



The Little Bee Charmer of Henrietta Street

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE AND THEMES

This guide has been designed to complement a class reading of the text in a way that brings the text alive whilst also enriching the students' critical abilities. The activities aim to inspire young readers by encouraging them to question the characters' motivations and the overall themes. The guide aims to develop empathy skills, stimulate discussion and encourage readers to dissect literary techniques in fresh and engaging ways. There are also activities included that are designed to hone communication, presentation and literacy skills. Key themes include:

- Courage,
- Family,
- Community,
- Ambitions and Dreams,
- Equality.

SUMMARY

The story opens in Rathmines in 1911 as Eliza, her younger brother Jonty and their father begin to move into the centre of Dublin. Their mother has died and their father's failing eyesight has meant they have lost a lot of money so can no longer stay in the family home. Their arrival at the tenements in Dublin shocks them as they were not aware of the levels of poverty some people lived in. However, life soon settles down and Eliza realises that the people who live on Henrietta Street are some of the warmest and friendliest people she's ever met. Eliza finds herself taking on more and more responsibilities to help run the household as her father's health continues to deteriorate and she tries not to become too bitter at having to say goodbye to her dreams.

A travelling circus brings excitement, new friends and some incredible opportunities, but their involvement has to be kept secret from their father. Tragedy strikes their neighbourhood and the circus brings

help from the most unexpected of places, changing all of their lives.

APPROACH

This is a very enjoyable and entertaining read. There are lots of interesting characters and a lot of drama and action to keep readers entertained. There are also many opportunities for discussion and learning about housing, prejudice, class systems and equality. This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes and examining the writer's craft in building characters and plot.

Part One Moving House Pages 9 – 90

SUMMARY

The story begins in May 1911 as Eliza, her father and her younger brother Jonty are preparing to leave their family home. The death of their mother and failure of their father's printing business means money is tight, so they're having to say goodbye to their housekeeper Sally and the family dog Oboe and downsize to a small apartment in a tenement in central Dublin.

When moving day finally arrives, they travel from the quiet suburbs of Rathmines into the city. The streets become more and more busy and Eliza grows more anxious about what awaits them at Henrietta Street. They arrive in a very busy neighbourhood and Eliza is instantly uneasy as their neighbours eye them as they move in. Inside isn't much better, with a nasty smell and general run-down interior. A local girl is kind which makes her feel better – and Jonty immediately makes friends with some of the boys in the street.

Things are difficult for Eliza – the outdoor

toilets make her feel ill and the noise of the neighbourhood is strange after the quiet of Rathmines. Due to her father's failing eyesight, Eliza has to look after the household, cleaning, preparing meals and looking after the upkeep of the apartment. However, it's when her father tells her she needs to take over his work and leave art college that the reality of their new situation really begins to sink in.

It has been arranged that Jonty will be tutored with the Pennefeather boys. Mr Pennefeather is an old friend of their father's and a very kind, wealthy man. He's also Sally's current employer and Eliza is excited at the prospect of seeing her old friend when she takes Jonty to their house. On their way out, they bump into the girl who teased Eliza for her nice clothes. Her name is Annie and she's kind and friendly, giving Eliza lots of advice on where to get the best bargains when shopping.

The journey is full of adventure – an exciting tram ride and an advert for a circus leave them both in good spirits. However, that soon changes when they arrive at the Pennefeather's spectacular house and Mrs Pennefeather makes it clear that she looks down on them because of their social status and living situation. Despite her annoyance, Eliza manages to keep her temper as she knows how important Jonty's education is.

At the Pennefeathers, Eliza catches up with Sally. Jonty is settling in well and Eliza makes another new friend. On her way home she sees some of her old friends, but they avoid her. Back at Henrietta Street, she shares her artwork with an impressed Annie and the two talk about their dreams for their future.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read p. 12.** Eliza comments that their mother used to describe Jonty's eyes as the colour of 'sealskin'. What does this suggest about his eyes? Why do you think

this? What colour are your partner's eyes? Can you think of another way to describe them?

