

Millions

Author: Frank Cottrell Boyce

Synopsis

Damian Cunningham's life has gone through some major changes lately. His mother has recently passed away, he has moved into a new house with his father and his brother Anthony, and the two boys have started a new school. Damian, who is shell-shocked by the death of his mother and worried that his father might leave him too, decides that he must not only be "good", but "excellent" in his behaviour. Damian's obsession with being excellent soon grows to such an extent that it rivals his obsession with patron saints – a topic that he is so well versed in that the school advises his father that he needs to speak to a counsellor.

Damian and Anthony's lives change even more dramatically when Damian discovers a bag full of money by the railway track behind his house. The money has been tossed off a train by a robber who has every intention of returning to collect his booty. Damian believes that the nearly 230,000 British pounds are a gift from God. He really wants to use the money to do good deeds. However his brother Anthony has no such desire. He encourages his brother to embark on a spending spree, and the pair starts buying everything they have ever wanted. Added to the dilemma of how to spend the money is the limited timeframe in which the boys have to spend it. In a little over two weeks pounds will be replaced by euros. After December 17th the money will be worthless.

Obviously the fact that the boys have had a huge windfall does not go unnoticed. Suddenly they are the most popular kids in school and when word gets around they are inundated by all kinds of people wanting a handout. When Damian makes a sizeable donation to a woman named Dorothy's charity "Change for Change" school authorities become suspicious and lies pile upon lies as Anthony tries to keep the money a secret. The boys are finally forced to come clean when the robber, looking for his stash, breaks into the Cunningham's home and trashes it.

To Damian's surprise their father doesn't make the boys turn the money in to the police. Instead he gets caught up in the excitement, and together with his new friend Dorothy, he goes about trying to spend the money and exchange as much of it as possible before December 17th. Damian begins to realise that money can't buy happiness and the things that are really important in life can't be bought. He begins to think that if he could just get rid of the money once and for all everything might return to the way it was...

Text Type

Millions is a humorous, poignant and moving novel. Realistic and gritty, the novel has broad appeal for readers of both sexes. The story is told from Damian Cunningham' point of view and as a fallible character with a number of issues his perception of events that occur in the novel is often distorted. The fact that the reader is aware of the narrator's limitations and is able to understand Damian's thoughts and feelings adds to the interest of the story.

Millions has a fast-paced storyline that deals with a number of topical and important issues including greed, family relationships, dealing with grief and understanding right and wrong. The fact that the robber is aware of who has his money and is determined to get it back helps create tension and suspense. The brothers in the story learn the valuable lesson that money can't buy happiness and it certainly can't give them the one thing they want most in the world – their mother back. Anthony in particular is having difficulty accepting his mother's death. This becomes apparent when he shows his disapproval towards his father's new friendship with Dorothy. The brothers' experience with the money helps them move on from their mother's death. Damian finds peace after he has the spiritually uplifting encounter with his mother's ghost near the end of the novel and comes to the realisation that money can indeed be the root of all evil.

Millions has recently been made into an excellent film directed by Danny Boyle and the novel contains 8 pages of colour photographs from the film.

Sharing the Novel

The Novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 1-12), Chapters 3-7 (pp. 13-60), Chapters 8-12 (pp. 61-142) and Chapters 13-20 (pp. 143-250).

During the shared session encourage students to ask questions and discuss their ideas about the characters, themes and issues raised in the novel. Wherever possible have them relate Damian's experiences to their own lives and broader understanding. Students should understand the effect of the first person point of view on the story and track the main characters as they develop and change. Encourage students to understand inferences in the story and make predictions about what is going to happen next.

Introducing the Novel

Discussion

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who are the main characters in the novel? What is their relationship to each other?
- Where do you think the bag full of money came from?
- If you came across a bag stuffed full of money what would you do?

- Imagine that you suddenly have a million dollars to spend and only two weeks to spend it in. What would you buy and why? Would you give any money away?
- Do you believe that money can buy happiness? Why/why not?
- What do you think the one thing the boys need is?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 1-12) aloud to students. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 1-12)

- Who is the narrator of the story? What do we learn about him in this chapter?
- Why is the patron saint of this story Assisi? Damian is obsessed with saints. Why do you think this is? How do others react to his obsession?
- Why is Damian so determined to be excellent?
- What does Anthony mean when he tells Damian that he is making himself “conspicuous”?
- What happened to Damian and Anthony’s mother? Why does Anthony always tell people about her?
- Why does Mr Quinn call Damian’s father?

