidating texts. This is a problem for many children and is called Cyber-Bullying.

She needs some sensible advice on how to deal with the problem.

Can you work in small groups to create a simple 'Help' sheet that she could use?

Your sheet could offer encouragement as well as useful tips on how to deal with the problem.

You can use information from the sites below.

www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/cyberbullying.htm

www.childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals/for-working-with-young-people/hot-topics/cyberbullying

Section 3 The Butterfly Shell Pages 121-181

SUMMARY

The new term brings no change and when

Rachel humiliates her with a nasty initiation challenge. Marie finds the temptation to 'cut' irresistible.

Two school competitions are announced, one to design a poster and one to write a story. Marie suggests Stella enter the poster competition and decides to enter the story competition herself.

At lunch, drawn by Rachel's waving and thrilled at being accepted Marie joins her, leaving Stella. She is unable to resist being drawn into Rachel's group, craving the attention she believes that they are giving her.

At a nail polish party in Rachel's house, blinded by the lavish surroundings, Marie agrees to supply confidential information on Stella, failing to see how she is being manipulated.

Ashamed when Rachel uses the peanut allergy information to humiliate Stella, Marie is unable to extricate herself from their influence.

Marie discovers that Stella is not annoyed, but still shuns her, unable to resist the inexorable draw of acceptance as part of Rachel's group.

Invited to a group meeting to discuss their healthy food project and issued with a camera, Marie realizes that she is to be the instrument used to shame her own mother.

Tears streaming down her face and with Rachel's mocking laughter ringing in her ears, she rushes from the meeting into the path of a lorry and is seriously injured.

Marie's coma lasts nine days. A strange time of memories and time shifts allowing her to meet the sister she lost and retrieve the abalone shell fragment her mother had buried with the child.

Marie convinces everyone that she has no recall of the incident or what caused it, however part of her recovery includes psychiatric care, the hospital having noticed the cutting scars.

Stella visits her every day and reads to her. She has kept the 'Super Six' file safe, helping to shred it when Marie recovers and recounting the creative revenge she took on the group with the file.

Marie's birthday is a joyful family occasion. Presents are given and surprise follows surprise until her mum presents her with the box of letters she had seen so many months before.

Encouraged, she discovers to her elated disbelief that most of the letters are addressed to her, written by her mother

on each of her birthdays; letters of pride, joy and love, while nestling at the bottom of the box she finds the abalone shell, now mounted on a chain ready for her to wear.

Back at school, Marie decides to take part in a geography test even though she has missed all the preparation and is astonished with her score.

Stella is delighted and reveals that she had read the material to her while she was in the coma. Marie realizes the depth of Stella's friendship for her.

Approached by Rachel, her rehearsed barbs remain unspoken and Marie dismisses her with a casual comment, realizing that the spell has been broken. She is free.

Her strength returning and Rachel and her gang avoiding her, she is told on the last day that her story has been shortlisted for publication.

Her mum has arranged a holiday for her in Connemara with her aunt and as the train pulls out of Dublin, the tiredness she feels seems to sweep the previous year away.

Strengthened by Connemara and the touch of her sister's shell, she feels a deep reassurance that her next year in school will be good.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p124):** The principal weapon of control for Rachel is humiliation and it is an unpleasant experience to be the target. Why do you think it can be so effective? What is the best response to this type of behaviour?
- **(Read p124):** Marie uses 'cutting' as a strategy to distract herself. It is almost therapeutic for her. Why do you think the temptation to self-harm is so powerful? Can it be a solution to other problems? What type of thinking will drive someone to 'cut' themselves?
www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/cutting-and-self-harm.htm
www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/self-harm/
- **(Read pp129&136):** Marie seems to want to be part of Rachel's group despite what they have done to her, even revealing details about Stella's allergy. Why do you think she is behaving like this? What is the attraction of Rachel's group? How do our own feelings of inadequacy influence how we behave?
- **(Read p145):** There is a relationship between Marie and Rachel. Marie is drawn to Rachel's group, but do you think that Rachel feels a need to behave in the way she does? What draws Rachel

to Marie? She has her group, why does she need to pursue Marie? What is the nature of the need that is driving her to bully?

