



Chasing Ghosts: An Arctic Adventure

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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 aim is 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. This novel deals with some very interesting ideas about the exploration of the Northwest Passage and the existence of ghosts. Key themes include:

- Courage,
- Grief,
- Supernatural,
- Family,
- Equality,
- History and legacy.

SUMMARY

Chasing Ghosts opens in Derry. It's 1849 and our narrator (twelve year old Ann Coppin) is grieving the death of her younger sister. However, this is not the last we see of Louisa Coppin – her ghost and presence haunts her family, causing much upset as the family struggle to come to terms with her loss. The ghost causes mischief in an attempt to communicate from the other side of the grave. This results in conflict within the family as Ann's mother grows increasingly more upset.

Meanwhile, the newspapers are filled with the story of the mysterious disappearance of the Arctic expedition to find the Northwest Passage. The second narrative string of the novel focuses on the lives of the explorers and, for most of the novel, we hear about the difficulties through the first-hand account of Captain Francis Crozier, second-

in-command to Sir John Franklin. As the men struggle to overcome adversity in treacherous conditions, Captain Crozier's diary shows the mind of a man determined to bring the men to safety.

As the novel comes to a close, these two narrative strands begin to intertwine in the most surprising of ways, building to a fascinating ending.

APPROACH

This is a very enjoyable and entertaining read. Although the plot refers to a number of challenging historical events and opens up difficult questions about the notions of life after death and the existence of the supernatural, it is an engaging read with many opportunities for discussion. This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes.

Section 1: A Ghostly Visit and the Beginning of an Expedition (pages 9–99)

SUMMARY

We meet Ann in the city of Derry with her family mourning the death of her younger sister Weesy. In England, Sir John Franklin is nearly sixty years old and about to embark on a dangerous mission to explore the freezing Northwest Passage, but the comments of those who doubt his suitability are playing on his mind. Sir John's family gather at the port to wave him farewell on his long journey, but his daughter is concerned – as is his second-in-command Captain Crozier. Back in Ireland, Ann's father is away on business for a number of months. While he is away, the family have a ghostly visitor in the shape of their recently deceased Weesy. Unfortunately, this ends up leaving Ann feeling scared. On the expedition, Captain

Crozier's doubts about the expedition have grown, especially once they hit Arctic waters. The Coppin family are still in mourning and visit Weesy's grave. On their way, Ann has an unsettling vision, which fades when she spots a newspaper headline about two ships missing in the Arctic. Back in the past, Captain Crozier's diary tells of how they spent six months waiting for the ice to melt, losing three men to disease in that time.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read page 13)** After Weesy's death, Ann's mother wants to "cover all the shiny surfaces". Why is this? What other traditions do you know about death? Why do you think we follow them?
- (Read page 18)** Sir John Franklin's ambitions as a young boy were to travel the world and "press his boot into foreign snow or sand". Do you want to travel? Why? Why do you think this was John's main ambition? What does it tell us about his character?
- (Read pages 22-23)** What sort of woman is Lady Franklin? Do you think she should have played the role of a dutiful wife? What do you think of how women were expected to behave in those times?
- (Read page 34)** What do you think about Ann and her siblings seeing the ghost of her little sister? Do you think that ghosts exist? Why? Are they right to be afraid? How do you think you would feel if you saw a ghost?
- (Read page 41)** How do you think Ann's mother feels that everyone else in the family can see Weesy but she can't? Why do you think this is? Why doesn't she explain her feelings to the rest of the family? Do you think the rest of the family are being insensitive?
- (Read pages 48-49)** What do you think about Captain Crozier's concerns? Can you rank them in order of importance? Do you think he is making too much of

things? What would you advise him to do?

- (Read pages 56-59) Do you agree with the hunting of whales or do you agree with Captain Crozier? What do you think about hunting animals in general? Why?
- (Read page 62) What do you think of the city scene that is being described? What do we learn about the city inhabitants and their lives? How is it different from a modern city? What do you think of the performing monkey? Why?
- (Read pages 90-91) Why do you think Sir John will have a funeral for the monkey? Is this foolish? What do you think of Crozier's reaction? Why?

