

When Secrets Set Sail – Teacher’s Pack



Secrets from the past are the keys to the future...if two children can find them. Bold adventure, timely themes and breath-taking writing from the award-winning author of *Where the River Runs Gold*, Sita Brahmachari.

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When Secrets Set Sail by Sita Brahmachari is suitable for teaching to children aged 9+. The four extracts included in this Teachers’ Pack are accompanied by corresponding discussion questions and activities linked to important themes in the story: Promises, Secrets, Silenced Voices, and Family.

CONTENTS

EXTRACT 1: Promises (taken from *The Farewell*)

Objectives: Reflect on the importance of making promises and keeping them; design your own Promise Book entry.

Subjects: Literacy, PSHE, Citizenship, Design Art and Technology

EXTRACT 2: Secrets (taken from *Anchor*)

Objectives: Consider the relevance of the book’s title; write about the topic of secrets from the perspective of four different characters.

Subjects: Literacy – Creative Writing, Drama, PSHE, Citizenship

EXTRACT 3: Silenced Voices (taken from *History Speaks*)

Objectives: Discuss the theme of silenced voices in the text and society; research and write a report entitled ‘My Local History’.

Subjects: Literacy – Writing, History, PSHE, Citizenship

EXTRACT 4: Family (taken from *Last Will and Testament*)

Objectives: Understand the importance of family and that all families are different; compare how Imtiaz’s and Usha’s relationship develops over the course of the story.

Subjects: Literacy – Writing, PSHE, Citizenship

About the book

Usha is devastated when her grandmother Kali Ma passes away. Then straight-talking Imtiaz arrives - her new adoptive sister - and the two girls clash instantly. They both feel lost. That is until Kali Ma's ghost appears...with a task for them.

Immy's and Usha's home is full of history and secrets. Many years ago it was The House of the Ayahs - for those nannies who couldn't return to their Indian homeland - and Kali Ma made a promise she couldn't keep. She can't pass on to the other side until the girls fulfil it.

Today, Usha and Immy's over-worked parents run the house as a home for refugees, but eviction threatens. The precious documents that could save them are lost. As the house slowly fills up with ghosts, that only Usha and Imtiaz can see, the girls realise they have more to save than just one grandmother's ghost.

With help from their new friend Cosmo, Usha and Immy must set off on a quest through London, accompanied by two bickering ghosts, working together to find a series of objects that shine a magical light on their family's past and hold the clues to securing their future.

If they can set the secrets of generations free, will they be in time to save their home?

EXTRACT ONE: PROMISES (p. 51)

'Wipe that word away,' Kali Ma ordered, pointing to the window. Usha blew on it and the glass clouded over. 'If only it was that easy to forget old promises. Seems like this is unfinished business.' Kali Ma sighed.

So she does know something. Usha closed her eyes and tried to visualise the other scattered words in the book in her mind's eye.

Esimorp

Promise

Ykcul

Lucky

Sterces

Secrets

Niagrab

Bargain

When she opened her eyes again, she found Kali Ma snoring softly. *Why are you here, Kali Ma? What promise did you make? Why can't your spirit rest?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why do we make promises? Why is it so important to keep a promise?

Who does the Promise Book belong to in the text? What does it contain?

Why is Kali Ma's spirit unable to rest? How can Usha help?

Which other ghosts are connected by the Promise Book? How are their stories linked?

Which other characters make promises in the text? Who keeps their promises and who doesn't?

ACTIVITY: MY PROMISE BOOK

Start off by making your own Promise Book page by staining a piece of A4 paper with coffee to make it look much older. While it's drying, discuss in pairs some important promises that you have made in the past. Are there any promises you would like to make to yourself or someone in the future? Perhaps you have had a particularly special or vivid dream about a promise?