Discussion

- How do you think Damian is perceived by his teacher and other students at his school?
- Describe Anthony. What do we know about him so far? What is Damian’s relationship with his brother like?
- What is Anthony and Damian’s father like? How do you think their mother’s death has affected their family life?
- Predict what is going to happen in the story next.

Students read Chapters 2-7 (pp. 13-60) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2-7 (pp. 13-60)

- When is the British pound being replaced by the Euro? What happens to all the old pounds?
- How does Damian feel about money? Why does he feel this way?
- What does Damian do with the empty boxes?
- Who does Damian get the idea of creating a hermitage from? Why does he think that his hermitage doesn’t work? How does he plan to solve the problem?
- What does Mr Quinn find under Damian’s shirt? What does he give Damian to take home to his father?
- Who is Terry? Why do Damian, Anthony and their dad go to his house?
- Why is Damian so excited when he meets Eli, Amos and John?

- What does Damian learn during his conversation with Saint Clare of Assisi? How can you explain Damian's conversation with a long-dead saint?
- When and why did Damian first become interested in saints?
- What does Damian mean when he says the better place is "metaphorical"?
- Why does Damian's dad take him to Huskisson House? What kind of an impression do you think Damian made there? Why do you think Damian's father wants him to stop talking about saints? Why does this request confuse Damian so much?
- What does Anthony tell Damian when he describes his experience at Huskisson House to him?
- Why does Damian go out to his hermitage early in the morning? What lands on the hermitage while he is huddled inside? Why does Damian believe that this is a sign from God?
- How does Anthony react when he sees the bag of money? Why doesn't he want Damian to show the money to their father?
- How much money is in the bag? How do Damian and Anthony begin to spend the money?

Discussion

- Anthony always tells people that his mother is dead. Why does he do this? Why do people react to this news the way they do? Is it fair for Anthony to use the fact that his mother is dead in this way? Explain your answer.
- In what ways are Anthony and Damian similar? How are they different? Describe Damian's values. How do they differ from Anthony's?
- Damian is the narrator of the story and because the story is told from his point of view the reader doesn't always get an objective view of what is happening in the story. Find examples in the story where Damian's account of events doesn't necessarily reflect what is really going on.
- Where do you think the money came from?

Students read Chapters 8-12 (pp. 61-142) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 8-12 (pp. 61-142)

- How do the other students at school start behaving when they realise that Anthony and Damian are giving away money? What does Anthony mean when he says the money supply "created an inflammatory environment in the playground"? Why do the boys have so much trouble spending the money?
- What does Damian buy for himself? Where do the boys decide to hide all of their new possessions?

- What does Anthony tell his father when he discovers them playing Subbuteo? What does Damian mean when he says that Anthony's lies are "tasty"?
- Why does Damian purchase the birds and then let them go?
- How does Anthony convince Damian that they can't give the money to the poor? What is his idea for getting rid of all the money? Why can't the boys carry out his plan?
- How much money does Damian give to the Latter-Day Saints?
- How does Barry react when Damian asks him if he is poor? Why does he react this way? Why is Damian so determined to help poor people?
- Describe Damian's encounter with the stranger. Why is Anthony so annoyed when he finds out that Damian told the man he has "loads of money"? What does Anthony give the man?
- What do the Latter-Day Saints buy with the money? Why is Anthony so upset when he sees their new purchases?
- Why does everyone at school have money "but no one's any richer"? Why is Anthony unsure about his Rockports?
- What does Damian find when he visits his hermitage after school? Where does he get the idea for donating the money to help people dig wells? How does Anthony manage to confuse Damian out of wanting to donate the money to Water Aid?
- Who is Dorothy? Why has she come to the boys' school? How much money does Damian put in the bin?
- What does Damian find out when he reads the articles on the internet? Why is he so upset that Anthony told him where the money really came from? Why does Anthony feel that Damian needs to know this information?
- Who does Damian find sitting outside the Principal's office when he goes to confess to Mr James?
- What does Anthony tell Mr James about where the money came from? Why does Damian want to tell Mr James and his father the truth? How does Anthony distract the two adults from the stealing issue?
- How do the Mormons react when the police return the 3,000 pounds to them? Why do they react in this way? What would you have done in their position?
- Why does Damian believe that the Mormons are "dodgy"? Where do the boys try and put the money so that it is safe?
- What is standing at the bottom of the stairs when the boys arrive home?