ACTIVITIES

1. DESCRIPTION

On pages 13 and 14, the wake is described in a lot of detail such as "golden sunlight trickled through the arc window over the front door, causing specks of dust in the air to sparkle". Choose a scene of a room from either your imagination or real-life and describe it in around 250 words, using as many sensory details as you can to really make it come alive for your reader. If you are struggling, you could write a description of your bedroom at dawn or describe your classroom at school. Remember to create a balance in your writing – use a mix of sensory detail and adjectives and adverbs without using too much of either.

2. RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

Sir John Franklin has 45 years of experience, but is doubting whether or not he should lead the expedition. Imagine you are Sir John and you have an opportunity to address those who doubt you. What would you say? Write a persuasive speech about their concerns, making sure to include as many devices as possible such as rhetorical questions. Your speech should last between one and two minutes when read aloud.

3. NEWS REPORT

The scene at the port when the ships are ready to leave is full of action and excitement. Imagine you are a reporter at the scene reporting a piece for the evening news bulletin. In small groups, act out a news piece reporting directly from the scene. Include some interviews with people involved – family members of the men going aboard, sailors taking part in the expedition and maybe some of the dockworkers preparing the ship for sailing.

4. DRAMA

On pages 42-46, Ann has a visitor in the night which leaves her feeling scared. In groups of three, act out the scene, either through an improvised piece or a series of five freeze frames. How are you going to show her fear? How are you going to show that Weesy is a ghost?

5. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

We learn a lot about Captain Crozier from his journal. What sort of a man is he? Choose four or five adjectives to describe him and find a quote from the text that supports each one. Write an extended analysis of his personality using these adjectives and analysing the quotes from the text to show how they prove your ideas.

6. KINDNESS

On page 66, Ann turns to wave to Mrs Delaware as she is aware she might be a rather lonely woman. Why is this the right thing to do? In our society, a lot of people suffer from loneliness. What can we do to help them? Is there anything we can do in our day-to-day lives? In small groups, write a list of five things we can do as individuals to help the lonely and five things you think the local council or government should do.

7. LETTER OF CONDOLENCE

Write the letter to the mother of John Torrington about the death of her son. Make sure it includes references to how well-respected he was and how he died for his country.

Section 2 Welcome Home (pages 100–194)

SUMMARY

Ann's father comes home, which causes conflict between her parents. Ann and William make the most of some time alone with their father but Ann becomes upset when her father seems to be bowing to their mother's wishes. In the Arctic, the ship becomes stuck again after six weeks of free sailing. Despite activities to keep the men busy, Captain Crozier is beginning to grow concerned. Back in Ireland, Weesy's ghost is becoming more destructive, causing trouble for Ann and William who are growing more and more afraid of the ghostly presence in their home. Sir John is growing more and more unwell, much to Captain Crozier's despair. Things get progressively worse, especially when their exploratory group

expedition returns with even more grave news. Ann's family receive relatives from County Cork, which is both exciting and full of awkwardness as they try to hide the strange goings-on from their visitors. After their guests leave, Ann finds an ally in her Aunt Harriet. On the expedition, more men are dying from illness and the ice still refuses to thaw, leading Crozier to suggest a drastic plan of action.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read page 100) Why do you think Ann's father doesn't go to Weesy's grave? What do you think is going through her mother's head? Which of the two parents do you sympathise with more? Why?
- (Read pages 102- 105) Ann's father asks William if he has ambition and explains what this means. Do you have an ambition? How will you achieve it? Why do you think they don't discuss Ann's ambitions seriously? Do you think this is right?
- (Read page 108) What has annoyed Ann? Why do you think she is so angry? Is her anger justified? Why do you think this? How would you feel if you were in her situation?
- (Read pages 119-120) Do you think it would be hard to only eat tinned food for two years? What would you miss the most? Why?
- (Read pages 131-132) Why do you think Ann is attempting to speak to Weesy? Do you think this is a good idea? What do you think might happen? What advice would you give her?
- (Read pages 136-143) What is happening to Sir John? What do you think of the way Captain Crozier dealt with the situation? Has this changed your opinion of him? What do you think he should do? Why?
- (Read pages 165-167) What are your impressions of Ann's Aunt Connie? How do you think she makes Ann's mother and Aunt Harriet feel? Why do you think this? Do you think they should stand up to her? Why?
- (Read pages 186-194) Do you think the men should be allowed to have their say? Is it fair that the officers are the ones who make the decision about what to do? What do you think should happen?

