

Teachers Notes

by Dr Susan La Marca

The 10PM Question

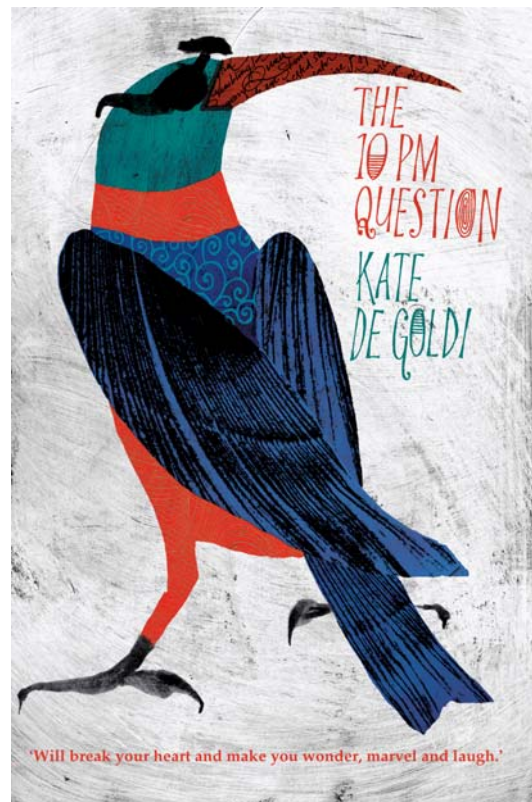
Kate De Goldi

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Recommended for ages 11 – 14 yrs

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INTRODUCTION

The 10pm Question is a gentle and thoughtful book about Frankie Parsons' struggle to understand and come to terms with his mother's paranoia and his own related issues. It is a story about beauty in imperfection and a family's ability to shield and support each other.

Frankie is twelve years old and has always lived with his mother's inability to venture outside the confines of the family home. He loves her but does not understand how she can be this way – her phobia commenced when he was very young and his memory of how it unfolded is vague. For some time he has felt his own life slipping out of control; worries of all kinds grasp at him and it is his need to shield his mother and the answers she gives to his 10pm questions that keep him aligned with the wider world. A new friend, Sydney, inspires an alternate view of life and holds up a mirror to his own. Sydney's seeming ability to cope with her dysfunctional family life brings Frankie's own life into sharp focus. This, and her questioning, sends Frankie seeking answers – a journey back to the place where his memories are strongest, amongst his three eccentric Aunties – and begins a process of confrontation and understanding.

This is very much a story about difference and acceptance; where heroes are troubled, even damaged, but their lives offer the reader hope and belonging and a sense of strength and vitality. De Goldi's careful use of words and her exquisite, descriptive passages help the characters to shine through their problems. This is a moving and thoughtful book that sensitively, but without sentimentality, deals with big issues – family dysfunction, imperfect parents, friendship, siblings and the human need for a deep understanding of ourselves.

The high quality of De Goldi's writing style, and the themes of growing up and discovering one's identity, recommend this novel for upper primary and secondary study. In the English classroom, it not only provides many examples of excellent style, but also contains characters who love language and play with it, so there are opportunities for fun word-play in the classroom when studying it. It offers valuable themes for exploration, very appropriate for this age-group. The themes are also very suitable for Personal Development classes.

LANGUAGE

This is a superbly written book that is a pleasure to read. De Goldi's deft hand shapes intriguing characters through a creative and evocative use of language and structure.

Students could explore examples of De Goldi's writing, choosing what they feel are interesting descriptive pieces. De Goldi's skill lies in her ability to use the perfect metaphor or word in a descriptive way. Some good examples of her skill are the following:

(Gigs) 'He cupped his big freckled hands ready; they were like the firm but flexible petals of an aging tulip.' (p. 12)

(Uncle George) 'He had a particular way of relaxing when he was seated in an easy chair or sofa. His feet tapped, his arms jerked, his head was up and alert like a rotating periscope. He twitched and barked and generally disturbed anyone else's attempts to idle and lounge.' (p. 13)

'Gordana hoovered up books; she devoured them; with a book in her hand Gordana was deaf and dumb to the rest of the world.' (p. 99)