Taking inspiration from the Promise Book in the text, you are now going to create your own! Your Promise Book entry will enable you and/or your family members to look back in years to come and learn something about you. Here are some ideas for what you might like to include:

- your name, age, the date, and any other details you'd like to include
- a promise you would like to make to someone or yourself
- sketch(es) about a promise e.g. details about a dream you've had
- your thoughts or feelings in invisible ink or words written backwards
- your hopes, fears, or thoughts about the future

Create your entry making it unique and personalised to you. Students who are comfortable to can share their Promise Book with the class. Keep your entries safe by rolling it and tying it with string or a ribbon, then putting it somewhere safe for you or a family member to find in the future!

EXTRACT 2: SECRETS (p. 111-112)

'I can hear Lucky's voice. She's humming . . . It sounds like a lullaby!' Imtiaz gasped and as she began to hum, felt Lucky's voice soothe her.

'Wait! Usha . . . there's more! She's speaking through the conch.'

'What's she saying?' Usha whispered urgently.

*Your belief in me sets my voice free
Promise to piece me together
Or my story's lost for ever
To find peace in this house
Sew my patchwork
Of forgotten promises
Pomegranate pieces
Bargains broken
Secrets unspoken
Free my story
To free this house
Save my memory
Set my spirit free*

Watching the silent Lucky, who though moving her mouth, released not a sound, Imtiaz understood. No matter how strange this was, what Delyse had so often told her – that she should believe in miracles – seemed like it was true.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Why might a person have or keep a secret? Why can secrets be dangerous?

Who is Lucky? How is she able to communicate with Imtiaz and Usha?

Which 'secrets unspoken' is Lucky referring to? How is Lucky connected to Kali Ma?

Can you think of other secrets that are important in the text? Who keeps them?

How do Imtiaz and Usha work together to find out the truth? Who helps them along the way?