ACTIVITIES

1. LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

Ann gives the flower seller too much money on page 106, prompting her father to say "mistakes can be good teachers". Do you agree? Write down two or three mistakes

you have learned from. What was the mistake? What did you learn? What advice would you give someone else to help them avoid making the same mistake?

2. KEEPING BUSY

Sir John suggests the men prepare a play for Christmas to keep the sailors busy. Why do you think it was so important to keep the sailors busy? Imagine you were in charge of the ship – what sorts of things would you organise to keep the men busy on the ship for over six months? In small groups, discuss the options and create a list of at least eight activities. Decide on the best three and persuade the rest of the class why your ideas should be on the list of activities for the ship.

3. A CHRISTMAS CAROL

What are the main messages of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens? (If you don't know the storyline, here's a synopsis: sparknotes.com/lit/christmascarol/summary/) In small groups, create a ten-minute piece of drama that tells the story – you can tell it in a modern setting or in the traditional Victorian era – just make sure that the original messages from the story are very similar in your adaptation.

4. HEADING INTO THE UNKNOWN

Imagine you are Lieutenant Gore. How do you feel about taking an expedition out onto the ice? Write a diary entry exploring your thoughts, fears and feelings about the expedition you have been asked to lead. What are your fears for yourself and your men? Do you trust the commands you have been given? What do you think is likely to happen?

5. SIR JOHN'S OBITUARY

Write an obituary for Sir John Franklin, outlining his life, his achievements and the sort of man he was. Remember to mention his family and try to use language that is suitably formal and shows emotion.

6. COUSIN CHARLOTTE

What qualities make someone a good role model for young girls? What sort of a person is Ann's cousin Charlotte? Do you think she is a good role model and friend for Ann? Why do you think this? Give three reasons in your response and analyse quotes from the text in your response.

7. DIARY

Imagine you are Ann's mother. What do you think about the fact that your children

can see the ghost of your daughter but you cannot? How do you feel about your husband's relatives visiting? Do you feel comfortable? Write a diary entry based on their visit and the events of the past year, exploring your inner thoughts and feelings.

8. DEBATE ON STAYING OR LEAVING

Captain Crozier is set on a dangerous plan of action in order to save the lives of his men. Has he made the right decision? Write at least three reasons why the men should delay their abandonment of the ships and at least three on why they should leave immediately. What sorts of preparations will have to be made? As a class, debate what the men should do – should they stay on board or should they leave the ships?

Section 3 Back to School (Pages 195–311)

SUMMARY

Ann returns to school after the summer holidays and makes some new friends – but it soon becomes clear that their motives are not innocent and they are more interested in the death of her sister than a friendship with Ann. Her parents find out that she has told her classmates about their ghostly visitor which makes them angry and causes some arguments. In an attempt to ease the tension, Aunt Harriet comes up with a very strange plan. In the Arctic, the men prepare to leave the ships, with Captain Crozier saying an emotional farewell to the ships. Ann's family have a session with a medium, which leaves them with many questions still unanswered. Captain Crozier's situation continues to worsen as many of the men are unable to complete the journey across the ice. Ann's experience with the medium has huge consequences, not least that her mother finally believes her. Captain Crozier and his remaining men come across some native Inuits and it seems like the men may be saved. Unfortunately this hope is short-lived, as Ann and William find out when they are visited by many of the ghosts from the expedition. Her mission completed, their sister Weesy says goodbye.

DISCUSSION POINTS

□ (Read page 196) Ann is full of worries about returning to school. Why do you think this is? Is she right to be anxious? Why do you think this? How do you feel when returning to school?

- (Read pages 202-203) What do you think of the twins? Do they really want to be friends with Ann? Why do you think they are behaving in this way?
- (Read pages 207) Are you surprised that the medium is a friend of Mrs Lee's? Why do you think this? Why do you think it is important to remember that adults such as teachers have their own lives outside the classroom?
- (Read page 210) What makes a good leader? Can you think of a modern example of a good leader? Do you think Captain Crozier is a good leader? Would you trust him with your safety? Why do you think this?
- (Read page 224) Do you think Ann was right to let William watch the medium's visit? Why do you think this? What do you think her parents would say if they found out?
- (Read pages 265-269) Do you think the men are right to return to the ships? Do you think it was an easy decision? What would you do in this situation? Is Captain Crozier making the right decision? Why do you think this?
- (Read pages 298-307) What is happening in Ann's bedroom? Would you be scared? Why? Why do you think Weesy is so happy? How do you feel about saying goodbye to the men? Do you think this is a good ending for the story?

