



# TEACHERS' NOTES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Middle to upper primary (ages 9–11; years 4 to 6)

## CONTENTS

1. Plot summary	1
2. About the author	2
3. Author's inspiration	2
4. Pre-reading questions	3
5. Key study topics	3
6. Key quotes	4
7. More activities	5
8. Themes	5
9. Further reading	6

## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English; History
- **General capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking; Intercultural Understanding; Literacy

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Story forms: historical fiction/fantasy, fairytale and literary references
- How an author constructs voice and character
- Researching history
- Building vocabulary
- Explore values: bravery, selflessness, fortitude, resilience and friendship

## THEMES

- Making a difference
- Teamwork and friendship
- Courage, kindness and generosity
- Wealth and power/equality and justice
- History: Italian Renaissance
- Magic and wonder

## PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Belinda Murrell

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9781761045554 (paperback);  
9781760148416 (ebook)

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## The Silver Sea Belinda Murrell

## PLOT SUMMARY

*'You don't understand how dangerous this is. Anyone you see could be a spy. You cannot trust anyone.'*

Sophie returns to the magical land of Tuscia and is instantly thrown into danger – Nanna and Caterina Rossellana have been kidnapped.

To save them, Sophie and Nicco must team up with a theatre troupe who are performing for the Mago, in the city across the Silver Sea.

Can Sophie unravel the political intrigues of Venetto and save the grandmothers? Or will she fall foul of the evil mago and be thrown into the dungeons to be eaten by the Mostro of the Dark Waters?

**The adventures continue for Sophie and her friends in this thrilling sequel to *The Golden Tower*!**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



At about the age of eight, Belinda Murrell began writing stirring tales of adventure, mystery and magic in hand-illustrated exercise books. As an adult, she combined two of her great loves – writing and travelling the world – and worked as a travel writer, journalist and public relations consultant. Now, inspired by her own three children, Belinda is an award-winning, internationally published children’s author with a history of writing in her family that spans over 200 years. She has written more than 35 books including *The Sun Sword* trilogy and her time-slip adventures, *The Locket of Dreams*, *The Ruby Talisman*, *The Ivory Rose*, *The Forgotten Pearl*, *The River Charm*, *The Sequin Star* and *The Lost Sapphire*. For younger readers Belinda has her popular Lulu Bell and Pippa’s Island series. Her latest books are *The Silver Sea* and *The Golden Tower*, time-slip/fantasy adventures set in a magical Italian Renaissance inspired world. Belinda lives in Manly in a gorgeous old house overlooking the sea with her husband Rob, her three beautiful children – Nick, Emily and Lachlan – and her dog Rosie. She is an Author Ambassador for Room to Read and Books in Homes. Find out more about Belinda at her website: [belindamurrell.com.au](http://belindamurrell.com.au)

## AUTHOR’S INSPIRATION

Belinda says:

I fell in love with Venice as a 22-year-old backpacker, with my soon-to-be husband Rob, watching the enchanting Regata Storica paddling along the Grand Canal. Hundreds of Venetians, dressed in Renaissance costumes, re-enacted the famous water parade of 1489, celebrating the return of Caterina Cornaro, the

Venetian Queen of Cyprus. Years later, we returned to the Floating City with our three children, Nick, 11, Emily, 9, and Lachie, 7. We delighted in getting lost, exploring the maze of alleyways, spotting winged lions, and searching for mermaids and sea monsters in the canals.

Three years ago, my family and I travelled again to Italy to explore the history, culture and landscape of Tuscany, as part of my research for *The Golden Tower*. We visited Renaissance palaces, admired the portrait of Bia de Medici, ate magnificent feasts, hiked in beech forests and wandered cobbled alleyways of ancient hill towns. To my children’s delight, we stayed in a medieval tower in the walled town of Lucca and a 12<sup>th</sup>-century castello in the hills outside Florence.

When my husband and two sons returned to Australia, my daughter Emily and I had a joyful week together in the heart of Venice, around the corner from the Teatro La Fenice. We lived in an apartment, on the third floor of a rose-coloured palazzo, with glorious views overlooking the junction of three canals. It still had its traditional parquet floor, marble fireplace, antique furniture and exposed beams. We were woken by the sound of gondoliers singing opera below our windows, or boatmen calling out as they passed.



On the second day, the alarms sounded to warn of the acqua alta, when the city floods. The marble foyer downstairs was ankle deep in seawater. We traipsed the bridges, alleys and piazzas of the city, while water lapped into the shops and palazzos. Piazza San Marco was a lake, traversed by temporary boardwalks. Emily and I crisscrossed the Grand Canal by traghetto and island hopped by ferry. It was heavenly. So as always, this book would never have been written without the inspiration, love, adventurous spirit, and encouragement of my beloved family.

