

FARAWAY HOME

ISBN 978-0-86278-643-4 pb

MARILYN TAYLOR

Teaching Guide

By Liz Morris

RATIONALE AND THEMES

This novel has been selected for use in the senior cycle of primary schools and junior cycle of secondary schools, because it deals in a compelling yet sensitive manner with one of the darkest periods of the twentieth century. It is also highly relevant today in the light of recent events in places such as East Timor and the former Yugoslavia and in view of the current difficulties experienced by refugees. Themes explored in this book include:

- Conflict
- Personal responsibility
- Democracy and fascism
- Racism and prejudice
- Friendship and first love
- Experiences of death and loss

SUMMARY

Thirteen-year-old Karl and his sister Rosa watch the parade to celebrate the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany. Persecution of families such as theirs grows ever stronger, culminating in the events of Kristallnacht, when Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses are destroyed and looted. In a desperate attempt to save their children from certain death, Jewish communities organise a series of Kindertransports: Thousands of unaccompanied children make their way to safety in the United Kingdom. Rosa and Karl arrive in Northern Ireland on one such Kindertransport, are separated and sent respectively to a foster family and to a refugee farm in Millisle, Co. Down. When young volunteers arrive from Dublin to help on the farm, Karl

meets Judy and, together with Peewee, himself an evacuee from Belfast, they form a close friendship that will see them through the difficult times ahead.

APPROACH

For the purposes of this exploration, the novel has been divided into four units, based on the structure of the story. The pace at which the novel is read is up to the teacher. Discussion points and activities, mostly based on language, are listed at the end of each unit. This book features a comprehensive Afterword, pp.211–218, which summarises the most important historical events and describes in detail the people and places on which the novel is based.

UNIT 1 VIENNA 1938 PAGES 11-43

SUMMARY

From their Viennese apartment Karl and Rosa Muller look down on the Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler, leading a parade to mark the Anschluss. In an attempt to ignore events below, Oma tells how her late husband, the children's grandfather, earned the Iron Cross for bravery in the Great War. Oma herself had donated her gold wedding ring, and had received in return the heavy iron ring she now wears. The local police and an SS officer arrive for Papa and Uncle Rudi, who are forced to scrub the anti-Nazi and pro-democracy slogans from the

footpaths. When Papa returns, he is alone – Uncle Rudi has been taken to Dachau prison camp. The events of Kristallnacht increase the pressure on all Jewish families to leave, and Karl and Rosa get places on Kindertransports. With a small suitcase each, they depart, leaving everything they have ever known.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Karl is hurt when Lisl decides not to be his friend (p.28). Analyse Lisl's change of attitude and behaviour and the pressures that she might have experienced that caused her to behave like this.
- Oma feels betrayed, by a country in which her family has lived for generations (p.18). Her iron ring is a symbol of the predicament in which Jews and others now find themselves. Discuss her feelings as she 'peers down at the darkening street' (p.21).

ACTIVITIES

1. YELLOW STAR

The Nazis were not the first to force Jews to wear a yellow star as identification. In 1215 Pope Innocent III instructed Jews to wear a distinctive badge to mark them out in society. Find out all you can about the Star of David symbol. What did it represent during the Nazi regime?

2. FACIAL CHARACTERISTICS

By 1935, many openly anti-Semitic teachers in Nazi countries would humiliate Jewish children by making them stand up in class to display their 'despicable racial traits'. Divide the class into groups of

children with common characteristics such as blue eyes or blond hair and segregate this group for one day, perhaps swapping groups so that everyone experiences what it is like to be ostracised. Write a short account of how it feels to be segregated in this way.

3. RESEARCH

In 1935, Hitler made anti-Semitism official by passing the Nuremberg laws, which deprived the Jews of their German citizenship. Find out all you can about these laws. Discuss their personal and political effect on the Jewish population.

4. HISTORICAL LANDMARKS

There are several references to famous Viennese landmarks of the 1930s such as the Café Splendide (p.23) and the Prater merry-go-round (p.38). Investigate similar Belfast and Dublin landmarks of the same period and say how these buildings have changed. Contact Historical Buildings and Heritage Service, 5–33 Hill St., Belfast, BT1 2LA or Dúchas, www.heritageireland.ie

UNIT 2 A STRANGE LAND PAGES 45-66

SUMMARY

When the Kindertransport children finally reach England, they are separated and sent to various locations. Karl and Rosa are sent to Northern Ireland. A week later, they are collected from the Belfast Jewish community and taken to a hostel. Rosa is separated from Karl and fostered by an elderly couple, while he is sent to the refugee farm in Millisle, Co. Down. As they gradually adapt to life on the Farm, the new arrivals learn English and make friends, but fear for their families' safety haunts them, as the news from war-torn Europe grows worse. When Karl hears that a group of volunteers from the neutral South of Ireland is coming to work on the Farm he wonders if these might be resented by some of his fellow-refugees