ACTIVITIES

1. CONSULTING A MEDIUM

The adults in the Coppin family are uncertain whether or not they should try to speak to Weesy's ghost, but decide to go through with it. Do you think this is the right decision? Why/why not? In small groups, debate whether or not they should go through with it – what could go wrong?

2. FREEZE FRAMES

The scene with Mrs Powell has some very tense moments. In small groups, choose the five most interesting moments and freeze frame them. Remember to use your facial expressions and body language to illustrate how the different characters are feeling. Be prepared to explain why you have chosen these particular scenes and what you think your characters are thinking and feeling in each frame.

3. COURAGE

What is courage? Is it a lack of fear or the determination to do something even though you are afraid? Do you think Mr Goodsir and

Peddie are showing courage by volunteering to stay with the men? Do you think they expect to survive? Write 200 words exploring the meaning of courage, giving examples of people you think are brave. Try to end it with words that will inspire others to show courage.

4. ANN IN THE HOT SEAT

What does Ann's reaction to her parents' news tell us about her? What sort of person is she? Create a list of ten questions you would ask her and consider what her answers would be. Take it in turns to play the part of Ann answering the questions, making sure your responses are in keeping with what we have learned about her from the book.

5. STRANGE VISITORS

The Inuits must be very surprised to see the men in the expedition – and confused as to why they are so unprepared for the weather and conditions. What do you think they think of the expedition? What lessons has Captain Crozier learned over the course of the expedition? What do you think he wished he had learned from the Inuits about how to survive? Create a question and answer session between one of the Inuits and Captain Crozier where they ask one another about their cultures and what they have learned about how to survive in the Arctic.

6. LAST SCENE

The scene in Ann's bedroom is very haunting and full of emotion as they (and we) say goodbye to many of the characters from the book. Recreate it, either in small groups with freeze frames or through storyboards. Remember to pick out what you think are the most important moments – think about what we learn about the characters and their storylines.

7. UNNECESSARY POSSESSIONS

Why do you think the men brought things like writing tables? What would you have brought from the ship? Draw up a list of 10 items in your group. Be prepared to argue why your choices are the most sensible with other groups.

8. LESSONS LEARNED

Think about what might have happened had Sir John and Captain Crozier decided, from the very beginning, that their best chance of success in the Arctic lay in learning more about how the Inuit lived and copying them. Create a 'how-to' guide for survival in the Arctic, incorporating all the lessons you've learned throughout the book.

CLASS PROJECT

Both ships from the Franklin expedition have been found (*Erebus* in 2014 and *Terror* in 2016) in excellent condition, revealing many surprises.

Travel writer and comedian Michael Palin was also written his own book specifically about the *Erebus*. You can listen to him talk about the process here: themichaelpalin.com/shop/audiobook/travel-audiobook/erebus-the-story-of-a-ship-audiobook/#discusses

As a class, complete an investigation into the expedition and the ships using as much information as you can from both the novel and the resources available online

You can investigate the shipwrecks on the Parks Canada website.

pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/nu/epaveswrecks.

Your project should include: a detailed map of the expedition, character profiles on the key individuals involved, what lessons they learned, how the expeditions must have seemed to the Inuits, a timeline of events, what we have learned about the wrecks. Include as many interesting images as you can.



Nicola Pierce published her first book, **Spirit of the Titanic**, to rave reviews and five printings within its first twelve months. **City of Fate**, her second book, transported the reader deep into the Russian city of Stalingrad during World War II. Nicola went on to bring seventeenth-century Ireland vividly to life in **Behind the Walls** (2015), set in the besieged city of Derry in 1689, followed by **Kings of the Boyne** (2016), a moving and gritty account of the Battle of the Boyne (1690). In 2018 Nicola wrote about the true stories of the passengers, crew and the legacy of the fated ship **Titanic**.

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