Venice, floating on its lagoon, is truly one of the world’s most beautiful and magical cities – a fitting inspiration for my fictional Venetto. During the Renaissance, Venice was one of the richest and most powerful cities in the world, with a vast network of spies and informers, reporting back to the Doge in



coded messages. Back then, polluting the water was one of the few crimes punishable by death.

This book was written in 2021, during the many challenging months of lockdown, and I was reminded that many of our responses to the pandemic were invented 600 years ago in Venice during the devastating bubonic plague known as the Black Death. Ships, cargo and crew were isolated before they could enter Venice on separate islands (isola is the Italian word for island) for 40 days' quarantine (the Venetian word quarantena means forty days). The Venetians implemented lockdowns of the city, forced closure of business, travel bans and health passes for travellers. Doctors washed their hands in vinegar to avoid spreading infection and wore iconic beaked masks, filled with aromatic herbs.

These masks later became synonymous with the character Il Dottore, in the famous Renaissance theatre tradition of commedia dell'arte.

My character Viola Cappello was inspired by a brilliant Venetian actress and proto-feminist writer called Isabella Canali Andreini, one of the most celebrated actresses of the commedia dell'arte in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who began performing aged 11 and touring at 14. She played both male and female characters, spoke multiple languages, and performed for the major royal courts of Europe, as well as writing poetry, madrigals, plays and essays.

I was inspired by the achievements of several Venetian Renaissance women who were famed for their intelligence, business acumen and creativity. Veronica Franco, Moderata Fonte, Gaspara Stampa and Lucrezia Marinelli were early feminist writers and poets. Marietta Robusti, known as La Tintoretta, was a talented artist, who dressed as a boy so she could train with her famous artist father, Tintoretto. Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia was a Venetian philosopher, astronomer, composer and musician, famous as the first woman in the world to gain a Doctor of Philosophy degree from a university in 1678.

### Activities

- Pick two locations, people or historical events that Belinda mentions above and research them. Write a newspaper report on one of these topics.
- The author mentions the correlation between the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Death. Research when the Black Death was a problem in society and how it was overcome. Are there 'cures' or 'preventative measures' that were taken or implemented back then to contain the disease that are familiar to you from our lives over the past two to three years?

- Pretend you are in Renaissance Italy. Write a postcard to a friend or family member from that location, letting them know where you have been travelling and what you have seen.
- Belinda mentions the acqua alta, when Venice floods. Find out if this is a regular occurrence in Venice and if so, what the city does to prepare for such events.



### PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- Looking at the cover, what do you think the book will be about?
- How has the designer created a sense of mystery and wonder? Do you think it would be different if we could see the figure's face? Why or why not?
- Research the cover of *The Golden Tower* – Belinda Murrell's other book set in the same world. How can you tell, from looking at the covers, that these two books are connected? What elements are the same? What elements are different?
- Analyse elements of the book cover design by Christa Moffitt and comment on what makes them effective. Consider colour, font and images in your discussion. Why were these elements chosen? What would you have done differently if you were designing this book cover?

### KEY STUDY TOPICS

#### Living in Renaissance Italy

- Write a newspaper report or a blog post about what it would be like living in the Floating City of Venetto. (Research the real city of Venice to get inspiration for your article.) Give different perspectives about what it would be like if you were from a wealthy family like Viola's and also if you were from a working family like Nezetta. Consider food, work, clothes, lifestyle, education and



entertainment. Include quotes from fictional characters to give differing points of view.

- Draw a map or floorplan of your own palazzo or castle, labelling all the elements. Does it have towers? Fortifications? Gardens? Open outdoor areas?

### Commedia dell'arte

The theatre troupe Sophie and Nicco join perform commedia dell'arte. This was a very popular form of theatre in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### Questions

- Why do you think the commedia dell'arte was so popular?
- Do you think you could say commedia dell'arte was the social media of its time? Why or why not?

#### Activities

- Research the main characters of commedia dell'arte. Choose one of these (Eg Pantalone, Il Dottore, the Masters) and write a short scene with them as the main characters. Choose a simple setting so you can showcase the personality of your chosen character. For example: a bus stop, the grocery shop, a library.
- Discuss the main characters of the commedia dell'arte using the description of them in chapter 8. Why do you think the same characters are used over and over? What does this allow you to do regarding plot and settings?
- Write your own short play in the commedia dell'arte style. Think of common tropes you could include (like forbidden love or grumpy parents).
- Choose two of your favourite characters from the story and write a scene in the commedia dell'arte style. Perform this scene with a friend for the rest of the class.