'The kidney was a deep red-black, tiny and delicate as a semi-precious stone. It had the look of something licked to a high polish. The eye seemed almost to shimmer under the bathroom light; it was a slightly squashed, flaccid marble, shiny brown with black speckling.' (p. 124)

'Frankie sat in the riverside bus shelter, massaging the end of his nose, which stung with the cold. He imagined it red at the tip and shiny like freshly cut beef.' (p. 181)

A LOVE OF LANGUAGE

Frankie and Gigs create their own language so that they can communicate in secret in their own safe and private world. It is said 'Frankie enjoyed languages; their different sounds and patterns interested him. His ear seemed to sort out their mysteries quickly' (p. 16). Gigs considers Chilun the 'ultimate non-violent weapon' (p. 16). There is no doubt that Frankie and his friends love language in all of its forms and relish its varied possibilities. Allowing Sydney to learn this language is a major indicator of how well she has come to be accepted by the boys. Creating a language is integral to the creation of a world or a culture and language as the basis of communication defines how we see ourselves and allows us to create a sense of community and belonging. The language Frankie and Gigs create is called Chilun:

'Chilun was a code, a complicated language spoken by only two people in the world. Frankie had invented it one dull summer and taught it to Gigs. It was a mixture of pig Latin, inverted syllables, truncated words – and bits of Russian.' (p. 16)

In the wonderful picture book *Weslandia* by Paul Fleischman and Kevin Hawkes the main character creates a new society and, as part of this, a written language that borrows symbols from a variety of known languages and the illustrator's creative imagination. Students, in pairs, could experiment with creating their own written or spoken language. The power of shapes and forms to convey feeling and the use of different scripts for different purposes could be explored. The use of computerised fonts could also be part of this project as could a more detailed exploration of colour and form, line and design in written text or the sounds and intonations in spoken languages.

WORD GAMES

Dictionary – Word of the Day Game

On page 32 Frankie works through his teacher, Mr A's, Word of the Day exercise and finds that the words he picks at random seem to illustrate his current predicament.

In response to this exercise students could play a similar game with the dictionary. The words they come up with must be used in sentences. These sentences could reference something from the book or reflect something from the students' own lives. (A number of stabs at the dictionary may be needed as random choice does not always throw up useable options as easily as it does for Frankie.) As a twist, students could be encouraged to use the word in a sentence in light of how it sounds rather than in response to what the word really means.

Adverbs

On page 35 Frankie and Gigs play a continuing adverb game where they take turns in coming up with the best adverb to describe something, in this case the heat of the day. 'It was hot. Crushingly hot... Punishingly hot...Mercilessly hot' and so on. Gigs wins with 'Malignantly hot'.

In small groups, students could take turns coming up with adverbs in a similar way moving around the group until all possibilities have been exhausted. Try matching adverbs to cold, violent or beautiful.

'Bonga Swetso'

This was Frankie's made up word for good when he was four years old and it is now being used by Gigs at every opportunity (p. 37).

Students could engage with making up their own words for 'good' or 'bad' exploring how sounds and the feel of make-believe words can evoke a feeling, and then, in a writing exercise, use their words in dialogue between two characters.

Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* with lines such as 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe', could be used as added inspiration for the creation of new and interesting words.

Replacing a Letter

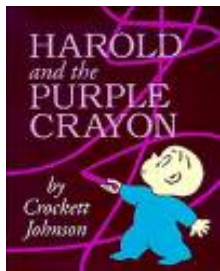
On page 123 Frankie explains how 'Partially blind' becomes 'partially bling' – a mistake in a publicity campaign created by his father. Changing one letter in this phrase changes the meaning and has humorous results.

Students could peruse magazines and newspapers to find adverts or headlines that could be altered in a similar way to create something funny or ironic.

CHARACTERS

FRANKIE

We are introduced to Frankie on page 7. He is a complex and fascinating character and it is his development and exploration of the world that drives this book.



The picture book *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson is Frankie's favourite book of all time (p. 101). It is quite a famous book, having celebrated a 50th anniversary in 2005, and has been made into a television program and a movie. In the book the main character, Harold, is able to create his own world by drawing it. He has control over everything around him with the aid of his magic crayon.

If you can find it, share the book with the class. Why has the book remained special to Frankie?

