

Classroom Resources



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NOTES BY:
Sue Warren and Jemma Myors

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The Fortune Maker

Catherine Norton

BOOK SUMMARY

Which is more dangerous – a future you can't see – or one that you can?

London, 1913

Twelve-year-old Maud Mulligan knows there's no future for her in London, in the rat-infested slum where she grew up. But in the tunnel under the river are fortune tellers, Seers, who will tell your future for a few pennies. And then there is Mr Mandalay, Seer to the king and anyone else rich enough to afford him.

When Mr Mandalay sees Maud in a foretelling for a wealthy factory heiress, she believes Maud can save her family from financial ruin. But how? And why?

In a world shaken by suffragettes, scientists, and the threat of war, what could a girl like Maud do to change anyone's future – or even her own?

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ACELA1512
- ACELT1608
- ACELT1613
- ACELT1616

THEMES

- Grief & Loss
- Gender
- Power
- Resilience

Recommended Reading Ages: 8+

Resources Created For: Upper Primary

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Before Reading

1. Discuss the cover art and use the various images to speculate on the setting and plot.
 - a) There are two very recognisable symbols of fortune telling – crystal gazing and palmistry.
 - (i) What do students know about fortune telling?
 - (ii) Do they know other ways of predicting future events?
 - (iii) Do they know anyone who has had a ‘reading’?
 - (iv) What do they think of the concept – are they believers, sceptics or uncertain?
 - b) Careful observers will note two buildings in the background which very much look like iconic London landmarks [St Paul’s and Big Ben] and may be able to guess at the setting, particularly if they pair this with the river and small boats (clearly not ocean-going craft).
 - c) What do they make of the buildings with chimneys pouring smoke? What part might these play in this story?
 - d) How does this contrast of architecture set a scene for the narrative?
 - e) What is the significance of the coin?
 - (i) Who was the monarch at the time?
 - (ii) What was happening in England (and around the world) during this period of history.
2. Discuss the title and why it might be ‘Maker’ and not [Fortune] Teller. What is the inference here?
3. *The Fortune Maker* is historical fiction which incorporates factual information with narrative. In particular, it focuses on the plight of the extreme poor and the growing agitation for workers’ and women’s rights, and the class divide. From the late 19th century into the early 20th century, there was growing support from some important groups and individuals to address the terrible conditions the working class and poor lived and worked in. The story also focuses on some of the idiosyncratic interests/beliefs of the time. In pairs or small groups ask students to research one of the significant concepts, events or people of this period and prepare a one-page overview to share with the rest of the class:
 - Henry Mayhew
 - Charles Booth
 - Joseph Bazalgette
 - Emmeline Pankhurst
 - WSPU Women’s Social & Political Union
 - Slums
 - Industrial Revolution
 - Edwardian-era superstitions
 - Famous Edwardian spiritualists
 - The Fabian Society

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- On the eve of the First World War, Great Britain was an economic and political leader in the world, with an empire that ruled about a quarter of the world's population (one of the many maps still available may be useful to show to students to enable them to visualise this). The Industrial Revolution had made it the most technologically advanced power in the world, and the middle and upper classes had greatly benefited. However, for the working class or unemployed, this was not the case. Use visuals such as images or film to help students gain a sense of this period and discuss some of the problems this class of people might face e.g., housing, daily necessities such as food and clothing. Some suggested starting points are:
 - [1914 Life before war – in pictures](#) [The Guardian Jim Powell 05/01/2014]
 - [Old London Street Scenes](#) [1903 BFI: 4.09 mins]
 - ['Dirty Old London': A History of the Victorians' Infamous Filth](#) [NPR Fresh Air 12 March 2015]
- Establish a class Learning Wall (this could be a physical space in your classroom, or a virtual one that the class shares) to record reflections, questions and answers, relevant information, quotes, examples of writing techniques and speculations.
 - Start with students' responses and speculation about the novel based on the cover and their one-page overviews of the historical context of the novel.
 - Encourage students to put up any questions they may have both before and during reading, and to contribute responses to those questions as they read *The Fortune Maker* and learn more about context and events of the novel.

