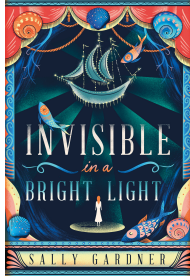


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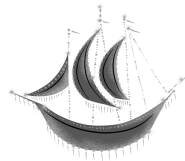


***Invisible in a Bright Light* by Sally Gardner**

Artwork © Helen Crawford-White

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Readers'/Teachers' Notes



Presentation

Look at the **cover**.

Discuss: What kind of story do you think this will be? Can you tell which genre this book fits into? Can you identify any themes that will be visited in the book?

Now turn to the **first page illustration**.

Discuss: Why has the author chosen to have an annotated illustration of the interior of a theatre here? What does it tell you about the setting of the novel – think both about place and time. How does the illustration make you feel?

After reading the book, go back and revisit the illustration. Is the theatre how you imagined it as you read the story?



Structure

Foreword

Research and Discuss: What is the point of a foreword? Does it give away information about the story? Does it create a sense of anticipation? Why has the author chosen to write a foreword to this particular story?

A foreword usually aims to highlight the rationale of a book, or its limitations and scope.

After reading the book, go back and re-read the foreword.

Discuss: Was the book as expected after reading this foreword? What extra insight does it give you into the author's mind?

In the foreword, Gardner explains how she was fascinated by the opera house chandelier and the old lady who keeps the chandelier shining.

Activity: Can you think of an object or place that has inspired you, or a person connected to those things? Write a short story with this place/object as your inspiration.

Try writing a foreword of your own (most forewords aren't written by the author of the book). Pick a book you know well, and write a short piece that explains the connection between you and the book, and the angle of the book you want to highlight.



Read the **First Chapter** (Pages 1–6)

Discuss: How does Gardner create a sense of disorientation at the beginning of the novel? Why does she do this?

Activity: Pick out key phrases and words that point to this uncertainty. Are the reader and the protagonist equally perplexed? What do you think the game is? Make a list of the things you do know after reading this opening chapter, and a list of mysteries posed by the author. Order the mysteries in terms of which is most pressing.

The man refers to 'The Reckoning'. The Day of Reckoning is the 'settling of accounts', a day in the future in which a person is forced to deal with a situation that up until then has been avoided. A reckoning is also the calculation of a ship's position.

Discuss: How do these ideas fit with your impression of the novel from the opening chapter.

Activity: At the end of the chapter, write a short continuation of the story. How does this compare with the book?

Activity: Now imagine you are filming this opening chapter. How would you show confusion at the same time as rendering a visual image? Think about camera angles or special effects that you may have seen used in other films. Write some director's notes.



Chapter 38 (Page 285)

When you have finished the novel, take another look at Chapter 38.

Discuss: How is this chapter written differently from the rest of the novel?

Why do you think Gardner has chosen to write it from Mr Gautier's point of view, and with hindsight?

Look at the phrase, 'Mr Gautier hoped there might be a world of different possibilities, of alternate endings, a place where he played a more honourable part.' (Page 289)

Discuss: How does this link to the themes in the novel? In what way is it a key piece of text?

Now look again at the end chapter, entitled '**Four Years Later**' (Page 337)

Discuss: Why has the author chosen to write this? Does it give a finality to the book? An explanation?

This chapter is written in first person point of view.

Discuss: Why has the author changed from close third person narrative to first person? Does it change how the reader sees Celeste?



Writing Style

Sally Gardner has particular **metaphors and language themes** running throughout her novel. One of these is light, stemming from the title, *Invisible in a Bright Light*.

Activity: Can you study the following passage and see how mood is dictated by light:

‘It was dark in the city; it had been dark since midday...bubbled from a pan on the stove itself.’ (Page 33–34)

Cold and Warmth

Look also at Gardner’s use of cold and warmth throughout the novel. Contrast the opening of Chapter 13: ‘Celeste stayed in bed three days... would melt away’ (Page 93), with ‘Peter greeted her... at the head of the table.’ (Page 101)

Discuss: Look carefully through the novel and see where Gardner uses cold and warmth to create mood: hope or despair. How often are warmth and light, cold and darkness connected? Why does Gardner create the sense of cold so much throughout the novel? Look at the instances of when Celeste is cold. Now look at when Hildegard is cold. Explore warmth as a solution in the book – where does the warmth come from?