- **Read p. 12.** When Jonty finds out they have to move, he is enraged that it was kept a secret from him. Do you think they were right to keep it a secret? Why do you think this? Do you think Jonty is right to be angry with them?
- **Read p. 25.** Eliza is encouraged to wear some of her mother's old clothes by Sally and states that 'Now I wear something of Mama's every day; it's like carrying a little bit of her with me.' What do you think of this statement? What do you think Eliza means? Why do you think keeping mementoes of people can be a good thing?
- **Read p. 39.** Eliza tells Jonty off for changing the way he speaks. Do you think she is right when she says he can't speak like that in front of the Pennefeathers? Why do you think this? Do you think people still judge one another based on their accents? Why do you think they do this?
- **Read p. 41.** Eliza is embarrassed when she says 'Hay is for horses.' Why do you think this is? What does the phrase mean? Can you think of any similar phrases? Ask your parents and grandparents for help as homework.
- **Read p. 51.** Why do you think Eliza's father has stopped going out to things? Do you think this is a good idea? Why do you think this? What advice would you give him? How do you think Eliza should manage the situation?
- **Read pp. 64-64.** Has this changed your view of Mrs Pennefeather? Why? Do you have any sympathy for her? Why did she have to change her life when she got married? Do you think this is fair? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 81.** Eliza is shocked by Sally's suggestion that she 'might make a good marriage'. What do you think of this? Do you think it's fair that Eliza should have to give up on her dreams? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 88.** Why do you think Eliza is so surprised by Annie's dream of becoming an archaeologist? Do you agree with her? Do you think this is something Annie will achieve? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES

1. Your Neighbourhood

From pages 24-26, Eliza describes the streets and neighbourhoods as they move into the city. Look at the detail she uses – there's

lots of descriptions of sights, sounds and smells that really bring them to life. Write a description of your own neighbourhood. Think about the movement of people, the sounds during the day. Try and use as much description and sensory detail as you can. Take us through the scene – move from one part to the other.

2. Rent Crisis

Eliza is shocked at the price of the rent of their apartment – especially since the apartment is very basic and there are some broken windows! What do you know about rent and the cost of living? In small groups, research the current rental situation in Ireland. To start with, read the information on page 307. How do you think things should change? Do you think people have a right to reasonably priced rental properties? Why do you think this? What responsibilities do you think landlords have to their tenants? Prepare a presentation on the importance of decent, affordable rental homes to deliver to the rest of the class.

3. Close the Tenement Buildings

Mr Dalton describes himself as coming from a tenement just like Henrietta Street – but what does this mean? In pairs, research tenement buildings – there's a lot of information in the back of this book. What was a tenement? Who lived in them? Where were they? What were living conditions like? Write a persuasive speech to deliver to the class on why tenement buildings should be made illegal.

4. Cooking on a Budget

When Eliza bumps into Annie, Annie gives her a lot of good advice on how to make their money last while still buying meat and vegetables. In pairs, draw up a list of four evening meals for a family of four on a budget. Think about variety, nutrition and budget – don't use too many expensive ingredients and try and avoid wastage (eg if one recipe calls for half a bag of cheese, can you use another recipe later that uses the other half?) Once you've drawn up the recipes write a shopping list of ingredients.

5. Old Friends

On pages 82 and 83, Eliza's old friends from art college ignore her. Why do you think this is? Imagine you are Eliza and you have the opportunity to speak to them. What would you say? Write a speech about how you're still the same person even though your circumstances have changed and try to make them understand why their behaviour

is cruel.

6. Dreams For the Future

On pages 87-90, Eliza and Annie discuss their dreams for the future. Annie lists all her ambitions, from visiting the zoo to becoming an archaeologist. Do you think they're all achievable? Why do you think this? Write a list of five things you would like to do in the future. Rank them in order of achievability. For the most difficult to achieve, what can you do now to start you on your way? Write your ambitions and your reasons and put them away to look at in future.