Frankie begins to spiral out of control when he is asked to step up and help out once again (p. 128) but he gives in because he can't bear the look on his mother's face – expressionless, transported.

GIGS

Gigs is the perfect foil for Frankie; he 'saw the bright side of everything. It made him a good person to be around' (p. 14).

- Consider Frankie's life without Gigs. What do you think it would be like?
- Discuss the similarities and differences shared by the two boys. Do their similarities outweigh their differences?

SYDNEY

Sydney is introduced to us as 'The new girl' (pp. 23 & 25).

- What does this introduction tell us about Sydney?
- Consider the boys' different responses to her.

Sydney has the ability to front up to her first class 'smiling broadly' (p. 26). Do you think that she has inherited her mother's acting ability or is she genuinely confident in difficult situations?

Sydney makes her own clothes (p. 65), has lived in 22 houses (p. 71) and is 'effortlessly loquacious' (p. 134).

'What was good, Frankie thought, suddenly clear about something, was the way she said exactly what she wanted. It was unusual. It was refreshing.' (p. 31)

- Do you think she is someone that you would like if she arrived in your class?
- Why do Gigs and Frankie like her?
- Do you believe that opposites attract? Or is Sydney more like Frankie and Gigs than we might at first think?

Sydney feels she is used to sad endings (p. 202). Why?

This story documents a time of enormous growth in Frankie's life. Could he have achieved this without Sydney?

THE AUNTIES

The Aunties (pp. 17-19, 66-67, 70 onwards, 221) are a wonderful study in unfettered enthusiasm for life. Eccentric and unusual they are characters that dominate the book even though their role is only small.

- Students could write a short creative story featuring one of the aunties, documenting an incident from their very colourful lives.

THEMES

ANXIETY DISORDERS / AGORAPHOBIA

De Goldi's author statement includes a very interesting insight into her own life and its inspiration for the idea behind the title of the book and its main focus. She said:

...between the ages (roughly) of eleven and fourteen my son, Jack, was from time to time plagued by anxiety — about many things (the possibility of fire, ant invasions, global warming, earthquakes, the SARS virus, sundry illnesses...) I felt a lot of sympathy for this affliction since I'm a rather active hypochondriac and general worrier myself. Often, in the late evening, Jack would come into our bedroom and confess his current fear ... we would talk about it, I would try and reassure him... After several years of this he was well over himself and would become kind of sheepish and exasperated about it all... One evening he came through the door and said, in a comically hang-dog voice, 'It's the 10 p.m. question'.

De Goldi's explanation could begin a discussion of how authors come up with their ideas, this could be combined with a discussion of what the students find inspires their own creative activities.

When we are first introduced to Frankie (p. 7 onwards) he is making a list of the things that have gone badly on February 14th followed by the things he needs to organise his day (pp. 8 and 9).

- What does this show us about Frankie?
- At what point is Frankie's behaviour beyond normal and moving into the realm of anxiety or obsession?
- Students could make a list similar to Frankie's based on events or irritations in their own lives. De Goldi's tone is entertaining and light despite an undercurrent of seriousness. A discussion of how De Goldi has achieved this effect and the tone the students might aim for in their own writing may lead to an understanding of the skill with which this book is written.

Frankie is not the only one who relishes routine: together Frankie and Gigs maintain 'an invariable routine' (p. 11) in how they negotiate the zig zag and also in how they have decorated the back of the same seat on the bus for the last four years (pp. 22-3).

Gigs does not let these routines control him though.

- Where is the borderline between routine and obsession?

Frankie's worries dominate much of his life, even when he is having fun:

'Food, fun, and fast hands of cards were great...but there was so much else to think about, and no one except him seemed to bother doing the thinking.' (p. 18)

Frankie worries about a vast array of threats and possibilities - worms, smoke alarms, the rash on his chest (pp. 18 & 19), the contents of the local pool (p. 36), spiders (p. 52), camp (pp. 54, 84), food poisoning (p. 59), travel (p. 75), Hepatitis (p. 90), heart attack (p. 133), hospitals and sickness (p. 186) to name a few. Until Frankie is even worried about the possibility of worrying, this becomes

'a progressively more high-pitched white noise in his head and there would be no possibility of padding down the hall to Ma's room for reassurance.' (p. 86)

Frankie is concerned he may not be normal (p. 150) and he imagines and envies the dog's life – 'Perpetual enthusiasm, zero worry.' (p. 177)

- Why is Frankie like this?

