



The Book of Whispers

KIMBERLEY STARR

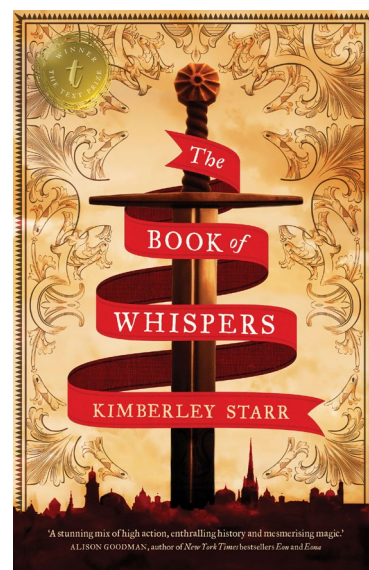
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TEXT'S TEACHING NOTES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

- ▶ Text's teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.

Strands	LA – Language LT – Literature LY – Literacy
Modes	W – Writing L – Listening R – Reading S – Speaking
General capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literacy Intercultural understanding Personal and social capability Information and communication technology Critical and creative thinking Numeracy Ethical behaviour
Cross-curriculum priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

SYNOPSIS

'Only the owner can open the book. Perhaps Ramberti knows the legend. He thinks he's the owner now. But unbeknown to him, he's given me hope. If he can't get the book open, maybe that's because Luca is still alive.' (p.344)

Luca is the heir to the de Falconi title and estates in Tuscany, as well as the mysterious Book of Whispers that has been passed down through generations of his family. He sees demons—a talent for which he has previously been subject to an exorcism—and is shaken by a recurring dream foreshadowing his father's death. To try to prevent the dream coming true, Luca disobeys his father and joins the great pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He meets the mysterious Suzan in the desert, and they work together to solve the mysteries of the Book of Whispers. The pilgrimage becomes a quest fraught with obstacles: jealousy, greed, brutality, physical hardship and the growing power of the demons who delight in human suffering. It is a story of great personal strength, goodness and self-belief that ultimately thwarts evil in an astonishingly written final battle against the demons in Jerusalem.



BEFORE READING

- Undertake preliminary research on the historical places and events that are referred to in the novel.
 - Locate San Gimignano in Tuscany and read about its history and famous buildings. Find a website that shows images of the interior of the Duomo. Students can write a paragraph about what they see.
 - Using a map of Europe and the Middle East, ask students to plot the route they would take from San Gimignano to Jerusalem on foot. They need to be prepared to explain their choices and how long the journey may take.
 - Create a glossary that students add to while reading the novel. Start by writing definitions of the following: Saracen, Pilgrims, the First Crusade, Pope Urban, Latin, Matilda of Tuscany, exorcism, Conte, codex, vellum, Tutivillus, sirens, Christendom, Euthymius the Illuminator, Raymond of Toulouse, Byzantium, Constantinople, Hydra, etc.
 - Students research the significance of the religious relics taken on pilgrimages to Jerusalem and find examples to share with the class.
 - In pairs, students undertake some online research into demons. Where did the word 'demon' originate? What was its original meaning? Can they find names of specific demons?
- Calculate the time the pilgrimage takes using the chapter headings.
- Discuss the notion of 'a hero's journey' and 'a quest' with students. Find out what other texts they have read that explore a similar theme, especially other texts describing knights and pilgrims. (ACELY1721) L S LY
- Explain to students that *The Book of Whispers* is a story about good and evil, and two young people fighting to restore the world to harmony. Also point out that there are parts of the novel that are quite brutal, but not altogether removed from what might be viewed on television news. Ask students to share instances of conflict between two groups of people as reported by the media. (ACELY1804) L S LY
- Discuss the importance of words, both spoken and written, in everyday life, and how they can be used in positive and negative ways. Also consider how words can be misinterpreted. (ACEY1719) L S LY

