



CORNELIA FUNKE NOVELS TEACHERS' NOTES

Cornelia Funke's novels offer a wonderful source of material to support the National Literacy Strategy for Years 4, 5 and 6, and the National Curriculum areas of English, Drama, PSHE/Citizenship for Key Stages 2 and 3. All the novels are rich in characterisation and plot, though each has its own distinctive characters, settings and themes.

THE THIEF LORD

A story of mystery, intrigue and magic which takes place in the atmospheric, historic city of Venice. The two protagonists, Prosper and Bo, grew up listening to stories of Venice, and of its network of canals and stone lions. When the two become orphans, they run away to Venice to escape from a scheming aunt and uncle who want to separate them. They are taken in by a group of homeless children, whose leader, Scipio, calls himself the Thief Lord.

Meanwhile, their aunt has hired a detective, Victor Getz, to track them down. Encouraged by Scipio, the children take on a daring robbery; in doing so, they discover that not all adults are what they seem to be, and that the Thief Lord has a few secrets of his own. The plot twists and turns in the alleys of the ancient city as Prosper struggles to look after his young brother, whilst Bo uses his angelic looks to make friends with everyone. The novel ends with most of the protagonists getting what they *thought* they wanted in life – though nothing is certain in this intriguing novel.

Children often long for the time when they will be grown-ups. *The Thief Lord* gives them an opportunity to consider different adult roles, both positive and negative. Victor and Ida are caring adults, who are on the children's side. Dottor Massimo is not a caring father to his son, Scipio. Aunt Esther only wants Bo because he looks angelic – she's not remotely interested in Prosper. And the Conte uses the children so that he himself can revert to being a child, having missed out on childhood the first time round. The child characters – despite being petty thieves or runaways – are all caring and inherently good, despite being victims of adult actions and behaviour.

***The Thief Lord* and National Literacy Strategy at Key Stage 2**

The novel can support the range of texts required at Year 4 (reading *with* pupils) and Years 5 and 6.

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| Year 4 Term 3 – | Raising issues: bereavement, homelessness, friendships, families, stealing, youth versus age. |
| Year 5 Term 1 – | Novels by a significant author: Cornelia Funke is an internationally acclaimed author and the winner of several prizes. |
| Year 6 Term 2 – | Introduction to different genres: <i>The Thief Lord</i> combines the genres of fantasy, mystery and adventure. |

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- Year 6 Term 3 – Same author, different stories: compare *The Thief Lord* with Cornelia Funke's other novels, *Dragon Rider* and *Inkheart*.
- Year 6 Term 3 – TV and film adaptations: Both *The Thief Lord* and *Inkheart* are soon to be released as major family films.

***The Thief Lord* and National Literacy Strategy at Key Stage 3**

The Thief Lord can support areas of the curriculum at KS 3, including English and Drama, PSHE/Citizenship and European History (Venice).

THE THIEF LORD – FOLLOW-UP SUGGESTIONS

CHARACTERS

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is Prosper so determined to keep Bo with him? What does this tell you about Prosper's character?
2. Why does Scipio want to keep his identity secret from the other children? What does this tell you about him?
3. Why do you think Dottor Massimo is so horrible to Scipio?
4. Which of the adult characters want to be children, and why?
5. Which of the children want to be adults, and why?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a list of adjectives to describe each of the children: Prosper, Bo, Hornet, Riccio, Mosca and Scipio. Do any of them have the same characteristics?
2. Do the same for the adults: Victor, Ida, Esther, Barbarossa, Dottor Massimo, Renzo and Morosina.
3. Which of the adults are kind? Which are unkind? Why do you think this is?
4. Design business cards for two opposing characters in the novel. For example:

The Thief Lord

No robbery too small
Steals from the rich to give to the poor
Contact: Scipio, The Stella,
Calle del Paradiso, Venice

Dottor Massimo

Businessman
Parenting Skills Specialist
Contact: Dottor Massimo,
Fondamenta Bollani 223, Venice

5. Write a prologue – choose a character and write a short story about what that character might have been doing one month before the novel begins.

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SETTING

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is Venice important to the story? Could this adventure have happened anywhere else?
2. Prosper and Bo go to Venice because their mother told them stories about it. Can you describe any part of Venice from the stories she told them?

ACTIVITIES

1. Many of the places in this novel have animal statues connected with them. Make a list of the animals you can remember; how important are they to the plot? What do these animals represent to the child characters, and to the adults?
2. Draw a story map of Prosper and Bo's journey around Venice from the Stella cinema to St Mark's Square and out to the Secret Isle. Ask them to say what happens in each place. For example: the Stella – Prosper and Bo are taken in by Riccio, Mosca and Hornet.
3. Design a travel poster to include some of the highlights of Venice. For example:

COME TO VENICE!

- Explore the canals
- Ride in a gondola
- Feed pigeons in the Piazza San Marco
- Enjoy a gelato
- Count the lions
- Listen to the bells

THEMES

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Families: talk about the different families in the novel – Prosper and Bo's, the Massimo family, Renzo and Morosina, and the family the children have created for themselves: Riccio, Mosca, Hornet, Prosper and Bo. Which family setup seems the happiest and why?
2. Age: a major theme in the story is that of age versus youth – how many references are there in the novel to a character wishing to be older or younger than he or she is? What reasons do characters

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have for wishing to be a different age? Would you choose to ride the merry-go-round if you had the chance?

ACTIVITIES

1. Possessions: each character in the novel has something they treasure: for example, Bo has his collection of fans, Mosca his radio. Compile a 'favourite things' list for each character.
2. Disguises: both Scipio and Victor use disguises, although for different reasons. Write a list of the disguises featured in the novel, and say why they are used –simply for fun, or for more complex purposes?
3. Food: there's plenty of food to choose from in Venice. Play a class 'A to Z' game of food, from Antipasto to Zabaglione!
4. Language: how many Italian words do you know? Have a brainstorm – you might be surprised at what can say in Italian!

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