

# The Book Thief

MARKUS ZUSAK

## TEACHER'S INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE

*The Book Thief* is a rich and rewarding read. It is complex, multilayered and has multiple voices. With this in mind, these notes have been written to support a thorough and complete study of the book, designed to spark off discussions based on pupil's engagement with the text and their knowledge of the wider issues which the text highlights. At the same time, these resources can just as easily be used to plan single lessons. Feel free to use these resources and the extracts contained within this pack to construct stand-alone exercises for your class or to use these as a stepping stone to discussing Holocaust and WWII literature. Whilst there is no substitute for reading the book in its entirety (and I would urge you to encourage your pupils to do this whether you are planning an in-depth study or not), these resources are here for your use, to employ in the way which would best suit your pupils' learning.

These resources are pitched at year 9 as they transfer into KS4 and their GCSE courses and should help teachers plan for effective transition (although with a bit of thought they could easily be adapted for older children). Maybe *The Book Thief* could be introduced to year 9 at the end of KS3 (and after their SATs), so that they have time to read the novel during the summer before they commence year 10. It is a long book and the following teaching approaches for progressing through the novel may help:

- Students or teachers can recap on chapters that haven't been read – often a good approach if you reach a 'valley' in the story;
- Let the students read at home – if this is appropriate;
- Use diagrammatic representations and/or summaries of the plot to keep up the pace;
- Group readings – each group is given a section to read and then reports back.
- The golden rule is to let students control their own pace; if they want to read on, let them. Revisiting sections already read means that the engagement is often at a deeper level.

### Tracking KS3 assessment foci through to GCSE assessment objectives

Making the link between assessment foci (KS3) and assessment objectives (KS4) will support smooth transition from one key stage to another. An AF describes a skill, and an AO describes a competency in a skill. The chart below provides a more encompassing vision of what progress should look like across the key stages. The focus of these resources is reading, so therefore only the reading AFs/AOs have been included.

| Reading                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>KS3 AF</b><br>AF2 Understanding, describing, selecting or retrieving information, events or ideas from texts and using quotation and reference to text<br>AF6<br>Identifying and commenting on writers' purposes and viewpoints and the overall effect of the text on the reader | <b>GCSE AO2</b><br>AO2i<br>Read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references and developing interpretations<br>AO2iii<br>Follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies    |
| AF3<br>Deducing, inferring or interpreting information, events or ideas from texts                                                                                                                                                                                                  | AO2ii<br>Distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate how information is presented.                                                                                                                               |
| AF4<br>Identifying and commenting on the structure and organisation of texts, including grammatical and literary features at text level<br>AF5<br>Explaining and commenting on writers' uses of language, including grammatical and literary features at word and sentence level    | AO2iii<br>Follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies<br>AO2v<br>Understand and evaluate linguistic, structural and presentational devices and comment on language variety and change |

## Ways into *The Book Thief*

These are just some ideas to get discussion started and focused on the novel. The student resources invite more detailed, closer study.

### Context (AF2, AF3, AF6)

The best place to start is to activate the students' prior knowledge about the **Second World War**. Unless students fully appreciate the horrors that are caused by persecution, they will never reach a full understanding of the novel, nor will they be able to relate it to contemporary contexts. Without the social and historical context they will not begin to see or feel what literature is. The student resource asks them to do this, but to set it up as an investigation, using a variety of resources, should really engage the students.

Begin with a date – e.g. 1939. Why is this date significant? Add an artefact from the war – maybe a gas mask or a ration book. What is it? How does it relate to 1939? How might it relate to you? To *The Book Thief*? Once the period has been established, the discussion can be broadened by introducing further resources which can trigger a response – e.g. a slide show of images from the Holocaust accompanied by haunting music. What do the students already know about the Holocaust? What have the pictures added to their knowledge? What shocks or puzzles them about the images? What are their predictions in relation to *The Book Thief*? These images could then be extended with some written descriptions of Dachau (<http://www.holocaust-history.org/dachau-gas-chambers/>) or some of the edicts issued by the German government.

Other useful websites include:

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/kristallnacht.html>

<http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/holocaust>

### Structure (AF4, AF6)

This is laid out clearly for the reader. The book is conveniently subdivided into ten parts, each one introduced by a list of key features. The way the novel has been structured can be used twice by the students:

1. As an orientation activity – what will this section be about?
2. As a critical re-reading activity – how well does this represent the section of the novel?

### Voice (AF2, AF3, AF5)

The narrator of the story is Death, who regularly punctuates the commentary and drives the story forward with anticipatory comments. A good starting point would be the *Death and Chocolate* section of the Prologue. What do we learn about the voice? What do we feel about the voice? At which point does the reader realise that the narrator is Death? How does the voice try to earn the reader's sympathy? And finally, how is the reader set up to read the rest of the story? Students could then read to the end of the Prologue and explore whether their opinions about the narrator have changed at all.

To challenge the higher ability, develop this discussion with a focus on authorial voice. How is this different from the narrative voice? What impression do we have of the author? It might be useful at this point to let the students have access to an interview with Zusak: ([www.teenreads.com/authors/au-zusak-markus.asp](http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-zusak-markus.asp)).

### Style (AF2, AF5, AF6)

To open up discussion about style, ask the students how Zusak's style is different from what they are currently reading. One of the things they will notice are the centred pronouncements in bold type. Why have these been done like this? What is the impact on the reader?

### Themes (AF2, AF3, AF6)

Now that context, voice and style have been explored, from their understanding of *The Book Thief* so far, ask students to decide which themes will be key players in the book. They should provide reasoning behind their thinking. Compile a class list, which can be revisited during and at the end of reading the novel to see whether their predictions were right.