“‘It was cold,’ Celeste told Maria. “There was nothing that made it feel homely. Not like this.”” (Page 328)

Activity: Write your own descriptive paragraph, choosing either warmth or cold for your setting. How does the temperature dictate the feel of the piece?

Water and Sea

Another extended metaphor is water.

Research: What is an extended metaphor?

Look at the following phrases in the book:

‘Not for the first time did Mr Gautier wonder if something in his fortunes had suffered a sea-change.’ (Page 15)

‘There it was, a silver fish of something, someone half-remembered... everything else might begin to make sense.’ (Page 23)

‘Then a flash of light in her mind’s eye, no more than a stone skimming the waves, brought her a hard-won memory.’ (Page 32)

Discuss: What effect do these mentions of water/sea have? Where else can you find similar words and phrases in the novel? Can you make a list of these words/phrases?



Tenses

Look at the **tenses** used in the novel. The bulk of the novel is told in past tense, but the scenes in the ‘dream’ are told in present tense: (Pages 1–6, Pages 48–51, Pages 185–187, Pages 317–322)

Discuss: Why is this? What effect does changing the tense have on the reader?

Now look at pages 323–325. These are also written in present tense. Why?

Activity: Take one of the passages you have written so far, or a passage from a library book. Change the tense from what you have written to present or past. What difference does it make?

Dream Sequences

'Down she falls. And down she falls... Down she falls. Oh, how the world has tumbled.' (Page 48–51)

Discuss: Other than present tense, how else are the dream sequences distinguishable from the rest of the text? Are they more sensory in their descriptions?

Activity: Compare this opening dream sequence to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, both the opening of his novel, and the scene with the Mad Hatter.

'Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end? "I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?" she said aloud. "I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth."

"Why is a raven like a writing desk?"

"No, I give up," Alice replied. "What's the answer?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said the Hatter.

Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with time than wasting it in asking silly riddles."

"If you knew Time like I know time you wouldn't talk about wasting it. Time is not an 'it'. It's a 'him'. So there!"' *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Discuss: Are the scenes in *Invisible in a Bright Light* more 'dreamy' or more based in reality? Who speaks in riddles and why? How are Celeste and Alice alike? How is the man in the emerald green suit like the Mad Hatter? Can you find similarities in Alice's encounter with the White Rabbit, and Celeste's encounter with Albert Ross?

Activity: Can you write your own non-sense dialogue? The primary characteristics of a piece of 'non-sense' literature is the use of riddles or puzzles balanced by repudiations. I.e. Balancing logic with nonsense.

This understanding of 'nonsense' literature also chimes with Gardner's characteristic play with idiom, malapropism and misappropriated adjectives.

"It's what you call a silver herring" (Page 58); "weeny-teeny" (Page 54); "Easy, bright and breezy" (Page 49); "The cat's got your tail." (Page 186)

Discuss: How do these phrases differ from usual? Why has Gardner chosen to do this?

Activity: You could also look at some 'nonsense verse', perhaps by Edward Lear, and have a go at writing your own. Can you turn your nonsense dialogue into nonsense poetry? Which idioms or malapropism have you used?



Characters:

Celeste

Celeste appears from the very first page, but at first isn't named.

Discuss: Why is Celeste referred to as 'the girl' in the first page of the novel?

"'You're an orphan as well you know. Your mother – whoever she was – left you in a basket and forgot all about you.'" (Page 8)

In the town of C—, Celeste is presumed to be an orphan.

Discuss: Are many children's characters in the books you've read orphans? Why do you think this is? Can you back up your thoughts with examples?

What impact does remembering her parents have on Celeste? Is it important to know where you come from/your background? Why?

Activity: Can you trace your family tree? How far back in time can you go? What about places – where were different members of your family born?

