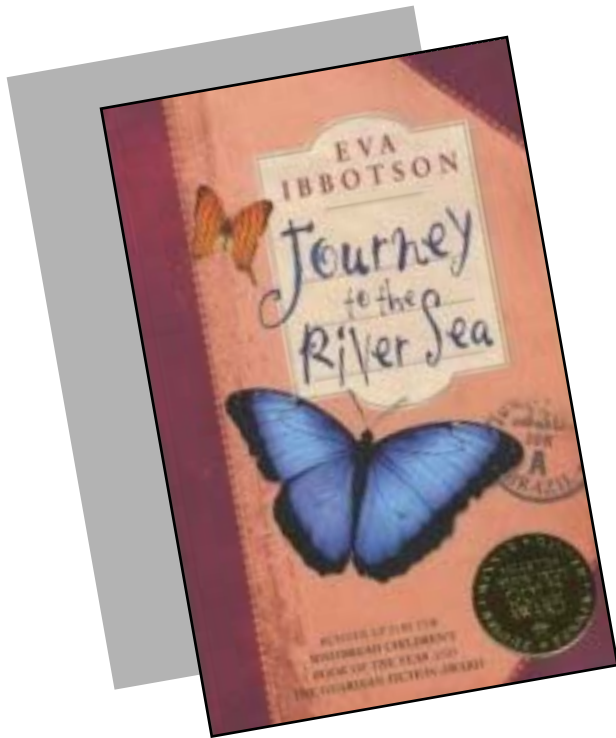


TEACHING GUIDE by KATHRYN SAEB-PARSY

Journey to the River Sea



by Eva Ibbotson



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Curriculum Context

The teaching suggestions for this book are most suitable for use with Year 5 or 6 classes. It could be very effectively incorporated into a cross-curricular scheme of work as outlined below. *Journey to the River Sea* could be used as a guided reading text for fluent readers, for group reading in class or for an out of school reading group. At KS2 *Journey to the River Sea* fits the range of literature outlined in the Literacy Framework as, 'modern fiction by a significant children's author', (Y5) or as, 'a novel selected from more than one genre' (Y6).

Synopsis

The novel begins in a Geography lesson at The Mayfair Academy for Young Ladies. Maia Fielding (an orphan) gets called out of the lesson and Miss Banks imparts the news to her that some of her relatives have been traced and therefore she will be going to live with them in Brazil near the city of Manaus. Miss Carlisle, Maia's Geography teacher, asks the class to each find out one interesting fact

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Journey to the River Sea was the winner of the Gold Medal for the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize 2001, was shortlisted for the Carnegie medal and was runner-up for both the 2001 Whitbread Children's Book of the Year and the Guardian Children's Fiction award.



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about the Amazon. All of the girls come out with facts that are quite daunting for Maia but she is determined to make her experience a positive one and she feels that everything will be all right. After she says her farewells, she meets Miss Minton, a rather fierce looking governess, who will be accompanying her on her journey. Maia quickly discovers that they both love books and this establishes a common bond between them.

The second chapter is set on *The Cardinal* – the ship that will transport Maia to her new life. It is here that she meets Clovis, a young actor with The Pilgrim Players. Mrs and Mrs Goodley who own the acting company have adopted him and Clovis is anxious that they will throw him out of the company because his voice is breaking. Maia watches them rehearsing and she promises to go and watch the company's performance of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* when they perform it in the theatre in Manaus.

As Miss Minton and Maia journey down the Amazon to the Carter's house, they speculate about what the Carters and their house might be like. Maia has a somewhat idealistic view, especially about what the twins might be like – she imagines them paddling their boat between giant water

lilies and trekking 'fearlessly through the jungle.' On the way, they stop off at a market and buy some presents for the Carter family.