Gordana feels she and Louie did not get the worry gene like Frankie (p. 172) and

'Gigs *never* seemed to worry. His life was a steady, tidy progress from one activity to another...The smartest thing about him, in Frankie's view, was that he never, ever, ever worried. Frankie dreamed of having such a disposition.' (p. 21)

Remembering the time when his mother did not cope causes panic (p. 175).

- Why do we often not remember important events from our past?

Frankie makes lists of birds, cricketers, gemstones (pp. 218-9), dogs (p. 219).

- Why?

Frankie achieves a breakthrough when he realises he needs to talk to someone but that it can't be a member of his immediate family, even his mother – or especially his mother (p. 220). The realisation allows him to cry and he knows he needs to talk to Alma.

- Why?

Frankie finally realises that he has been waiting for something:

'The something was behind him or it was just over his shoulder or just around the corner, out of sight; he worried about it, it made him nervous and uncertain and sometimes sad.' (p. 222)

- What is he waiting for?

Frankie explores his past with Alma (p. 226).

- Why is this necessary for him?
- What do Alma and the other Aunties represent?

Frankie tells Alma of his 'rodent thoughts' (p. 227). Alma calls him brave for talking like this.

- Do you think Frankie is brave? Why or why not?

Frankie feels an enormous pressure; he feels he must be there for his mother, that he is the one that must look out for her. He also feels trapped by his need to seek answers – the 10 pm question (p. 228)

- Why does he feel like this?

The answers for Frankie lie in past events and his remembering and accepting those events and feelings that relate to them. He needs to understand what happened to his mother (p. 232). Discuss the relevance of the past to our future in general and in relation to each of the characters in the text. The following quotations might be useful starting points:

The farther behind I leave the past, the closer I am to forging my own character.
– Isabelle Eberhardt

The past is finished. There is nothing to be gained by going over it. Whatever it gave us in the experiences it brought us was something we had to know.
– Rebecca Beard

Those who face that which is actually before them, unburdened by the past, undistracted by the future, these are they who live, who make the best use of their lives; these are those who have found the secret of contentment.
– Alban Goodier

Study the past if you would define the future.
– Confucius (551 BC - 479 BC)

(Quotations sourced from www.quotationspage.com, where links or more information about each can be found.)

On page 234 it says 'Everyone copes differently.'

- Is this so? Why?
- Why is looking over his old drawings important, helpful, to Frankie? (p. 235)

Read over the passages where Frankie finally confronts his mother (pp. 237 – 240). Frankie makes a choice (p. 239).

- What is it and why is it so important?

It is also important for Frankie's healing that his mother says to him:

'You don't have to watch over me.' (p. 240)

- Why does Frankie need to hear this?

Frankie gets professional help – Petrus (p. 245).

- Why is someone 'outside' useful to Frankie?

At the end of the story Frankie now has exercises to help him cope and is about to spend a night away from home (p. 250).

- Do you think that everything will now be alright for Frankie?

FAMILY

In addressing the theme of family, De Goldi has said:

I think maybe, too, another lurking 'theme' in the story is that family life is always a complicated puzzle. It can be rich, hilarious, educational *and* enraging, painful, and sometimes tragic — (in other words, it's a perfect microcosm of — and preparation for — life itself)! I suppose I hope, too, that any reader of Frankie's story, might come away from the book thinking that this complicated puzzle of family life — and life in general — will never be fully solved, either ... there will be semi-sad and often downright sad endings for some people...

- If life is a complicated puzzle, why does it seem to be easier for some people than others?
- Is life about solving the puzzle? Is that what Frankie does?

Family, and the genetic inheritance that it entails, is at the centre of Frankie's problems. On p. 173 he realises:

'It had been there always, alongside the rodent snarling, the knowledge that Louie and Gordana were like Uncle George – bold and carefree, fearless, joyous. And he was like Ma; he was timorous and beset, a hostage to dark imaginings, cowering somehow, waiting always for the chopper.' (p. 173)

Discuss the idea of nature versus nurture.