Part Two There's a Circus in Town! Pages 91 – 207

SUMMARY

Jonty drags Eliza to watch the circus parade through the city. There's a whole host of fascinating displays and Jonty shows his bravery rescuing a dog from the water – and they're rewarded with free tickets. It's tricky keeping it a secret from their father when they are both so excited, but they're thrilled to attend such an exciting performance.

They're invited backstage, but Eliza is a little disappointed at how the magic wears off. Albert the dog trainer takes them on a full tour of all the performers and animals and Jonty gets a little carried away, placing himself in terrible danger. The tour ends with a very unexpected opportunity as Madam Ada offers both Eliza and Jonty a job working with the circus. They're both desperate to accept, but decide to keep their new employment a secret from their father.

Back in Henrietta Street, Eliza's father receives a feast and a letter from his old friend Mr Pennefeather asking him to join him at their old social club. The letter also presents an opportunity for Eliza to organise their employment at the circus without getting caught.

Eliza starts her work at the circus. After a very nervous start, she soon settles in and has a great time, even though she spends most of it cleaning out animal dung. It also gives her a chance to talk properly with Madam Ada and learn more about the bees. When she returns to Henrietta Street full of excitement and smelling of manure, Annie gives her advice on how best to hide what she's doing from her father. She visits Annie's home for the first time and is shocked by what she sees.

Life is busy for Eliza and despite her

tiredness, she continues to enjoy working at the circus. She grows closer to the other people that work there and Jonty is very excited by this new adventure. Then there's an awful tragedy as one of the houses in the street collapses, shocking the entire neighbourhood. Annie shows incredible courage and ends up getting hurt. Eliza faces her fears and her quick-thinking and bravery save Tall Joe's life.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p. 102.** Do you think Jonty was 'mad to jump in after a dog'? Why do you think this? What could he have done instead?
- **Read p. 108.** What do you think is going on with the family sitting next to them – why have they behaved in this way? What do you think about this? What would you have said if you were in Eliza's situation?
- **Read p. 121.** The mother next to them says 'What's life without a bit of magic, eh?' What do you think she means by this? Do you agree with her? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 123.** Eliza is disappointed to see the circus without all the 'magic'. What do you think she means by this? Do you understand her disappointment? Have you ever been in a similar situation? What happened?
- **Read p. 135.** Jonty and Eliza decide to accept the job without checking with their father. Do you think they're doing the right thing? Should they tell their father? Why do you think this? What could they say to persuade him? What would you do in their situation?
- **Read p. 144.** Why do you think Eliza is so nervous about starting work? What advice would you give her to calm her nerves?
- **Read p. 181.** Eliza remembers her mother's words 'Learn to be still and nature will unfold in all its magic.' What do you think of this saying? Do you agree? Have you ever just sat and listened to nature? What happened?
- **Read pp. 189-191.** Do you think Annie is brave or foolish? Why do you think this? Why do you think she acts like she does? What advice would you give Eliza to try and keep her friend safe?
- **Read p. 202.** Why do you think Albert is so cross with Eliza? What do you think he is really feeling? Why do you think this? Do you think this is the best way to show his feelings for Eliza? What advice would you give him on how to act?

ACTIVITIES

1. Daring Rescue

Imagine you are a reporter who spotted Jonty's brave actions. Write or script a news report that outlines what happens. Include interviews with the main people involved and some eyewitness accounts from onlookers. Try and make sure you keep your language formal, but make it sound exciting to an audience.

2. Jonty

Eliza describes her brother as having 'such a good heart.' Do you agree? Choose three or four adjectives or short phrases to describe Jonty. Once you have your list, find examples from the text that prove your points. Write these up into a short essay – each paragraph should include a point about Jonty's personality, a quote from the text that shows this and an explanation of how the quote you've chosen proves your point.