WHILE READING

- Why is Luca's father so outraged at his son's decision to join the pilgrimage? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- The 'tall stranger in an iron-coloured cape' is introduced on page 35. How can the reader tell that the author is foreshadowing a future twist in the plot here? Find two other examples of foreshadowing in the first two chapters and explain your choices. (ACELA1545) L R S LA
- Why is Luca's dream about the *Nikopeia* significant to the plot? What further information does it, and Luca's encounters with Ramberti in the town, reveal? (ACELT1621) W R LT
- "'Soldiers,'" I say. I can't help myself. My mother's look of despair moves from the threat on the horizon to me.' (p.77) Explain why Suzan's one-word observation is a crucial turning point in the plot. (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- Find several examples of humour in the novel. Discuss what forms humour can take: for example, black humour or sarcasm. What is the purpose of including some humorous moments in the story? (ACELA1545) L R S LA
- What is your first impression of Sir Percy? What key information does he reveal to Luca? (ACELT1621) W R LT
- The author uses italics to deliver some of the interior thoughts of the two narrators. Reread Luca's words on page 99. Why does he feel unable to say these words aloud to his father? (ACELA1545) L R S LA
- Why doesn't Luca's father warm to either Suzan or Mattiolas? (ACELT1620) L R S LT
- Keep a list of Luca's observations of Thanatos. What aspects of Thanatos's behaviour most disturb Luca? (ACELT1621) W R LT
- Why does Luca challenge Narlo on the jousting field? What are the consequences of the joust? (ACELT1620) R LT
- Describe the first meeting of Luca and Suzan. Take note of some of the first questions they ask each other. What clues are laid for potential romance between the two characters? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- Explain why Luca and Suzan both misunderstand the other's relationship with Serafina and Mattiolas. Why does the author include this misunderstanding? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- When does the reader first realise that everyone apart from Luca sees Suzan as ugly? What is the explanation is given for this phenomenon later in the novel? (ACELA1542) R LA
- Explain why Luca's father is so distressed at the slaughter of the Saracens. (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- Find at least one example of sexism in the novel. (ACELT1620) R LT
- Comment on Luca's reaction when he first kills another human. (ACELT1620) R LT
- Why does Ramberti kill Luca's father? Does the murder match Luca's dream? How does Luca respond? (ACELT1621) W R LT



18. Reread the events of pages 187–88 again. What realisation does Luca have about the motives of the demons? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
 19. Which specific items most help Luca and Suzan achieve their ultimate goal? (ACELT1620) R LT
 20. Why do they return to Goreme, and what is the significance of the visit? (ACELT1620) R LT
 21. How does Luca discover that Suzan can read the Book of Whispers? Why does the countdown of moons become crucial for the reader as well as these two characters? (ACELT1621) W R LT
 22. Why is Brother Bonaccorso's story about the six blind men and the elephant so important? (ACELT1621) W R LT
 23. 'For everything horrifying and brutal, there is something beautiful, pure and true.' (p. 368) Amid all the horror and brutality, what moments of beauty do Luca and Suzan find? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
9. Luca's father is carefully developed as a character. Use some specific examples to show how readers' feelings about him may change. (ACELT1627) W R LT
 10. Reread the end of Chapter 3. Describe your reaction to learning of Helena's muteness. Write a paragraph explaining how this revelation made sense of events earlier in the chapter. (ACELY1733) R LY
 11. How does the author use Serafina and Mattiolas to bring happiness into the story? (ACELT1621) R LT
 12. What does the character of Peter Bartholomew add to the story? Use several examples of his behaviour to support your view. (ACELY1723) W R LY
 13. Sir Percy is a demon whose behaviour differs greatly from that of Thanatos. Write a short character study of Sir Percy capturing some of his main traits. (ACELY1734) W L R S LY

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. Construct a map or flowchart of the major characters in the novel. Group them according to families, human/demon, knights, religion, etc. to clarify the relationships between them. (ACELY1723) W R LY
2. Luca experiences a range of emotions during his journey. Decide what specific emotions he displays and record an example of each. What do you consider to be the highs and lows of Luca's emotional journey on the pilgrimage? (ACELT1621) R LT
3. Narlo is portrayed as a jealous, greedy and immoral character. What examples can you find in the text? (ACELT1621) R LT
4. Suzan is introduced in Chapter 3. What information is revealed about her and her mother in the chapter? How do the character traits of Suzan and Helena challenge your understanding of these mythical creatures? (ACELT1620) R LT
5. How is Mattiolas introduced to the reader? Find several examples that highlight Mattiolas's innate goodness. (ACELT1620) L R S LT
6. Make a list of quotes that represent Father Eser's character. What specific language conveys to the reader that he is a villain? (ACELT1621) W R LT
7. 'Us. We. The word we thrills me. I'm not alone with this anymore. And she's still holding my hand.' (p.145) Why is the bond with Suzan so vital to Luca? How has their bond been tested by the end of the novel? In what ways have both matured? (ACELT1627) W R LT
8. In pairs, trace the development of Monsignor Ramberti. Find key moments that assist the reader in their progressive knowledge and understanding of his character. Decide what words used in the novel best describe him. (ACELT1621) W R LT