The reader comes to learn that Celeste and Maria are twins, but that other characters see them as one person.

'He was looking at her now as if he knew her well.' (Page 39)

"That's what Mama always says. You're Maria, aren't you?"

"No, I'm Celeste."

"Then why do they call you Maria?" (Page 44)

'Viggo said, "When I saw Maria this afternoon, she was a bit strange with me. I thought she looked different too."

"In what way?" said Peter.

"She was smaller." (Page 59)

Look carefully at Chapter 9, then:

"She used to say we were mirrors of each other's souls, that we are different and yet we are the same." (Page 112)

Activity: Divide your page into two columns and list the differences between Celeste and Maria.

Think carefully about physical appearance, skills, mannerisms and speech.

"I hear Maria in my head," said Celeste. "It isn't me – her voice is very Maria-ish."

Anna laughed. "She keeps her words short and sharp."

"Yes – unlike me," said Celeste, pulling her muffler tight about her neck.' (Page 170)

Discuss: Can you distinguish between the twins in the dialogue. If the author doesn't tag the speech, can you tell which character is saying what?

Activity: Write a dialogue, trying to distinguish between two people without using tags. Can you work out who is saying what because of the emotion in their speech, their dialect?

The twins are called Maria and Celeste. The *Mary Celeste* is a famous ship in history.

Research and activity: Look up what happened to the *Mary Celeste*. Either, write a non-chronological report on the *Mary Celeste* or make an information poster about it.

Discuss: How does the *Mary Celeste* tie to themes in *Invisible in a Bright Light*?

There are many famous twins in literature. (Fred and George Weasley in *Harry Potter* by JK Rowling, Sam and Eric in *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, Laurie and Lia in *Stranger With My Face* by Lois Duncan, The Cheeryble brothers in *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens).

Discuss: Can you think of any other famous twins in literature? Why do you think twins might be a powerful plot device?

Activity: Imagine you have a twin. Write a character description of them. In which ways do they share your characteristics and in which ways are they different? Now apply this to a sibling, if you have one. Are they similar to you – in which way? (If you *are* a twin, then apply the same activity to them).



Hildegard

Hildegard's name also has a particular meaning: 'comrade in arms' or 'battle guard'.

Discuss: How is she a comrade in arms? Look at how she behaves towards Celeste at the start of the novel compared with the end:

"She's only a theatre rat," said Hildegard.' (Page 40)

"It's true Mama doesn't want you here," said Hildegard. "She's told me many, many times that she's not a charity. All right. But first you write on a piece of paper that I can have the doll.'" (Page 75)

"Quigley opened the basket and burst out laughing when he saw the girls.

"You two could work this up as a comedy act – the audience would love it.'" (Page 209)

Discuss: Why do you think Hildegard throws Celeste out near the beginning? How does Hildegard's relationship with Celeste change? Is Hildegard's main battle with Celeste or with her mother?

"The fact that it had nearly choked her daughter became of little consequence.'" (Page 28)

"But Mama, you can't mean me," said Hildegard as Madame took her daughter's hand and threw her out along with everyone else.' (Page 29)

'There were bruises on her face and on her arms but none of them mattered as much as the pain in her heart. Her mother had never wanted her.' (Page 91)

'Hildegard found it hard to believe that her own mother could be so jealous of her.' (Page 169)

Activity: Make a list of all the 'bad' things that Madame Sabina does to Hildegard. Is Madame Sabina a bad mother? Is she a wicked person? Can you find any redeeming features in the book? Can you find any incidence in which you sympathise with her? Compare her with Mrs Coulter from *Northern Lights* by Philip Pullman. What do they have in common?

Discuss and Activity: Is Hildegard's mother the main villain of the novel? Divide the class in two, and hold a debate. One group should argue for Madame Sabina being the primary villain, the other group for the man in the emerald green suit.



"Even if she is a witch, she's still my mother," said Hildegard.' (Page 253)

Discuss: Why do you think Hildegard stays with her mother and drinks the water she is given?