3. Trousers for Girls

When she goes to work for the first time, Eliza is handed overalls by Albert. She is shocked because 'Girls don't wear trousers.' What does she mean by this? In small groups, research the history of women and trousers. Why were trousers not acceptable clothing for women? Was this fair? How did things change? Create a timeline of events and how things have changed. Why do you think clothing can be political? Can you think of any examples in modern life where people can or cannot wear particular clothing because of their gender? What do you think about this? Extension: What is your school uniform policy – is there anything in the policy that you disagree with? Write a persuasive letter to the headteacher giving three or four reasons for change.

4. How the Other Half Lives

The description of Annie's house on pages 164-166 shows how poor Annie's family are. How does this description compare to the description of the Pennefeather home? Is it much different from Eliza's apartment? Look at the different descriptions and choose three or four phrases for each. Illustrate them and label with your description. Show your work to your partner and explain why these differences are so strong.

5. Freeze Frame

On pages 186-198. In small groups, create six freeze frames to retell the events of the house collapse. Think about facial expressions and how to show the different

emotions of the characters. How do you think they're feeling? How will you best show the tension and danger in each frame?

6. News Report

The collapse of Tall Joe's house is a terrible tragedy and his life is saved by the bravery of his friends Eliza and Annie. Imagine you are a reporter. Create a news report for the daily paper that tells the story of what happened. Include a timeline and description of events. News reports always start with the most important pieces of information – what happened, when and where and what the outcome was. Then outline the timeline of events. You should also include a few short interviews with those involved, such as Eliza, a firefighter and any other eyewitnesses.

Part Three Growing from Tragedy Pages 208 – 299

SUMMARY

Madam Ada has had an idea for a fundraising event to raise money to help Tall Joe and his family and Eliza is delighted to offer her artistic skills to help raise awareness. She's nervous when Mada Ada asks her to speak at the benefit, but determined to do all she can to help Tall Joe's family. Meanwhile, Tall Joe's siblings are living with them and it's becoming a bit of a squeeze. Annie is released from hospital and has a plan to help everyone out.

The day of the benefit arrives and Eliza is a bundle of nerves. They tell their father a half-truth and head to the circus where Jonty throws himself into the job of welcoming people into the big tent. Eliza finds it difficult to enjoy the show due to her nerves, but she manages to swallow her fears and give her speech to thunderous applause.

The show raises a huge amount of money for Tall Joe and his family. However, the popularity of the event also means that Eliza and Jonty's secret is uncovered and their father is furious. He forbids them from returning, breaking both their hearts. When Eliza goes to the circus to say goodbye, Madam Ada helps her believe that she acted with the best intentions.

Help comes from the most unexpected of places when the Pennefeathers ask Eliza to show them the living conditions at Henrietta Street. After some sharp words from Annie, they are shown around the area. Even Eliza is shocked by the terrible conditions some families are living in. The Pennefeathers'

visit prompts something in Eliza's father and he grants her and Jonty permission to say goodbye to their circus friends properly.

At the circus, Madam Ada has an exciting new opportunity for Eliza and gives them a small gift that could change all of their lives. However, Eliza's father is not as excited and lashes out at his children. He calms down and makes a huge decision that brings joy to all their lives.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp. 215-216.** Eliza gives Peter her portion of dinner. What does this tell us about her as a person? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 220.** Eliza feels bad that she's disappointed about her poster when her friends have had such tragedy. Do you think she should feel guilty? Why do you think this? What advice would you give her?
- **Read p. 224 – 225.** Eliza remembers her mother's advice 'Tell your truth'. What do you think this means? Do you think it's good advice? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 228.** Madam Ada tells Eliza that nerves before the performance are good because it 'means you care deeply about the show.' Do you agree with this? Have you ever felt nervous about something? What happened?
- **Read p. 230.** Annie says that bravery is about 'feeling scared and doing it anyway.' Do you agree? Why do you think this? What advice would you give to Eliza to try and ease her nerves?
- **Read p. 248.** When she thinks about it, Eliza believes that her mother would be proud of her. Do you agree with this? Why? What sort of person was Eliza's mother? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 255.** Annie is enraged when she believes that Mrs Pennefeather is treating them like animals at the zoo. Why do you think she feels like this? Do you think she is right to be angry? Why do you think this?
- **Read pp. 262-263.** Are you surprised by the change in Mrs Pennefeather? Why? Which side of her personality do you think is the 'real' woman? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 286.** Why do you think their father is so angry when they suggest giving him the money for his operation? Why do you think this? What do you think Eliza and Jonty should do?