- How much of who we are is the result of our genetic makeup?
- How much influence do we, and others, have over the person we become?

When things are bad for Frankie each of his family members in turn (p. 212 onwards) attempts to understand what is going on and to help him. Families are often those with us for the happiest times in our life and for the saddest.

- Why?

Parents

An important part of becoming an adult is moving away from the immediate influence of parents. For some this is easier than others and for some it never fully happens. De Goldi acknowledged this as central to *The 10pm Question* when she said:

At the heart of the story is — I think (other readers may differ) — Frankie's need to separate out from his mother. He loves her very much and is deeply attached to her, but she is also, in a way, a great burden to him. The story works around his coming to understand these complex feelings towards Ma — his exhaustion with this burden, his acceptance of her 'half-sad ending' (that she may never leave the house), and his crucial understanding that *her* 'ending' doesn't have to be *his* ending. That is, though he is deeply connected to her, he is also significantly different — he can, and will, make different choices.

Frankie says of his mother 'Ma heard what was in the silence' (p. 159).

- What does he mean?

De Goldi expertly and non-judgementally describes parents that are flawed. Though different, both Sydney and Frankie are coping with parents that do not meet their expectations at times.

- Are they bad parents?

Sydney says:

'Isn't it perfect?...My mother never stays in one place and your mother never moves.'
(p. 190)

- Are the two women similar in any way?

Sydney's mother's 'whole life was like a series of stage plays,...(with) Freya in the starring roles.' (p. 192)

- What does this mean?

After Frankie calls Sydney's mother 'crazy', she says:

'Maybe...But maybe she's no crazier than a person who never leaves the house for nine years.' (p. 192)

Frankie reacts strongly, justifying his accusations. They both realise that they can't criticise the respective mothers without upsetting each other.

- Why is the bond to our parents so strong despite their flaws?

Siblings

The various groups of siblings in *The 10pm Question* offer vastly different examples of sibling relationships. Whilst Gigs cannot stand his siblings (pp. 62-3) and Frankie has a strangely antagonistic alliance with his (pp. 44, 48-50, 99-100), Sydney is dedicated to her two sisters (pp. 165, 197) and is a strong maternal figure in their lives. Each group clearly demonstrates the importance of sibling relationships to personal development and a sense of self in relation to family.

Louie has different styles of music for different situations, for example rap while driving in the city (p. 104).

- Students could work at matching different types of music, or even particular songs, to activities that make up their own days. Encourage them to respond to the pace and feel of the music and match it appropriately.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Perhaps one of the hardest things in life is to come up with the right questions.

Is that what Frankie's journey is about?

What is the purpose of Frankie's 10pm questions?

Are any of them questions he really needs answers to?

'Sydney was an insatiable questioner...she had a bottomless bag of queries about everything...She was indecently curious...Apparently most things were her business.'
(p. 62)

- Is this why Frankie likes Sydney?

Does he like her because he expects Sydney to ultimately come up with *the* answer? (p. 191)

- What does this mean? What is *the* answer?

Frankie's life is full of questions but during the story he realises that he has never discussed with his brother Louie the fact that their mother does not leave the house (p. 114).

- Why?

One evening, as Frankie begins to consider his mother and her issues, he uses his 10pm question to ask her to come to the ballet (p. 117). As with all of the other 10pm questions Frankie already knows the answer – she can't come.

- Why does he ask anyway?

When Sydney cries because her Mum has spent her camp money her distress has an extreme effect on Frankie:

'As for Frankie, the change seemed seismic; it was as if the very co-ordinates of his life had been reorganised. Sydney's revelation had had the magical effect of unplugging his own banked up secrets. It seemed as if from that moment his dread of her pesky questions had evaporated; now he practically invited them.'
(p. 189)

- Why?

Sydney feels that the story that they are working on together should have a choose-your-own-ending option. (pp. 199, 200)

- Why does this upset Frankie?
- How does his reaction reflect something of his view of the world and how it should operate?

Frankie prefers stories with happy endings but Sydney comments that his mother prefers the sad, Russian endings – 'totally tragic' (p. 203). This passage brings to a head Frankie's feelings about himself and his mother.

- Why is it distressing for him?
- Consider his physical reaction (p. 205). Why is it so extreme?