Activity: Look at incidences of power shift in the novel. When is Madame Sabina powerful and when is she not? How does this affect her behaviour? Examine her speech and pull out words and phrases that suggest manipulation, aggression, intimidation. She is abusive towards Hildegard, both physically and emotionally. Can you write the qualities of a healthy relationship instead? Think about supportive behaviour, encouragement, spending time together. You may wish to give examples.

Look at the letter on pages 281–283 from Hildegard to Celeste. Celeste tries to give Hildegard a letter from Anna on page 290, but can't.

Activity: Write the letter from Anna to Hildegard. What would she tell Hildegard to do?

The man in the emerald green suit/Albert Ross

'At the entrance of the cave sits a man in a barnacle-encrusted chair. Before him is a desk. It is his three-piece suit of emerald green that has caught the girl's attention, not his face as one might suppose, for it is a strange face. Behind him, neatly stacked, are hundreds of gleaming white candles.' (Page 1–2)

Discuss: What does Gardner mean by a 'strange face'?

Activity: Look through Chapter 1, and then try to draw the man.

Discuss: How has Gardner made the man seem menacing? Look at the vocabulary, his speech, his

body language. Why do we need villains in books?

Activity: What makes a typical villain in a children's book? Write a list of characteristics.

Celeste first meets Albert Ross on page 140. Re-read the passage beginning 'He wore goggles... tiny book of fairy tales.' (Page 143)

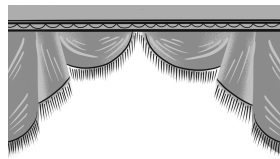
Discuss: What clues are there that Albert Ross is a double of the man in the emerald green suit?

Activity: Draw Albert Ross. Is the drawing similar to the one you did of the man in the emerald green suit?

Discuss: Does he become less menacing now that he has a name? Does he become less menacing when it is revealed that he is a father? Why?

Activity: Look up the meaning of the albatross bird. What does it signify? Which poem does it come from?

Further challenge: Read the poem alluded to by the albatross.



Themes

Theatre

The novel is mainly set in a theatre.

Discuss: Why would the theatre be an interesting place to set a story? Can you think of other stories set in theatres?

Activity: Design a poster or leaflet for the pantomime starring Hildegard. Don't forget the time and date you are designing it for – look up some other playbills or posters from the time. What do they look like? Take clues from the novel to write the information on your playbill.

At the end of the novel, the twins turn their 'dream' into a play and first perform it with a toy theatre.

Activity: Can you make a toy theatre from a shoebox. How will you light it? Can you create a backdrop and characters out of paper/craft materials? Which play are you putting on?

Activity: Many of the background characters in the book have a role to play in the theatre, Mr Gautier, Peter Tias, Miss Olsen. Choose one and write a job description for them. Which job would you take in a theatre? Perhaps you could write an application for that job in the theatre.

Appearance and Reality

Appearance and Reality is one of the most famous themes across literature, particular in theatre.

Can you see how it plays out here? What does it mean – appearance and reality?

Activity: Divide your paper in two. Write what is only 'appearance' in the novel, and what seems like 'reality'. Do the two blur?

Phaedrus, a Roman poet, said: "Things are not always as they seem; the first appearance deceives many."

Discuss: Who deceives whom in the text? Who is not as they first appear?

Discuss: There is duality and mistaken identity throughout the novel – the two identities of Albert

Ross, the twins, the two cities. What effect does this have on the reader?

Celeste and Maria have trouble distinguishing what is a dream, what is reality and what is memory.

Discuss: Is a memory more real if it is shared (if someone else also has that memory)? What else can make a memory feel more real and less imagined? How important are objects for recalling memories? What is the difference between dream and memory? Can you tell them apart?

Activity: Do you have an object that triggers a memory from a long ago place or event? What is it? Write about it. Do the objects help the memories become real? Are they evidence that something happened, or can the events still be imagined?