ACTIVITIES

1. Poster

Madam Ada has asked Eliza to create a poster advertising the event to raise money. Create your own version. Read through Eliza's plans on pages 208-209 for ideas and create your own version. What will you put in the centre? Present it to the rest of your group, explaining your design process. Look ahead to Eliza's drawing on page 213. How similar is it to yours?

2. Speech

In addition to creating the artwork for the publicity, Madam Ada asks Eliza to give a speech at the benefit. Write the speech. Think about how best to persuade the audience to give money to help Tall Joe. Remember that most of the people attending will not be from the tenements and may not have an awareness of how difficult life is for the people that live there. Also remember how Eliza has been ignored by her art school friends and looked down upon by Mrs Pennefeather and the man at the circus – how can you persuade these people that tenement families are just as deserving of respect as anyone else? In your speech, try to include persuasive language like rhetorical questions and emotive language.

3. Eliza's Outburst

When their father finds out that they've been working at the circus, he is furious and forbids them from continuing. Eliza loses her temper. Re-read through her speech on page 241. Do you think she has made her point effectively? Why do you think this? Imagine you are Eliza. Write a diary entry on the evening after this argument. What do you regret about how you spoke to your father? What will you do to try and make things right again?

4. Yeats

Eliza is tasked with illustrating a poem by Irish poet W.B. Yeats called 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.' Find the poem. What do you think the poet is trying to say? What is your favourite phrase in the poem? Why? Illustrate the poem like Eliza is doing and write a couple of paragraphs about what you like about the poem and why.

5. Madam Ada

When Eliza admits to Madam Ada that she didn't have permission to be working at the circus, she's surprised to find that Madam Ada already knew. What are your impressions of Madam Ada? Choose four

adjectives to describe her. Once you have your list, find examples from the text that prove your points. Write these up into a short essay – each paragraph should include a point about Madam Ada's personality, a quote from the text that shows this and an explanation of how the quote you've chosen proves your point.

6. Corruption

On pages 257-258, Annie explains to Mr Pennefeather that although the house the McAllisters were living in was declared unsafe, because it was owned by a local councillor, nothing happened. Why do you think this is? Does this type of thing happen today? In groups, write a letter to your local TD about the importance of everyone having safe homes. Think about using persuasive and emotive language to make your point. *Extension: Some homeowners in Ireland are still having issues with unsafe homes due to a lack of proper rules and regulations. Research Mica redress and present a short explanation to your classmates about what has happened and why people are so angry with the government.*

7. The Bees

All through the novel, each chapter begins with a fact about bees. In pairs, choose your favourite five facts about bees. As a class, create a classroom wall display about bees. The display will contain the facts you've learned from the novel, images of the different types of bees and some descriptions about bee charming.

8. Letter from Albert

The novel ends with a letter from Eliza to Albert. Imagine you are Albert. Write a reply to this letter. Ask her about the things mentioned in the letter. Think about how excited you are to see her again. Is there anything else you want to know about life in Dublin while you've been away?

9. Design Your Circus

The travelling circus still exists, but in different ways (mainly because of animal rights). Design your own 21st century travelling circus. What performances would you include? Read a little about the history of the circus on pages 309-310 – how might this affect your circus? Perform the opening speech to your circus to the rest of the class. Make it sound as exciting as possible.