### Time-travel story

Write a short story about travelling back in time. Where would you go? How would you get there? (For example, Sophie travels to Tuscany through a portal in the Roman ruins). Who would you meet? What do you see? What happens? How do you get back home? How do you feel when you are safely home (relieved, happy, sad the adventure is over, angry)?

### KEY QUOTES

1. *Despite the terrible news, Sophie felt much stronger now her friends had arrived. She was sure they could work out a plan together.* (p. 23)

Have there been times in your life where you've drawn strength from your friends? Have you ever had to support them? Find evidence in the story of other moments when Sophie found comfort and support from her friends.

2. *'But how did they get through the locked gate into the courtyard?' asked Isabella.*

*Giovanni flushed, avoiding everyone's eyes.*

*'I think there might have been an inside spy,' said Giovanni, twisting his gnarled hands together. 'The gate was locked at sunset as usual. I checked it myself.'*

*'A spy?' asked Bia, her brown eyes round.*

*Sophie exchanged a glance with Nicco and Isabella. Who could it be? Was it one of the servants?*

*'One of my stableboys, Sergio, is missing,' added Giovanni. 'I think he may have been paid to let them in through the gate.'* (p. 29)

Giovanni, the Stable Master, betrays the Rossellanas to the mago. He sounds quite convincing in the scene on page 29 when he talks of there being an 'inside spy'. Write a scene where he meets the mago's men in secret and agrees to betray Caterina and her family. Don't forget to include motivation for his actions and how he might be feeling at the time.

3. *On the wall, Sophie noticed an ornate carving of a lion, with wings outstretched and a gaping round mouth. A cloaked woman, her face completely hidden by a black mask, slipped a folded sheet of paper into the mouth, then left.* (p. 159)

The Mago of Venetto has established a system where his subjects police themselves by using the *bocche dei leone*. What are some other ways that the mago controls his subjects? This is based on a real system from historical Venice. Research this and list the similarities and differences between the real spy system and the fictionalised *bocche dei leone* in *The Silver Sea*.

4. *Sophie took a deep breath. This time she thought of her courage, like a tiny flickering firefly, buried deep inside her. She concentrated on the image, making it grow stronger and bigger, until it was a flaming golden orb. She pretended she was holding the orb in her hand in front of her, to show her the way in the darkness.* (p. 179)

This is the way Sophie gives herself courage. Have there been times where you've had to use a similar method? Do you think there are different ways to reassure and strengthen your self-esteem and courage?



## MORE ACTIVITIES



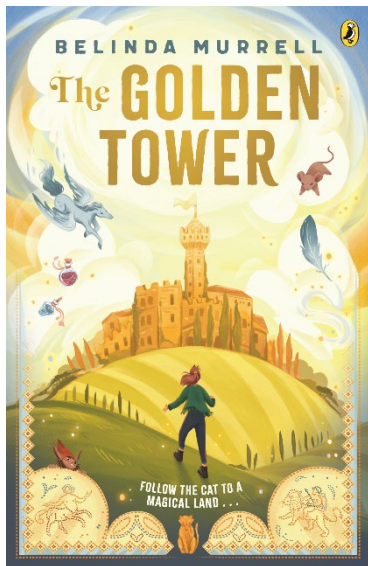
- Referring to the descriptions in the book, draw a cross-section of the mago's palazzo. Start at the top (the Piombi cells), and include everything below that – kitchens, antechambers, central courtyard etc – right down to the mostro's lair (under the Pozzi cells). Add as much detail as you can.
- Research the real Doge's Palace in Venice. What can you find in your research that matches up with Belinda's descriptions of the Mago of Venetto's palazzo in *The Silver Sea*?
- There are some very interesting dishes being prepared for the Midsummer Feast. (See pages 184–185). Create a menu for a feast – or a party – and be as creative as you can. Design and draw up a physical menu for your potential guests.
- Belinda mentions the winged lion as a magical creature in her world, but it is based on real statues of winged lions in Venice. Choose a magical or mythical creature and write a story in which it saves the day or brings a message to the characters.