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. Create a mapped timeline of Luca's journey. This could be completed individually or in groups. When finished, discuss what aspects of the novel's structure allowed you to complete this task. (ACELT1622) W R LT
2. The author frequently makes use of similes, metaphors, alliteration, personification and motifs. Find examples of each and discuss what effect these literary devices have on the presentation of the story. (ACELA1556) L R S LA
3. The narration of the story is shared between the first-person voices of Luca and Suzan. Choose a passage of approximately half a page and rewrite it in the third person. Ask members of the class to share their original and newly rewritten passages. Discuss what the effects of this change in narrative style have on the reader. (ACELA1553) R LA
4. There are many old-fashioned words used in the novel. Make a list of a dozen unfamiliar words and discover their meaning. (ACELA1556) L R S LA
5. Find at least six examples that show how the author uses the natural environment in the story. Why is the surrounding environment so integral to *The Book of Whispers*? (ACELT1622) W R LT
6. Why does the author blend actual historical characters and real places into her novel? What meaning would be lost if all the place names were fictional? (ACELA1553) R LA

THEMES

Love vs Temptation

1. 'This might be our only chance. To love a siren means death. If I give in to temptation, I could actually doom him.' (p.324) How does Suzan's recognition of her responsibilities towards Luca



contrast with the self-interest of some other characters? (ACELT1620) L R S LT

- How does Narlo demonstrate the dangers of temptation? Find specific examples to support your response. Does he ever redeem himself in the eyes of the reader? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- 'I love you, Luca. He must hear. Everybody must. It's the loudest thought I've ever had.' (p.365) Suzan shows a great capacity for love in the novel. Develop a theory to explain why she is able to love despite her silent childhood. (ACELT1620) L R S LT

Trust vs Betrayal

- "Trust me?" Ramberti demands, still unaware of Thanatos's presence. "Why would you want to trust me?" (p.340) What lessons about trust and betrayal are learned from the characters of Ramberti and Thanatos? (ACELT1621) R LT
- 'The book wants to make sure I realise that this charm can defeat Thanatos too.' (p.347) At what point do Luca and Suzan realise that they can trust the Book of Whispers? Are there any enchantments that betray them? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- 'Betrayal sears through me like the hottest of blades.' (p.358) Who does Luca feel betrayed by at this point? Is he right? (ACELT1627) L R S LT

Good vs Evil

- "We won't leave one of them breathing!" (p.334) Why do 'good Christian pilgrims—minstrels and merchants, tanners and seamstresses, knights and servants' (p.334) slaughter every pilgrim they can find? Can people be both good and evil? (ACELT1803) R LT
- "So much suffering here," Thanatos says. "I pity you, Conte. You're not even enjoying it. You can't feed on it." (p.336) Explain Thanatos's words. (ACELT1621) R LT
- Decide which moments in the novel most epitomise good and evil. Justify your choices. (ACELY1734) R LY
- Discuss this topic in class: 'Religion is the root of all evil'. Aim to find an equal number of arguments for and against the topic. (ACELT1771) L R S LT

Faith vs Doubt

- 'I'm amazed that Saracens allowed these chapels to exist.' (p.350) What does Luca's observation suggest about the Saracens' occupation of Jerusalem, and the Saracens themselves? (ACELT1771) L R S LT
- How does the author use Brother Bonaccorso's faith to contrast with that of Ramberti? (ACELT1771) L R S LT
- Does faith only need to be religious faith? Can you see other meanings of faith in the novel? (ACELY1723) R LY