ACTIVITY: SECRETS OF THE CONCH

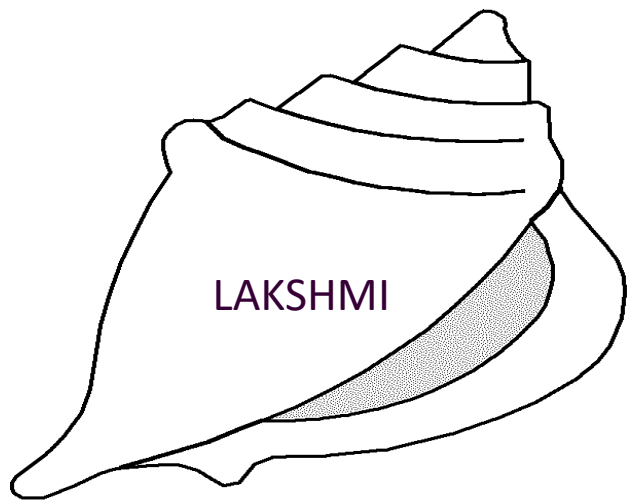
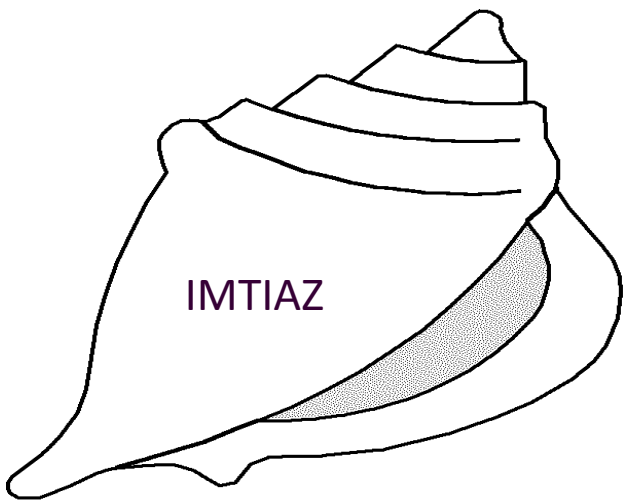
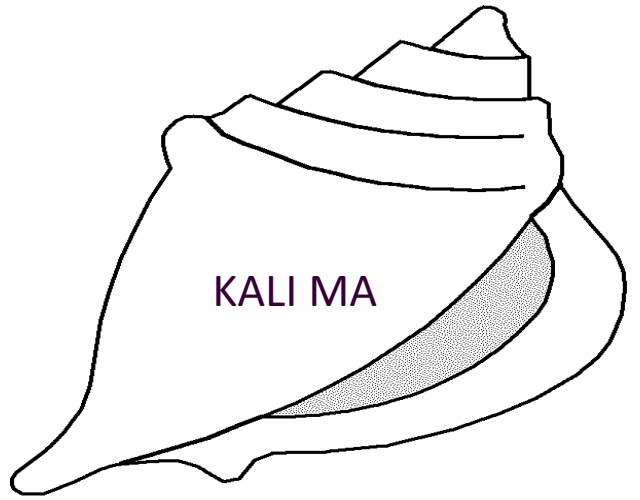
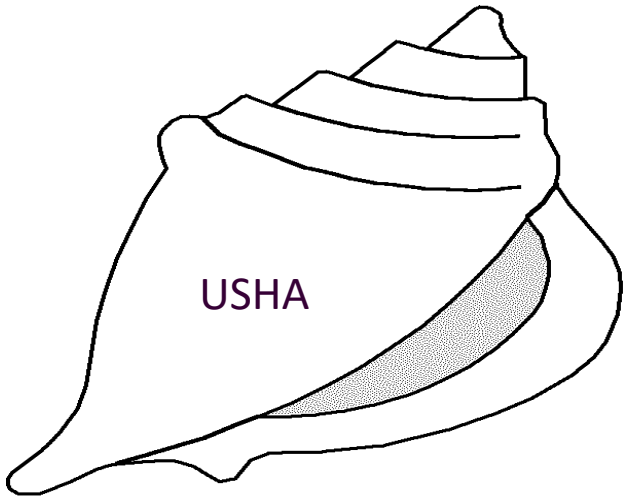
- In groups of 3 or 4, discuss the significance of the book's title, *When Secrets Set Sail*. Why do you think the writer chose this title? Why is the idea of 'secrets' so important in the text as a whole? Feedback these ideas a class.
- Then, take it in turns to role play the characters – Kali Ma, Usha, Lakshmi (Lucky), and Imtiaz – discussing the secrets that each character possesses in the story. Why do they have these secrets? Who are they kept from? How do these characters work together to make these secrets 'set sail'?
- Use these ideas to write a few sentences on the theme of secrets for each character in their conch. Try to write in the first person from each character's perspective. You could also consider how they feel about the secrets they keep or the secrets they help to reveal.
- Take it in turns in your groups to read out your points for each character. Are there any details you've missed and would like to include? Add them in a different colour if so!

[You can find the conch template on the next page]

EXTRACT 3: SILENCED VOICES (p.151-152)

'Oral history: transcribed for "Empire Day" local history exhibition. Gladys Garskill, 1890–1949. Domestic Worker, House of Ayahs.

'Well, I'm not exactly educated but I have got some things to say about the ayahs because I think they've missed out. Anyway, what I know about them is they were the nursemaids who came over to Britain with the children of the British Raj, you know from Queen Victoria's time. Not just from India, but I'd say most of them were. They would look after the children during the long journeys travelling to and fro. Children spent so much time with their ayahs that they were more like mothers to them. Would you credit it, some families had them bring their children over and then didn't look after the ayahs, didn't even pay the return journey. Some were left to fend for themselves out on the streets. My mam, used to work at number twenty-six . . . that's how I got the job when number four opened up, she said she'd seen these poor women in her time roaming about, not a penny to their names, selling bits of postcard art or sewing, hardly earning enough money to eat, let alone to get home. So that's why the missionaries got involved. Strange house it was. How they used to split them up by nationalities and religions although to my mind they all got on just fine. To be honest, I preferred the ayahs to the missionaries, always looking down their noses, treating them like children when most were mature women who'd travelled the world and seen a few things.'



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What is an ayah? Did you know anything about ayahs before reading the text?