Discussion

- If you were in Damian and Anthony's position what would you do with the money? Would you spend it or turn it in? Explain your reasons. How would you ensure that no one found out about the money if you decided to spend it?
- What effect does the money have on the various characters in the novel that come in contact with it? Is money really the root of all evil? Why/why not? Why are some people so obsessed with accumulating

material possessions? What message do you think the author of the story is trying to teach his readers?

- What do you think would have happened in the story if Anthony and Damian told Mr James and their father the truth instead of telling the lie about the Mormons?
- The character of Dorothy is introduced in this section of the novel. What part do you think she will play in the remainder of the story?
- Predict what is going to happen in the story next.

Students read Chapters 13-20 (pp. 143-250) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension

- What is Dorothy doing at the boys' house? What does she cook them for dinner? How does Damian feel about her being there? How does Anthony feel?
- What does Anthony tell his father when he asks him what is in his school bag? How could this explanation cause trouble for the boys later on?
- What TV programme do Damian, his dad and Dorothy watch after dinner? Why do you think Damian's dad never watches it anymore?
- Why is Anthony angry with Damian after Dorothy goes home? Who was really at the door? Why did Anthony give them three grand?
- Who does Anthony believe burgled the Mormons? Why is his theory so unlikely?
- How does Anthony ensure that he and Damian get picked for the nativity play? Which characters do the boys play?
- What advice does St. Peter give Damian?
- Who approaches Damian backstage at the nativity concert? How does Damian manage to escape from him? Where does he hide the money? Why do you think he returns to his old house? Who discovers him in the loft?
- Why do the boys finally decide to confess to their father? How long is the money valid for when they show it to him?
- Who is waiting for the boys and their father when they return home? What do they discover when they enter the house? How does Dorothy make them laugh after the policeman leaves? Why does the boys' dad decide to keep the money? How does he justify this? How does Damian feel about his dad's decision?
- Who does Damian discover hiding in the loft? What does the man tell Damian to do with the money? Why doesn't Damian tell his father about the man after he leaves?
- What does Dorothy buy with the money? Why does everyone panic when they learn she has disappeared with the money?
- Why does Dorothy suggest that the group split up after they reach Manchester? What do they plan to do with the money?
- How does Damian help Dorothy change the money?

- Why does Damian regret telling Dorothy that there is a bank inside Kendal's?
- How much money do the group manage to change? What do they decide to do with the rest of the old money?
- What does Anthony mean when he tells Damian "You don't know what you've done"?
- What does Damian see when he opens the front door on his way to take the money to Glass Eye? Why does it feel like "the whole house was about to crumple under the weight of people's needs"?
- Why does Anthony let Glass Eye in and tell him that the money is upstairs?
- Where does Damian take the money? Why does he take it there? What does Damian learn when he talks to his mother?
- How does the policeman react when he learns that Damian burnt the money?
- How much money do Dorothy, Anthony and his dad put aside? Why does his father decide that Damian should get to decide how to spend the money? What do they spend it on?

Discussion

- Describe Dorothy. What effect does she have on the boys' father? Why would it be hard for her coming into this family? Why does Damian like her so much? Why does Anthony resent her? Find examples in the story that illustrate her fun personality.
- Describe the boys' father. How does he treat the boys? Is he a good father? Use evidence from the story to back up your ideas. Are you surprised when he decides to keep the money? Why/why not?
- What do you think Damian's experience with the money has taught him? How does his character develop and change throughout the novel. Do you agree with what he does with the money? Why/why not? How does this experience help him come to terms with his mother's death?

Activities

Static Image – Design either a promotional poster for the *Millions* movie or book. Your poster should be suitable to be displayed in your school library. Remember that your poster should encourage people to read the book or see the movie. Combine verbal and visual features to convey your message.

Plot – Complete a plot graph for *Millions*. Label the vertical axis "Level of excitement". Label the horizontal axis "Events". On the horizontal axis list 10 important events that occur in the novel in the order that they happen. Plot each event according to its level of excitement.

Writing – Write a book review for *Millions*. Include a brief plot summary; discuss the characters, the setting and the themes. Explain the climax of the

story, your favourite part of the story and remember to include your personal opinion of the story.

Writing – Identify the main theme in *Millions* and explain how it is developed throughout the story. Use quotes and evidence from the story to back up your ideas.

Diary Entry – Imagine that you are Damian. Write a diary entry for the night after you burnt the money. Describe the events of the day and include your thoughts and feelings about what has happened.

Character – Imagine that you are the counsellor that Damian went and visited at Huskisson House. Write a report about him that describes his personality and your impressions of what kind of person he is.

Character – Write a character profile for Anthony.

Writing – Rewrite a chapter in the novel from another character's point of view.