Frankie lay in his bed. He lay facing the wall, his eyes open, but seeing only blackness. His entire body ached. He wanted to cry but it wouldn't happen. His insides were dried out, somehow. He was prickly and withered and exhausted.
(p. 205)

- How does he cope that evening?
- Why is Frankie unable to tell his mother how he feels and seek solace from her when the questions bother him? Why does he turn away at her door (p. 214)?

FRIENDSHIP

An interesting discussion could be had by comparing the portrayal of the friendships in *The 10pm Question* between Frankie and Gigs and the two boys and Sydney with the portrayal of similar supportive, strong friendships in a selection of excellent picture books. The following could be used:

- *Amy and Louis* by Libby Gleeson & Freya Blackwood
- *Castles* by Allan Baillie & Caroline Magerl
- *Pearl Barley and Charlie Parsley* by Aaron Blabey

- *The Adventures of Charlotte and Henry* by Bob Graham

The use of illustration as well as text – line, colour, the use of layout and space – can all be discussed in relation to how they convey an insight into the relationships. Similarities and differences between the friendships explored in each story could also be discussed in relation to the novel.

- Are all friendships the same?

De Goldi, in her author statement, recognises the variety of different friendships in her novel. She says:

Of course, the novel is also about the great joy of friendship: with a ‘best’ friend (who simply accepts you and doesn’t ask difficult questions); with siblings — whose friendship is always the first and therefore the model for all other friendships; with aunts, schoolmates, teachers, and the passing parade of adults we come into contact with and who affect us in countless ways as we grow. And then — significantly — friendship with that occasional ‘rare bird’ who may come — sometimes only briefly — into our lives and change them forever.

- Who is the ‘rare bird’ of *The 10pm Question*?

When things have got very hard for Frankie, he is not coping and is unable to really talk about it. Why does he continually say to those who ask that Sydney is not his girlfriend (pp. 213, 215)?

OUR SENSE OF SELF

In her author statement, De Goldi says:

My novels are always preoccupied with the progress a character must make *away* from the family/parents who have borne and loved him or her. All novels are about growing up, in some way — but children’s and teenage stories are *especially* about that — and the bittersweet fact of growing up is that we must grow *away*; in order to gain ourselves we have to — in some profound way — lose part of what we have loved and felt safe with — or, indeed, troubled by.

Many books that deal with the teenage years have similar concerns. Discuss De Goldi’s statement in relation to life in general, making reference to other books, movies and television shows that also deal with this necessary separation from family.

- Why is this ‘growing away’ so hard for Frankie in particular, or is it difficult for everyone – we just have different ways of dealing with it?

Alma’s advice about life to Frankie is ‘always remember what is trumps’ (p. 53).

- What does she mean?
- Is she only referring to a card game?

Why do Louie and Uncle George seem ‘both infinitely familiar and oddly unrecognisable’ to Frankie (p. 125)?

Gigs and Sydney have aspirations, life goals – both varied and interesting – but ‘Frankie had only very hazy notions of what he wanted to be’ (p. 143).

- Why?

Frankie finally faces a series of sleepless nights after his difficult day at Sydney’s house when both Sydney’s and his own problems came to the surface (p. 207 onwards).

Frankie makes it worse by rejecting Sydney, pushing her away (p. 212).

- Why does he do this?

SYMBOLISM

BIRDS

Frankie takes great pleasure in his knowledge of birds. For one of his turns choosing passwords for the bus he cannot help but use obscure bird names:

'He was still debating about Friday: it would be either lily-trotter or capercaillie, which were both names that made him smile.' (p. 15)

Birds permeate all parts of his life. On one of his most difficult evenings (pp. 205-6) Frankie recites bird names to calm himself. At one point he and Louie consider what bird best suits the character of each of his family members. Frankie thinks that Louie is perhaps a little like a sparrow – 'pecking, bobbing, chirping and chatting, on the go and on the make' (p. 109). They then consider what sort of bird Gordana might be, considering her character and her varied moods (p. 109-10). They then proceed to their other relatives.

