

Inspiring Children in Literature

di Sarah Gudgeon

1. Read

Do you like reading the great classics or do you prefer contemporary literature? Do you like stories with a happy ending? I do. Many of my favourite books are about children who overcome tragic events to finally get the happy ending they deserve. In the past, writers like Charles Dickens highlighted society's problems in their narratives and these included poverty, homelessness, inequality and violence.

Oliver Twist (by Charles Dickens) is about a young orphan who is sent to the workhouse as a baby when his mother dies. The conditions in the workhouse are terrible but even when Oliver gets out of there he has some more bad luck and even has to work for a gang of criminals. He is about to go to prison but in his happy ending he is saved and discovers that he is actually from a rich family and is really loved.

The Secret Garden (by Frances Hodgson Burnett) is another great classic but this story starts out differently. Mary Lennox, the main character, lives in a nice home with rich parents in India but she is spoilt and is a very unpleasant little girl. Her life is filled with servants and luxury but she isn't loved. One day, her parents die and she moves back to England to live with her uncle. Here in England, she learns that the most important things in life are friends and family and love and she becomes a very happy child.

In modern literature, we've got *Matilda* (by Roald Dahl) and *Harry Potter* (by J.K. Rowling). *Matilda* is very intelligent but the rest of her family is in contrast, very, very stupid. *Matilda* learns to read by herself and reads hundreds of books at the library. However, her family are not interested in her or her achievements; they just think she's very strange. Finally, she goes to school so that she can learn even more but there she has a very mean and scary headmistress, Miss Trunchbull. *Matilda* develops special powers though and finds a friend in her new school teacher Miss Honey. Finally, she gets the terrible Miss Trunchbull to leave the school and all the children and Miss Honey are very happy.

Harry Potter is an orphan. He lives with his aunt and uncle; they are horrible. Then, Harry goes to Hogwarts which is a school for wizards. He makes lots of good friends and he learns magic. Harry and his friends use their magic against Voldemort, the baddie who killed Harry's parents. Harry becomes a fantastic wizard. A lot of bad things still happen to Harry but he deals with everything because he is strong and brave and has the help of his loyal friends.

Glossary

overcome = superare

deserve = meritare

workhouse = ospizio

spoilt = viziato

orphan = orfano

baddie = cattivo

2. Answer the questions.

- a. What social problems were there in Charles Dickens' lifetime?
- b. Do all the stories mentioned have a happy ending?
- c. Why does Oliver Twist live in the workhouse?
- d. Does Mary Lennox have a good start in life?
- e. Does Matilda read a lot when she is little?
- f. How does Harry Potter overcome all his problems?

3. Choose your favourite orphan from a story.

Write a contemporary dialogue between the orphan and one of the baddie in their story.

Teachers Notes

2 Answer the questions

- a. Poverty, homelessness, inequality and violence.
- b. Yes, they do
- c. Because he's an orphan.
- d. Yes, she does, socially and economically speaking but she isn't loved, so no.
- e. Yes, she does. She teaches herself to read and reads lots of books at the library.
- f. By being strong and brave and with the help of his loyal friends.

3 Get the students talking about different books they've read in which the main character is an orphan before putting them into pairs. You could even get them to act out their dialogues to the rest of the class.

Sample answer

Oliver Twist: *Excuse me, but I'm starving. Could I have some more porridge, please?*

Mr Bumble: *What did you say?*

Oliver Twist: *I said I'm really really hungry and would like some more porridge please.*

Mr Bumble: *More food? This is not an all inclusive holiday resort.*

Oliver Twist: *I know that!*

Mr Bumble: *Right, that's it! You must leave the workhouse immediately, you horrible child!*