During Reading

Language and literacy

- Use the Learning Wall to explore and record the use of noun groups/phrases and adjectival groups/phrases to describe more fully a person, place, thing or idea.
- On the Learning Wall make connections between the fiction narrative and non-fiction information e.g., food, clothing or transport.
- New vocabulary. Use the table below to create a glossary of unusual or unfamiliar words. Add these to the Learning Wall.

Word	Page	What I think it means	Dictionary definition
pauper	26		
hare-brained	68		
lustrous	72		
toffs	76		
urchin	134		
desolation	145		
swoons	163		
guttersnipe	164		
doe-eyed	170		

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bloodless	191		
pawnbroker	203		
imperious	206		
conspiratorial	206		
dowdy	206		

Extension: Use your new words in sentences.

4. Creative writing: watch [A Day in the Life of an Edwardian Family](#) [Absolute History YouTube: 56.46 mins]. After viewing, ask students to write a descriptive piece in the first person PoV, from their social class of choice. They may need to do some additional reading/research.

Characters

1. How does Maud feel about her 'gift' revealing itself, particularly when Caroline is so scathing about seers?
 - a) How would students react if they discovered they had this 'gift'?
2. Compare the situations of Maud and Eleanor. Are they at all alike?
 - a) Ask students to think about personal freedoms (particularly for girls in this period). Which girl do you think has the 'better' life and why?
3. Discuss the concept of personality traits using the four categories: feelings, actions, dialogue, and thoughts.
 - a) Use [this template](#) for each student to record these for one chosen/allocated character.
4. Use the Learning Wall to create Character Adjectives lists using categories such as appearance, feelings and personality traits.
 - a) Extension: create synonym lists for common character traits and ask students to select the most appropriate word/s for different characters.

After Reading

Discussion Questions

1. The Suffragette movement made great inroads into rights and freedoms for girls and women. The First World War created more opportunities. Why was this, and what kind of changes happened?
 - a) What happened after the war when the men came home?
2. Have social conditions improved for women and girls in the past 100 years?
 - a) List reasons why/why not for responses.
 - b) Write a persuasive piece to lobby for a specific right or freedom.
3. What economic and social problems in our current society parallel those of the working classes in the novel e.g., accessibility to decent housing and food?
 - a) As a small group or class brainstorm ways to address these problems.
 - b) Extension: Devise a plan of action to bring attention to a specific problem and provide some solutions.
4. What do you think would be the best – and the worst – thing about living in Edwardian England?

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5. What do you think the author's intention is with this novel?
 - a) What one question would you ask the author about the book?

Activities

1. Plot the key events of the novel onto a narrative arc/framework.
2. Maud describes the fortune tellers of 'the tunnel'. This refers to the Woolwich Foot Tunnel. Read this [Wikipedia article](#) (or excerpts) and answer these questions:
 - a) Why was it built?
 - b) Who built it?
 - c) What was so significant about it?
 - d) Does it still exist today?
3. Australian women and their supporters were at the forefront of the suffragette movement, with South Australia the second place in the world (after New Zealand) to grant women the vote, and the first place to allow women to stand as candidates for state elections.
 - a) Ask students to create a timeline of women's suffrage in Australia.
 - b) Women in South Australia were allowed to stand as candidates for a strange reason, ask students to research how this came about.
 - c) Have students research places around the world where women are still legally or practically prevented from voting (for example, women are allowed to vote but they are not able to get to polling places as they can't drive), and prepare a short presentation or information sheet on one of these places to share with the class.
4. Write a newspaper headline and short article for one of the events in the novel. For example, the explosion at the factory or the protest march.
 - a) Extension: students could explore a platform such as Trove for examples of the style of journalism back in the early 20th century and duplicate this.

About the Author

Catherine Norton's first novel, *Crossing*, was joint winner of the Patricia Wrightson Prize in the 2015 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. It was also a CBCA Notable Book. She was born in the UK but grew up mostly in Adelaide, where she lives with her husband, children and a very lazy whippet called Archer. She has had dozens of jobs, including travel agent, cleaner, packer of tulip bulbs and novelty stationery, publishing assistant and academic, but she has only ever been fired from two of them. Writing novels is by far her favourite. You can find her online at www.catherinenorton.com.au.

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