How does Gladys describe the mistreatment of ayahs at the time?

How does this oral history link to Lakshmi? Why could she and other ayahs be described as silenced voices?

Which other people or groups of people are less likely to have their voices heard? i.e. think about Valini, Cosmo, and Delyse

How do all of these discussions connect to efforts to save The Hearth? Who or what stands in the girls' way?

ACTIVITY: MY LOCAL HISTORY

In the Author's Note on page 281, the writer states:

I hope that some of this story will inspire you to explore the local history where you live and the threads that reach from there across the globe.

- As a class, discuss what you know about the history of your school and its surrounding area. What about the area you live in? Do you know anything about the contribution of migrant people in your community?
- Using computers, books, and any other resources you have available, research your local history and hidden or silenced voices and stories within it. Use the planning sheet below to help you write a report entitled 'My Local History'.
- Take your report home and share it with a member of your family to help let other people's secrets 'set sail' just like Usha and Imtiaz.

[You can also use the **When Secrets Set Sail Blue Plaque Project** template to create your own blue plaque sharing what you've found! Click [here](#) to download.]

MY LOCAL HISTORY

By

WHERE? i.e. where is the location of your area? What buildings or places of interest exist?

WHEN? i.e. what time period(s) and dates are particularly significant in your local history?

WHO? i.e. which people or groups of people have you learnt about? What were their 'struggles and joys'?

HOW? i.e. how did these people contribute towards their communities? How were they treated?

WHY? i.e. why have you not heard about your local history before? Who has been silenced or what secrets have you revealed?

ONCE YOUR TEACHER HAS CHECKED YOUR WORK YOU ARE READY TO WRITE UP YOUR REPORT IN FULL!

EXTRACT 4: FAMILY p.271-272

Tanvi's hands trembled as she let the documents drop on to the desk. She turned to the wall and stared from the ashes into the void, unable to speak.

'Tanv! This is it! This is just what we need!' Lem grabbed her shoulders and planted a mammoth kiss on her forehead. 'Can you believe these two have found it?'

'Not only us,' Imtiaz and Usha said at the same time as the tiny consulting room crowded with their ghosts.

'Come on, Tanv, we've got to take this to the council, now!' Lem shouted, jubilant.

'Question time's later. For now, we've got to save this Hearth.'

Usha shoved the envelope into her mum's hands and as she did Tanvi grabbed hold of both Usha and Imtiaz and enfolded them in her arms. 'Thank you, my girls, I love you,' she whispered. Smiling through their tear-stained eyes Imtiaz and Usha felt the weight of Lakshmi's ashes as they carried them upstairs together, closely watched and followed by a procession of ayahs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Who are Saraswati Wilmington and Alice Durand? How do their past actions impact the future?

What 'documents' make Tanvi's hands tremble and why?

Which characters have been separated from their family in the text? What impact does this have on them?

What does the word 'family' mean to you? How many different types of families do you know?

Why is the theme of family so important in the text? What do you know about your family's past?

ACTIVITY: SISTERS

- With a partner, talk about who is in your family. What do you love about your family members? What can be difficult about being in a family sometimes? How can families change over time?
- At the beginning of the story, Imtiaz and Usha have a difficult relationship. Yet, through their adventures they learn a lot about themselves and how to be a better sister.

- Use the table below to compare how the girls change their attitudes towards each other and their views about family and sisterhood over the course of the story. Try to pick out examples of what the girls say or do from the text in your table. What do these conversations and actions tell us about each character?
- For an extension task, carry out an informal interview with a family member at home about your family history. Make notes during your interview and feedback at least one interesting new fact you've learnt about your family in your next lesson. For example, were any family members born in another country? Are there members of your family that you have never met or heard of before? Who are they?

Think about and include:

- their attitudes and treatment towards one another at the beginning of the text
- their relationship with other family members
- how their relationship changes over the course of the story and how they support one another
- how they view and treat their sister by the end of the story

USHA

IMTIAZ