Light

Gardner quotes the chandelier in the Copenhagen Royal Opera House as a key inspiration for her novel, basing the role of Anna on the woman she encountered (Foreword Page IX). In the novel, the chandelier is in the shape of a galleon. Look at page 46 for a description.

Have a look at this link to help you imagine your chandelier.

<https://kglteater.dk/en/whats-on/season-20182019/guided-tours/faste-rundvisninger/guided-tour-at-the-old-stage/?section=top>

Activity: Write a poem about the lights of the chandelier, or design your own chandelier. What shape will it be? How many lights will it have - electric or candle?

Read page 47–48. The chandelier falls from its dome.

Activity: Write a newspaper report about the fall of the chandelier. Or write a diary extract of that day from the point of view of Mr Gautier.

In 1896, a counterweight from the chandelier of the Garnier Paris Opera House fell, killing a person.

Activity: What can you find out about this? Who died? How did the weight fall? Are there similarities between this event and the events in the novel? Can you find out which other piece of literature was inspired by this chandelier fall?



Invisible in a Bright Light

Discuss: Think about the title of the novel. What does it actually mean? Can something be invisible in a bright light? How do we see light?

Light is only visible from the source, or when it is reflected or refracted by something. The photons have to hit something and bounce off in the direction of your eyes to be visible to you.

Activity: Investigate the science of light. Is light itself visible? Make a list of the different types of light. You might want to start here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/clips/z7qb9j6> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr4if3vZXgw>.

Now take the quiz <https://www.educationquizzes.com/ks3/science/light-01/>

Objects

The use of objects is crucial in the novel, firstly to root it in its historical setting, and secondly as part of the 'game'.

Discuss: Which objects in the novel point to the fact that it is set in 1870's Copenhagen?

Activity: Write your own piece of descriptive writing, carefully using objects to show the reader where and when it is set. Think about technology, types of building, transport, décor, clothes.

Some of the objects in the novel appear in both C— and the real Copenhagen. Look at the shawl that Anna owned, the black hat, the cardboard figure of a little dancer.

Discuss: Can objects mean more than the thing themselves? Do they become part of their owner's story? Do you, or did you, have a soft toy that means more to you than it would to someone else?
Activity: Take a favourite story or play and imagine you are putting it on at a theatre. Which props do you need for your story? Which objects would you place on stage to tie to your characters?
People can send an object through time in the hope that it will mean something in the future. This is called a time capsule.

Activity: Make your own time capsule. What will future people think of the object you have buried? Have you written a note to bury with it? Does it explain both the object and its meaning?



Time

The essence of the book is about the 'gutter of time'.

"You are in the gutter of time. A world full of endless possibilities." (Page 50); "Perhaps, in a different life" (Page 332)

This is a moment in time in which things could have turned out differently. Otherwise called a 'Sliding Doors' moment. In the story, Celeste is striving to get back to her life – to make her life better and be where she should be – not a foundling in a costume basket, but a twin with a loving mother and father.

Discuss: Can you think of a moment in your life which has been pivotal. Perhaps you had to decide between two things? Or moved from one place to another? How could things have turned out differently?

"I can't talk for long," the man says, lighting another set of candles. "Too much to do. Need to find time, to beat time, to keep time from running out." (Page 185)

The man in the emerald green suit also talks of the "sands of time." (Page 187)

Discuss: How important is time to you? Think about your day. Is it plotted out in times? Take a partner and discuss your weeks, working out how your time differs. How many hours do you spend studying/sleeping/socialising/on screens?

Draw a graph to show your use of time in an average day or week.

Activity: Take a moment to think about how much spare time you have. What do you do in free time? Do you feel you have enough free time? How could you make more?

Activity: Make your own sand timer. These can be useful for measuring how long to take in the shower, or brushing your teeth, or meditating. Use this link to help you:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Sand-Timer-from-Recycled-Plastic-Bottles>



The man in the emerald green suit also talks about a **Day of Reckoning**

"This year is on its last page and soon I can write it off, start again with clean white paper, no mark upon it until I write." (Page 187)

Discuss: How does The Day of Reckoning relate to the 'gutter of time'?