## THEMES

- **Making a difference:** one person can make a difference to their lives and the lives of others, as Sophie does when she risks her own life and dives under the palazzo to rescue Nonna and Nanna.
- **Teamwork and friendship:** Sophie and Nicco have to work together to save their grandmothers. In turn they have to work with Viola and her theatre company. By having to work together friendships are formed and strengthened.
- **Courage:** Sophie and Nicco must draw on their courage to find the grandmothers and rescue them.
- **Kindness and generosity vs intolerance.**
- **Wealth and power:** the wealth and power of the aristocracy vs the lives of common folk and servants.
- **Equality and justice:** rich and poor, men and women, right and wrong.
- **History:** the Italian Renaissance; the lives of rich and poor and the changing role of women in society; preserving the relics and architecture of the past; the art, history, society and culture of Renaissance Italy.
- **Magic and wonder.**



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



*The Golden Tower*  
by Belinda Murrell

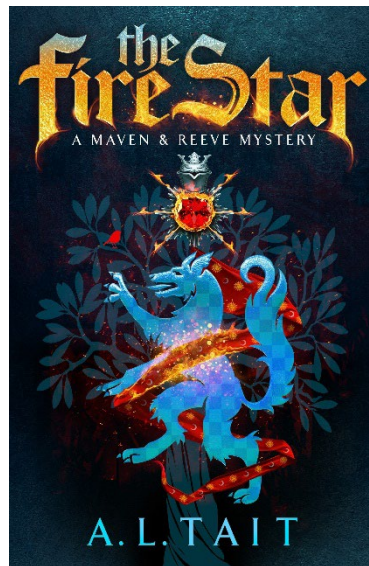
*In her wildest dreams, Sophie never thought she might be kidnapped by a cat and taken to a world of flying horses and wonder – but also magic, mystery and danger!*

Transported to the land of Tuscia, Sophie accidentally saves the daughter of a wealthy family and is swept along on their journey to the Golden Tower.

Now she is the only one standing between sisters Isabella and Bia and the terrible fate their stepmother has planned.

Sophie doesn't think she is brave enough, but with the help of a talking cat, a stableboy and some very tiny mischief-makers, she might be able to save the day.

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



*The Fire Star: A Maven & Reeve Mystery*  
by A. L. Tait

A maid with a plan. A squire with a secret. A missing jewel. A kingdom in turmoil.

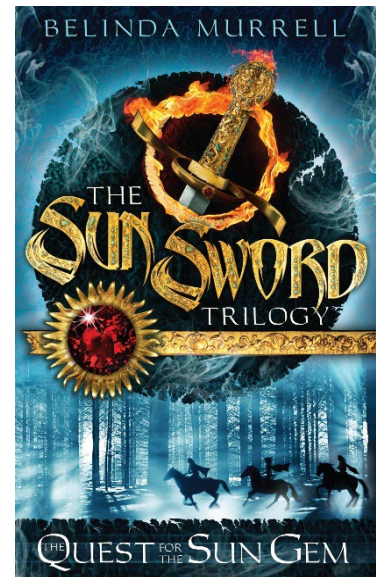
Maven and Reeve have three days to solve the mystery of the Fire Star. If they don't, they'll lose everything.

This could be a complete disaster . . . or the beginning of a friendship.

Bestselling author A. L. Tait is back with the intriguing story of two unlikely allies and a mystery to solve that could change their lives.

'I was up past midnight finishing this book! The mystery kept me turning the pages, and I felt like I'd known Maven and Reeve forever.'  
– Amie Kaufman, New York Times bestselling author of Ice Wolves

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



*Sun Sword 1: Quest for the Sun Gem*  
by Belinda Murrell

After their village is attacked, a young brother and sister set off on a dangerous quest to save their captured family and friends – and free their land from the Sedah invaders.

Where are Ethan and Lily's parents being held? And where have the Sun Sword and its magical gems been hidden? Joined by their friend Saxon and the determined Princess Roana, Ethan and Lily must solve puzzles and riddles, escape legendary sea monsters and outwit bandits along the way.

But the greatest threat to the children is the sinister Sedah tracker, Sniffer, who is close on their trail ... Can the four friends find the Sun Gem - before the Sedah can find them?



## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
The Silver Sea	Belinda Murrell	9781761045554	4-6	\$16.99		
The Golden Tower	Belinda Murrell	9781760897093	4-6	\$16.99		
The Fire Star	A.L. Tait	9781760897079	6+	\$16.99		
Sun Sword book 1	Belinda Murrell	9781760891008	3-6	\$15.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

PLEASE NOTE THAT PRICES ARE RECOMMENDED RETAIL ONLY AND MAY HAVE CHANGED SINCE THE TIME OF PRINTING. PRICES ARE GST INCLUSIVE.

<p>NAME: _____</p> <p>SCHOOL: _____</p> <p>ADDRESS: _____</p> <p>STATE: _____</p> <p>POSTCODE: _____</p> <p>TEL: _____</p> <p>EMAIL: _____</p> <p>ACCOUNT NO.: _____</p> <p>PURCHASE ORDER NO.: _____</p>	<p>PLEASE SEND ORDER FORMS TO YOUR LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPLIER.</p>
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