DISCUSSION POINTS

- The children are 'delighted' when Mrs Bland introduces herself 'in fluent German' (p.45) and Karl 'joyfully recognised' Yakobi's Viennese-accented German (p.58). Discuss the importance of language in making one feel secure and safe and the significance of Anton Senesh's ability to speak five languages fluently (p.56).
- 'Karl realised with a jolt that he and Rosa were refugees' (p.46). Imagine you were forced to leave home and family and transplanted, like Karl, to a foreign country with little money. What would you most miss/what would be your greatest worry? Find newspaper articles that document the problems currently experienced by refugees and other migrants. List the difficulties they must overcome and suggest ways in which we might make it easier for refugees arriving in our country.
- As they stood on the deck of the mail-boat, the other passengers 'were eyeing them curiously' (p.47). Discuss the importance of appearance and the way we dress in creating first impressions.
- Rosa was told that she needn't pack her suitcase, that she was a lucky girl who would have 'all new things' (p.54). If you were only allowed to pack one small suitcase, containing nothing of value, what would you bring? Describe Rosa's feelings when she learns she must leave behind her only links with home.
- As they leave the station in Vienna, Papa hands Rosa 'a new doll and a book about a dog, a golden retriever just like Goldi' (p.43). This doll and the book are metaphors, representing all she has lost: family, home, friends and pet. Discuss Rosa's feelings as she watches her last link with home taken from her (p.54).

ACTIVITIES

1. WRITING A POSTCARD

'Karl sent a card home to Vienna' describing all the sights they had seen in London and 'Rosa's amazement' on meeting a policeman who smiled at her (p.47). Write a postcard, addressing it

correctly, to family or friends, describing your impressions of a foreign city.

2. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The sailor on the mail-boat offered the children a ham sandwich (p.48) but Karl had to remove the meat, as ham is forbidden for Jews. List foods which are not permitted (non-Kosher) and find out why some foods are forbidden for Jews.

3. MENU WRITING

Contrast the foods eaten in Vienna with those eaten in Ireland (p.51). Re-read pp.16–30 and list all the foods mentioned. Design and write a menu for the day's meals that might have been served in the Muller household. Remember to include only Kosher foods.

4. PROVERBS

'From your mouth to God's ears' is a well-known saying (p.58). Ask an older relative or friend to suggest any similar sayings that might be better-known in Ireland and present these in a notebook.

5. PERSONAL SPACE

Ballcopeland Windmill became Karl's favourite place to sit and think (p.65). This windmill is open to the public. Visit www.ehsni.gov.uk/ballycopeland.shtml for more details.

UNIT 3 THE FARM PAGES 68-171

SUMMARY

Volunteers arrive from Dublin, among them Judy Simons, who fails to see why her holidays should be disrupted by refugees in the North. Life on the Farm is harsher than she had anticipated and at first she feels excluded by the refugees. Her discontent is evident, and many resent her apparent inability to understand their fears about missing loved ones. Not until she gets to know Karl does she begin to comprehend the challenges faced by the refugees. Judy and Karl gradually develop a trust that allows them to share their deepest thoughts and, together with Peewee, another outsider, they learn to participate more fully in local life. Rosa,

however, is deeply unhappy with the Goulds and longs for her own home. Reluctantly, they agree to let her go to her brother at the Farm. Karl should now be happy, yet with Judy's departure, finds himself strangely sad.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Social life was very different for young people at the time of the story. Discuss the leisure pursuits enjoyed by the class and compare with those enjoyed in Millisle. List the current names for hop, ping-pong, wireless and gramophone records and say which, if any, of the interests of the class coincide with those of the Farm residents.
- Neither Karl nor Judy had had any previous experience of life on a farm. Examine the story for references to manual work which would now be more usually done by machine and say how the lives of the residents might have been easier in a more mechanised age.
- The refugees, with Billy and Judy, discuss the war news (pp.148–149). Yakobi says that for the refugees 'there is no choice about this war' while Billy believes that 'sometimes you have to fight.' Discuss the idea of 'a just war' in the light of recent events in East Timor and the Balkans.
- Yakobi is 'from a medical family' and his 'only skill is playing the saxophone' (p.58). He is philosophical both about his current responsibilities and his future. Imagine how Yakobi might have spent his days had war not intervened.
- Billy shows his skill as a strategist by allowing Grace to participate in the football match. Why might he have had 'doubts about women playing football' (p.157)? Compare Granny's reaction (p.159) and Grace's reaction (p.162).
- Grace's desire to move the kittens is motivated by a concern for their welfare. But Karl begs Grace to leave them. 'For them it is their home' he says (p.164). Discuss the parallels between the uprooting of the kittens and that of the refugees.

ACTIVITIES

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION

The following words appear in this unit. Arrange in alphabetical order and write a definition for each word, consulting a dictionary: intervention, cacophony, vulnerable, suppressed, plaint, swathes, incredulously, ponderous, serene.

2. LANGUAGES

The refugees learn to speak English on the Farm, though they sometimes lapse into German when together. List those languages spoken by pupils in the class.

3. RADIO NEWS

Everyone on the Farm, even the younger ones, 'listened intently' to the nightly news bulletins (p.86). Consider the school events that might be of interest to the public and 'broadcast' your own Class News Bulletin.