- Why does Louie avoid engaging with this game in relation to their mother? (p. 113)

Consider Louie's description of her as a bird:

'She has to be a caged bird, doesn't she?' He kept looking ahead. 'Something that's had its wings clipped. Something really pretty, but a bit sad.' (p. 115)

Frankie, later, wishes he was intrepid and hardy or tough and streetwise like a petrel or a jackdaw but he thinks he may actually be more like a hummingbird – 'sort of small and incessantly wing-beating, hovering anxiously' (p. 121). But then he realises that perhaps he is a kingfisher – still, watchful and waiting (p. 122).

- What is he watching? What is he waiting for?
- Why does he see this as his role?

Students could match characters from *The 10pm Question* or people they know to different types of birds, breeds of dogs, or a particular animal, describing in a few words why they see a match.

For the story he is writing with Sydney, Frankie creates an 'Aral bird' (p. 186), it is a composite of all of his favourite birds and he wants its story to be a happy one.

- Why?

Alma calls Frankie a 'rare bird' (p 251), after their talk.

- Why?

NAMES

Names are hugely symbolic, in many cultures often layered with meaning. Names can also be fun and playful; others have sounds and textures that imply certain possibilities. Consider De Goldi's use of names.

- The fat controller (cat)
- Ray Davies (puppy)
- Gordana
- Uncle George – why this and not Dad? – p. 83
- Cassino
- Sydney and her sisters Galway and Calcutta
- Infinity (Gordana's rag doll)

What do the author's choices tell us about her characters?

Gigs thinks Gordana is in a permanent bad mood because of her name (p. 130) and Sydney's mother has changed her name by deed poll from Joanne Corcoran to Freya because Freya was the Norse goddess of beauty and fertility (p. 133).

Stephanie Meyer, discussing the names of her characters from *Twilight* said:

It took me a while to find names for my anonymous duo. For my vampire (who I was in love with from day one) I decided to use a name that had once been considered romantic, but had fallen out of popularity for decades. Charlotte Bronte's Mr. Rochester and Jane Austen's Mr. Ferrars were the characters that led me to the name Edward. I tried it on for size, and found that it fit well. My female lead was harder. Nothing I named her seemed just right. After spending so much time with her, I loved her like a daughter, and no name was good enough. Finally, inspired by that love, I gave her the name I was saving for my daughter, who had never shown up and was unlikely to put in an appearance at this point: Isabella. Huzzah! Edward and Bella were named. For the rest of the characters, I did a lot of searching in old census records, looking for popular names in the times that they'd been born.

—<http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight.html>

Names can be important. Compare the names in *The 10pm Question* with the character names from other well-known films and books. Discuss those that are liked and that you think work on some level. Some names definitely conjure up a certain type of character. Have some fun as a class creating a new name for a James Bond character; a beautiful, feisty heroine; or an eccentric professor.

FURTHER READING

Pip: The Story of Olive by Kim Kane

Benny and Omar by Eoin Colfer

Bird and Sugar Boy by Sophie Laguna

Love, Aubrey by Suzanne M La Fleur

Falling from Grace by Jane Godwin

All We Know by Simon French

The Power of Lucky by Susan Patron

Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Being Bindy by Alyssa Brugman

Boy Next Door by Penelope Todd

Heartbeat by Sharon Creech

I am Susannah by Libby Gleeson

Rain Man and Captain Daniel by Catherine Bateson

Silent to the Bone by E. L. Konigsburg

Eggs by Jerry Spinelli

Swashbuckler by James Moloney

Tumble Turn by Doug McLeod

MESSAGE TO STUDENTS FROM THE AUTHOR

I spent four years, on and off, writing this book, but it really began seven years ago when I read somewhere about a woman who suffered from an anxiety disorder – specifically, a serious agoraphobia which meant she hadn't left her home for more than a dozen years.

I made a note of that – as I do of many things in the world around me, things that intrigue me or amuse me, or that merely catch my attention for a reason I'm not yet sure of.

(Quite a lot of things in the novel have been gathered this way over the years: I've had the name Gordana in my notebook for more than a decade, knowing I'd find a use for it one day. Similarly, I've long been fascinated by document destruction trucks on city streets, and I've always wanted to call a cat The Fat Controller. Years ago I wrote in my notebook: '*guy has beagle called Ray Davies*'...