When Maia meets the Carter family for the first time, they look how she imagined they would, however, their personalities are quite different to how she imagined them. Everything is done in as English a fashion as possible and there are several indications that the Carter family snub everything Amazonian and Indian, including the native people and their own servants. This prompts Maia to wonder why the Carters offered to take her in and, although Miss Minton believes that it has to do with money, she keeps these thoughts to herself. Due to the fact that the Carters do not respect the Indians that they employ or draw on their experience and knowledge, their rubber plantation is losing money.

Miss Minton tutors Maia and the twins, but she quickly realises that Maia needs challenged, although as far as the Carters are concerned, it is Maia that cannot keep up with the twins. At the end of a dance lesson in Manaus, Mr Low and Mr Trapwood (the crows) approach Maia to ask her if she has seen an English boy who is the son of Bernard Taverner. She meets

them again at the Museum of Natural History. The Carters head off to the theatre to see Clovis perform in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and Maia is upset that she has been deliberately excluded from this chance to see her friend again. As she begins to walk into Manaus, she meets an Indian boy who takes her there in his canoe.

As time passes, Maia's friendly and open nature endears her to the Indians who are employed by the Carters. She meets the Indian boy again and discovers that Finn is indeed Bernard Taverner's son and that he is searching for the Xanti people, the tribe to which his mother belonged. He tells her about his life and she tells him all about Clovis and how much he wants to return to England, the opposite to Finn who will do anything not to return to England. Clovis escapes from the theatre, where he is worried about his future, to the Carter's house where he does not receive a warm welcome. The three children hatch a plan that Clovis will pretend to be Taverner's son and will go to England in Finn's place so that Finn will be left in peace to stay where he feels that he belongs. A period of training for Clovis follows so that he can convince everyone that he is Finn. He learns how to perfect

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an English accent and memorises the layout of Westwood.

When Clovis arrives in England, he easily persuades everyone that he is Tabverner's long lost son. It transpires that the Carters acquired their land in a deceitful way, breaking their agreement to keep the Longhouse containing the spirit of a very wise medicine man and not paying the full amount of money for the land. They get their comeuppance for their greed when their land is destroyed by fire and they have to go and live with the mean old Lady Parsons who gives them a taste of their own medicine. Finn returns from his travels just in time to help Maia escape from the fire and in the end the Professor and Miss Minton travel with them to find the Xanti tribe. At the end of the novel the Professor and Miss Minton are engaged to be married, Maia and Finn get to stay in Brazil and Clovis is happy as the future master of Westwood.

Setting

Time: 1910

Place: The Mayfair Academy for Young Ladies; Manaus, a city on the Amazon River in Brazil; Westwood, England.

Narration and Point of View

Narrated in the third person,

generally from Maia's point of view.

Themes and Issues

Journeys

New experiences

Racism & respect for other cultures

Friendship

Characters

Maia Fielding – the young girl who is plucked from her boarding school in England to go and live with her cousins in Brazil

Miss Minton - Maia's governess

Clovis King – The young actor who Maia meets on the *The Cardinal*

Mr and Mrs Carter – The couple who Maia goes to live with in Brazil

The Twins, Gwendolyn & Beatrice – Mr and Mrs Carter's children

The Crows, Mr Trapwood and Mr Low – The men looking for Bernard Taverner's son

Professor Glastonberry – Curator of the Museum of Natural History

Finn – Bernard Taverner's Son who lives in a hut in the rainforest

Sir Aubrey Taverner – Bernard Taberner's Son, Finn's grandfather

Aims:

- To encourage reflection on the themes and issues raised in *Journey to the River Sea*
- To consider how characters develop within a text
- To use *Journey to the River Sea* as a stimulus for creative writing
- To use *Journey to the River Sea* as a stimulus for discussion in PSHE

Discussion Topics

- *Coping with change and new situations (links with PSHE)*

'Those who think of the Amazon as a Green Hell,' she read in an old book with a tattered spine, 'bring their own fears and prejudices to this amazing land. For whether a place is a hell or a heaven rests with yourself, and those who go with courage and an open mind may find themselves in paradise.' Maia looked up from her book. "I can do it," she vowed. "I can make it a heaven and I will!"