4. LETTER WRITING

Karl receives a 'cautiously worded' letter from his parents (p.104). Write a letter that would escape the attention of the censoring authorities, omitting details that would endanger the writer or recipient **or** write a letter to the Red Cross or other organization requesting information on a missing relative.

5. SLOGANS

In Belfast, Judy notices the war posters (p.73). Write short, snappy slogans that would attract attention and encourage participation in some environmental or political campaign.

6. DIARY ENTRIES

Write diary entries Rosa might have made during her stay with the Goulds **or** those made by a Millisle resident, expressing reactions to the refugees.

UNIT 4 SEPTEMBER 1940– EASTER 1941 PAGE 173-210

SUMMARY

The friendship between Judy and Karl deepens as they exchange letters. Judy decides to visit Millisle for the Easter holidays. Karl confides that his parents

have been deported and he must assume the worst. When he decides he must enlist in the army, Judy is troubled but reluctantly supports his decision. With Peewee's help, they slip out after the Passover meal, and set off for Dublin. But as they watch German bombs falling on Belfast, they decide that they must return. Peewee's brother Billy is among the casualties of the Belfast Blitz. Resolving to support their friend and each other through the dark times ahead, Karl and Judy determine that they must build a new life and look to a future free from the horrors of war and of religious and racial persecution.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Karl tells Judy about his betrayal by Lisl in a letter, though he was unable to do so in Millisle (p.111). Why did he say 'it's easier in a letter' (p.176). Is it always easier to confide deep feelings in a letter? Why? Discuss the increasing importance of e-mail and the fear that e-mail may become more common than face-to-face conversations.
- In a letter, Karl tells Judy about Herr Klaar, a teacher who had 'always been kind' to him (p.176) and also Leni, a neighbour who helped his family. Like many others, they risked everything to help their Jewish fellow-citizens. Read the words below, attributed to Pastor Martin Niemoller. Discuss the courage displayed by people such as Herr Klaar and Leni.

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the
Communists
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Trade
Unionists
and I did not speak out –
because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for me
and there was no-one left
to speak out for me.
- When Karl decides to run away, Peewee asks 'no questions, just said he'd help, because Karl is his friend'

(p.187). Is it always right to support unquestioningly the actions of a friend? How else might Peewee have dealt with the situation?

- When the Nazi death camps were liberated, people wanted to make sure similar atrocities never happened again. In 1948 the United Nations published the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Discuss events in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the light of this Declaration.

ACTIVITIES

1. DIALOGUE

In a letter, Karl tells Judy of the London Blitz (p.173). Imagine you are in the Underground, among strangers. Write an imaginary conversation with the others as you listen to the bombs falling.

2. TRADITIONS

Karl mentions the Jewish custom of eating apples and honey at New Year. In Scotland, 'first-footing' is a New Year tradition. Ask friends and relatives for examples of New Year customs. List according to country of origin **or** write an account of these traditions.

3. SYMBOLS

The author uses metaphors to contrast the freedom of birds with the imprisonment of

the Jews caught in Nazi countries. List these references (see pp.65, 88, 184/5). Discuss the effectiveness of the bird as a symbol of freedom. Choose a different metaphor and write a vivid account of the plight of a refugee seeking residency permits from his/her viewpoint.

4. TELEGRAMS

Although the family knew that Billy was dead, they only fully accepted the news with the arrival of the telegram (p.207). Write the message as it might have appeared, remembering to omit all unnecessary words.

5. LETTER WRITING

Billy's death changed everything, not just for his family, but for Karl and Judy too. Judy felt concerned about her family and got in touch. Write the letter in which she assures her family of her safety.

SOME USEFUL ADDRESSES

1. Jewish Communal Office, Stratford College, 1 Zion Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6 (for synagogue visits and speakers to schools).
2. Cyril Rosenberg, 21 Downview Park West, Belfast BT15 5HP (for school visits to a Belfast synagogue which houses a plaque about Millisle).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources are available on the *Faraway Home* page on www.obrien.ie

By Marilyn Taylor

- My visit to Millisle Primary School: the place behind the story of *Faraway Home*

By pupils

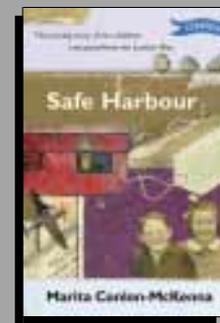
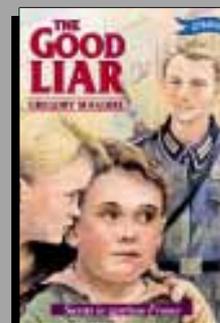
- Why Use A Class Novel? Two pupils' reactions to using *Faraway Home* in the classroom
- Pupils' Impressions of *Faraway Home*
- My Favourite Character in *Faraway Home*
- The Match in Millisle
- Quiz based on *Faraway Home*
- Student Reaction to Visit to Millisle Primary School of Marilyn Taylor and Mr Hackworth

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, MARILYN TAYLOR



MARILYN TAYLOR is a founder member of Children's Books Ireland (CBI), and is also involved in Books Across the Border, a cross-border cross-community literature project. She is also involved with the Pushkin Award, a competition that encourages high standards in children's creative writing.

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