The second important moment in the life of the story was a young woman I met who lived a rather transient life with her mother and sisters...she was 12 years old, incredibly smart, and wise beyond her years, but generally uncertain where she'd next pitch up. I made a note of her, too.

Finally, between the ages (roughly) of 11 and 14 my son, Jack, was from time to time plagued by anxiety – about many things (the possibility of fire, ant invasions, global warming, earthquakes, the SARS virus, sundry illnesses...) I felt a lot of sympathy for this affliction since I'm a rather active hypochondriac and general worrier myself. Often, in the late evening, Jack would come into our bedroom and confess his current fear...we would talk about it, I would try and reassure him etc, etc...After several years of this he was well over himself and would become kind of sheepish and exasperated about it all...One evening he came through the door and said, in a comically hang-dog voice, 'it's the 10pm Question'. Suddenly, all the half-formed ideas, the notes in my book, everything I was preoccupied with, *connected* up, and the starting point of the story was startlingly clear to me.

I didn't know much more than that when I began writing (I never do with a novel), but it went from there, and I went along happily for the ride – entertaining myself with many details I've been longing to have in stories (a trombone playing friend, a triumvirate of great-aunts, a cake-baking business, the ritual of a long bus trip to school, a *Fimo* army of lunatic second-lieutenants, a language-focussed teacher, etc etc etc).

Someone asked me recently what I thought *The 10pm Question* was *about*. It's always interesting to think about this after you've finished a book – you don't always know in a clear way while you're actually writing it.

At the heart of the story is – I think (other readers may differ) - Frankie's need to separate out from his mother. He loves her very much and is deeply attached to her, but she is also, in a way, a great burden to him. The story works around his coming to understand these complex feelings towards Ma – his exhaustion with this burden, his acceptance of her 'half-sad ending' (that she may never leave the house), and his crucial understanding that *her* 'ending' doesn't have to be *his* ending. That is, though he is deeply connected to her, he is also significantly different – he can, and will, make different choices.

My novels are always preoccupied with the progress a character must make *away* from the family/parents who have borne and loved him or her. All novels are about growing up, in some way – but children's and teenage stories are *especially* about that – and the bittersweet fact of growing up is that we must grow *away*; in order to gain ourselves we have to – in some profound way – lose part of what we have loved and felt safe with – or, indeed, troubled by.

Of course, the novel is also about the great joy of friendship –with a 'best' friend (who simply accepts you and doesn't ask difficult questions); with siblings – whose friendship is always the first and therefore the model for all other friendships; with aunts, schoolmates, teachers, and the passing parade of adults we come into contact with and who affect us in countless ways as we grow. And then – significantly – friendship with that occasional 'rare bird' who may come – sometimes only briefly - into our life and change it forever.

I think maybe, too, another lurking 'theme' in the story is that family life is always a complicated puzzle. It can be rich, hilarious, educational *and* engaging, painful, and sometimes tragic - (in other words, it's a perfect microcosm of – and preparation for – life itself)!

I suppose I hope, too, that any reader of Frankie's story might come away from the book thinking that this complicated puzzle of family life – and life in general – will never be fully solved, either...there will be semi-sad and often downright sad endings for some people...

ABOUT THE WRITERS

KATE DE GOLDI

Kate De Goldi is the author of novels and picture books for all ages. Her work has received a number of awards including the American Express and BNZ/Katherine Mansfield short story awards, the Esther Glen Medal, an Arts Foundation Laureate Award and several NZ Post Children's Book Awards.

She teaches creative writing in schools throughout New Zealand and reviews children's literature on radio and television.

In 2004 Kate received a scholarship from the Susan Price Children's Collection to research and write a book about international children's literature.

DR SUSAN LA MARCA

Susan La Marca is a secondary school teacher-librarian. Her PhD, completed in 2003, explored how a teacher-librarian creates a reading environment.

Susan works for the School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV) and edits their research journal *Synergy*. She is also an associate editor of the journal *Viewpoint: on books for young adults* and editor of a number of books on reading and school library design. She is the co author, with Dr Pam Macintyre, of *Knowing readers: unlocking the pleasures of reading* (2006).

Susan works as a consultant and writer in areas related to reading and teacher-librarianship. She has presented in these areas both nationally and internationally and was the Children's Book Council of Australia awards judge for Victoria for 2006/7.