Ask the class about whether they believe that a positive attitude can influence whether you enjoy something or make the

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most of it. Discuss how Maia prepares herself for leaving what is familiar to her. What new situations have any members of the class had to face e.g. moving house, changing schools etc. How did they cope with these? Discuss what new situations await them in the future and what strategies they could use to cope with these.

• *Preconceived ideas and Misconceptions*

Herminone looked anxiously at Maia.
'There are huge crocodiles that can snap your head off in one bite.'

When the other girls discuss what they have found out about the Amazon, how does this differ from what Maia actually experiences? Are the other girls meaning to be unkind? Are there certain countries that are portrayed unfairly by the media? How do the media influence our views about certain countries? What misconceptions can we have about other people? Discuss the phrase, 'Do not judge a book by its cover.'

• *Differences and similarities between people and cultures (Links with PSHE)*

We disinfect everything in any case, but it doesn't help. The

Indians are filthy. And if one is to survive out here, the jungle must be kept at bay.'

Discuss the difference between Maia and Miss Minton's attitude and the Carter family's attitude towards the Indians and the jungle. Are the Carters racist or ignorant? What is racism and how can it be prevented?

Creative Projects and Activities

- **Characterisation** – Discuss how certain characters, such as, Maia or Clovis develop throughout the book. In groups, pupils could be asked to draw their character on a large sheet of paper and write notes on it or around it to explain the character of that person and how it has developed throughout the novel.

- **A diary entry** – Ask pupils to write a diary entry for one of the characters at a pivotal time for that character in the novel e.g. when Clovis sees Westwood for the first time or when Maia finds out that she is going to Brazil.

- **Poetry** – providing pupils with a photograph of a rainforest plant or animal and asking them to write down words that come into their head when they look at it. Then ask them to write a poem based on these words. The photograph and poem could then

be displayed in the classroom or published in a class book.

- The book, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, is mentioned in the novel. Excerpts of this book could be read to the class and comparisons with Clovis and Finn could be discussed.

Cross-curricular Links

- **Geography** – Studying the Rainforest – Ask pupils to research one of the plants of animals mentioned in the book and produce a little information booklet/leaflet on it. These can then be displayed in the classroom against a rainforest backdrop (see art!). Maia's journey could be looked at in an Atlas to give pupils an idea of how far she travelled and where exactly she travelled to.

- **Art** – Pupils could produce rainforest leaves, flowers, vines, animals etc in art lessons and turn the classroom into a rainforest.

- **PSHE** – *Coping with change and new situations.* How did Maia feel when she heard she was to move so far away? How did she cope with that? What are effective strategies to help people who are faced with new situations? Preparing Year 6 pupils for moving to Secondary School.

Differences and similarities between



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people and cultures - Discuss the difference in attitude between how Maia and Miss Minton treat the local culture and traditions and how the Carters treat them. The book, *A Life like Mine* by Jemima Khan (UNICEF) will encourage further discussion about different people and cultures.

Taking it Further

Here are some websites that will help pupils explore the rainforest further:

<http://www.srl.caltech.edu/personnel/krubal/rainforest/Edit560s6/www/plants.html>

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/rainforest/animals/Rfbiomeanimals.shtml>

<http://www.eduweb.com/amazon.html>

Contributor

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Editor

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She is currently course tutor for the Advance Diploma in Language, Literature and Literacy at the Faculty of Education, Cambridge and is Associate Consultant at the University Of London, Institute Of Education.

Recent Publications include *Family Fictions* (2001) (with Nick Tucker); *Exploring Children's Literature* (2002) Paul Chapman (with Sally Yates) second edition forthcoming; *Guiding Reading at KS2* (2006) (2nd edit) (with Angela Hobsbaum and David Reedy) *The Story Shop* (2006).