- **(Read p172):** When Marie returns to school, Rachel approaches to offer sympathy. Marie resists the temptation to rage and replies casually. Was this the correct response? Who do you think benefitted more from this exchange and what might Rachel have learned from it?

ACTIVITIES

1. Rachel's Spell (Read p123)

Rachel is a bully. She manipulates her friends and seeks to humiliate others. Gail recognizes what she is and avoids her. Marie does not. There are many Rachels and Maries in schools.

Working in small groups, could you create a simple 5-point identification chart that would help to identify a Rachel or a Marie, allowing you to support one and challenge the other?

Think about what they do or say and how they interact with others.

www.bullying.co.uk/advice-for-parents/how-to-spot-the-signs-of-bullying

www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/warning-signs

2. The Group (Read p136)

Everyone wants to belong, to be part of a group. This is perfectly normal, however some groups are not a good influence on behaviour.

How might you identify a group where you would be enriched by being part of it?

Could you work in small groups to create a Member's Charter of signs that would help you to recognize such a group?

Could you create comparison DO/DON'T columns, one for the enriching group and the other for the group that perhaps you should avoid? Add five key points for each column.

3. I Know (Read p159)

Stella knows what has happened and is determined to teach the group a lesson. She decides that she will respect Marie's wish for secrecy and creates random cryptic messages about the accident that she knows only Rachel and her group will understand.

Each message is a simple cartoon line drawing and the only text she uses are the words 'I KNOW'.

She creates three of them, each different

and leaves them at different places where they can be seen.

Can you create her messages?

4. As Gaeilge (Read pp161 & 67-70)

Stella has mangled a translation of Marie's file into Irish so that the sense of what she has written is lost.

Rachel and her gang are desperate to unravel the meaning of it.

They do manage a translation finally but it makes little sense and seems simply ridiculous.

Could you recreate the translation they made adding the humour that their mistranslation has caused?

5. The Shell (Read p178)

When her aunt, Sinead, sees the abalone shell, she realizes immediately where it has come from.

Sinead is a watercolour artist and likes to paint what she sees in Connemara so she asks Marie's permission to paint a picture of her wearing the shell.

Can you create the picture she painted? How might she create the mysterious atmosphere that she knows surrounds the shell?

6. Marie (Read p158)

Dr Flynn has spent a number of sessions with Marie. Usually they don't say very much, however the doctor is skilled and eventually understands what has happened.

After their final session, she reads all her notes and completes her report for Marie's file. She is confident that Marie is in no further danger and discharges her.

Could you write the brief note she included in the file? What type of information might it contain?

7. Each Day (Read p181)

Marie is looking forward to next year. She is much stronger, Stella is her friend and her shell necklace is a support.

However, after her talks with Dr Flynn, she realizes that she must take control of her own destiny. Together with Stella she decides on five things that she will do every day to enrich the day and make it a positive experience for them both.

What do you think the five things were and why did they choose them? Create their list.

Class Project

The novel provides an excellent opportunity to discuss and identify some of the health, behaviour and emotional issues that are pertinent for the pupils.

As a device to focus their work and discussions identifying the problems and issues they may have I suggest that the class use the book as a prompt to creating a **BULLY FREE ZONE** in their classroom.

Topics could include:

- Identifying bullies
- Identifying victims
- Support behaviour
- Survival behaviour
- Unhealthy practices
- Report routes
- Buddy groups
- Safe challenges
- The bully in me
- How do I relate to others....

Etc.

Some of the websites already identified in the guide will provide useful information.

(As a general caution, children should never be allowed unsupervised web access in school nor directed to a web page that has not first been monitored by the teacher)



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