- Find evidence of the various ways the pilgrims express their religious faith. Do you feel the author approves of all these ways? Provide several supporting quotes in your response. (ACELY1721) R LY
- Do Luca and Suzan ever doubt their ability to fulfil their quest? (ACELY1734) R LY

Tolerance vs Prejudice

- Luca, Suzan and Luca's father are all appalled at the treatment of the Saracen people. Locate quotes showing their ability to see past the racial or religious background of those they meet. (ACELT1771) L R S LT
- 'It's apparent that Christian Jerusalem won't be as tolerant of Saracen mosques as Saracen Jerusalem was of Christian chapels.' (p.353) What do you understand the word 'tolerance' to mean? Decide on whom you see as the most tolerant character in the novel and explain your decision. (ACELT1771) L R S LT
- Find examples of the contempt shown towards the poorer pilgrims by those who travel in greater luxury. (ACELY1734) R LY
- What message does the reader learn from the men who guide Luca and Suzan to the salt lake? (ACELY1734) R LY

Social conscience vs Self-interest

- 'Ramberti opens the bag. "The Book of Whispers is mine."' (p.332) Think about the different reactions characters have to the book. Who sees it as an opportunity to help? Who sees it as a means to pursue their self-interest? (ACELT1627) L R S LT
- Mattiolas provides insights into both social conscience and self-interest. What do we learn from his words and actions? (ACELT1621) R LT
- What is the main motivation of the demons? Do any of them display compassion towards humans? (ACELY1734) R LY
- Write several paragraphs contrasting Luca and Ramberti. Find quotes to support the view that 'while Luca represents social conscience, Ramberti represents self-interest'. (ACELT1621) R LT

RESPONSE

- 'Demons love trouble. They love human pain and misery of any kind.' (p.2) How does *The Book of Whispers* demonstrate that human lives can be full of suffering? (ACELT1807) W R LT
- "In time you'll understand its significance." (p.19) In what ways have the Conte's words to Luca when he first introduces him to the Book of Whispers come true? (ACELY1732) W R LY
- Create a map that shows the exact route taken by Luca on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Label place names and then use post-it notes to pinpoint



what you believe to be the twelve most important moments for him en-route. Be prepared to justify your choices to the class. (ACELY1736)

W R L Y

4. The dreams of Luca and Suzan play a key role in foreshadowing the plot and providing some of the back story. Write a response discussing one of these dreams. (ACELT1771) **W R L T**
5. What does the novel teach the reader about class structure and social inequality in this period of history? Provide specific examples in your response, as well as integrating key quotes. Is the author's message still applicable to modern society? (ACELT1628) **W R L T**
6. 'I have a voice, I have words. I run to a future where there's the possibility of using them.' (p.84) Write an essay considering why words are so important. Provide examples from at least five characters to support your point of view. (ACELT1771) **W R L T**
7. Write a story from the perspective of one of the unnamed knights or ordinary people on the pilgrimage. It could be about a specific event along the way, in Jerusalem, or simply observations about everyday life. Weave in some of the new vocabulary learned from the novel. (ACELT1632) **W R L Y**
8. Debate this topic in class: 'There is no difference between Christians and Saracens'. Half the class can prepare the positive side while the other half prepares the negative. Each side selects three students to present their findings. (ACELT1628) **W R L T**
9. Those taking part in the pilgrimage have different goals. Write an essay discussing a range of characters and their reasons for joining the crusade to Jerusalem. Include your thoughts on which goals are the most, and least, noble. (ACELT1807) **W R L T**
10. The seven deadly sins play an important role in the novel. Choose a character that best represents each of the seven and explain your choice. (ACELT1771) **W R L T**
11. Using some of the information about demons in the novel, write an essay about them. Imagine you are explaining what they are to someone who knows absolutely nothing about demons. (ACELY1736) **W R L Y**
12. "'I'm not a hero,'" says Luca. "Heroes don't deliver messages.'" (p.119). Is Luca a hero? (ACELT1771) **W R L T**
13. Write the next chapter in life's journey for Luca and Suzan. You can write from either perspective or a mixture of both. Aim to stay true to the writing style of the author. (ACELT1632) **W R L Y**