In some religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, there is a Book of Life, which is the book in which God records the names of people who are destined for Heaven.

Discuss: Is this different to Celeste and Maria playing 'the game,' in which she has to win back her future? Why do you think religious people believe in a Book of Life?

Research: Investigate the meaning of the Book of Life with regards to the Jewish New Year and the

Jewish festival of the Day of Atonement? Or investigate ideas and practises of forgiveness in Catholicism.

Discuss: Can asking forgiveness for what you've done in the past change your future?

The Game

Discuss: Celeste has to play the man's game but she doesn't know the rules.

Can you play a game without knowing the rules? Why are rules important?

Activity: Can you make up your own board game? Here is a resource to help teachers guide students http://www.spen.org.uk/mymedia/files/resource_pdfs/Youth%20Scotland%20-%20Board%20Game%20Toolkit.pdf

Once you have created something, see if it's possible for your classmates to play it without knowing the rules. What happens?



Fairy Tales

'This story, in various shapes and guises, has lived with me a long time. It took me ages to work out how a theatre, a ghost ship and a crystal chandelier might be connected. As often is the way with my writing, I found the answer in fairy tales.' (Foreword, Page IX)

'I felt I had walked into a fairy tale. It was this time in Copenhagen that inspired my story, *Invisible in a Bright Light*.' (Page X)

Fairy tales have common elements, including good triumphing over evil, wishes granted, taking place in a magical land, numbers and patterns, royalty, talking animals, magical elements.

Discuss: How is the novel like a fairy tale? How many fairy tale elements are in the novel?

Activity: Make a list of the elements, and provide descriptions underneath of how *Invisible in a Bright Light* meets these criteria. E.g. Look at the importance of the number 3, or the time of 12 minutes to midnight.

Discuss: What does Gardner mean by 'I found the answer in fairy tales?' Do fairy tales have answers?

The words 'fairy tales' crop up many times in the novel.

"When you have quite finished making up fairy tales," said Miss Olsen, "Madame Sabina wants her glove and wants it now – in her dressing-room." (Page 8)

'With a turn of the handle, she slipped through the forbidden door into the realm of thick, red carpets where the walls were decorated with murals of fairy tales.' (Page 11)

'The only anchor she had was in her hand – a tiny book of fairy tales.' (Page 143)

"Fairy tales are for children – I'm far too old for such silliness." (Page 207)

Activity: Pick one of the following questions and write a response: Why would a theatre have walls painted with fairy tales? Can fairy tales be an anchor? Are fairy tales just for children?

Look at the reference to *Rumpelstiltskin* on page 107–108 and page 57 ("guess my name").

Activity: Read the story of *Rumpelstiltskin*. What are the similarities between this fairy tale and *Invisible in a Bright Light*?

The origins of fairy tales often come from **oral storytelling**. This is when a story is told by word of mouth as opposed to being written. Look at page 159–161. Both Stephan and Anna have different versions of a tale called 'The Reckoning'.

Activity: Pick one fairy tale, such as *Sleeping Beauty* or *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. Now find multiple versions of that story. You can go to your local library or look on the Internet. What features do the stories have in common? Now try to write your own version, keeping some elements similar

but changing others. What can you change without altering the message behind the tale?

With oral storytelling, it's very hard to know the original version of the story.

Activity: In a classroom setting, sit in a circle. One person begins by whispering a very simple two sentence story into the next person's ear. They whisper to the next person and so on round the circle. How different is the final person's version of the sentences?

Read pages 119–120.

Discuss: Which version of what happened to Viggo's parents do you believe? Why?

Activity: Have you heard the story of your birth? Ask an adult to tell you. Is there another adult who can tell you again, but separately? Compare the two. Are they the same?



Further Reading

The Longest Night of Charlie Noon by Christopher Edge

I, Coriander by Sally Gardner

The Diamond of Drury Lane by Julia Golding

Alice in Wonderland by CS Lewis

Hilary McKay's Fairy Tales

Grimm Tales for Young and Old by Philip Pullman

The Marvels by Brian Selznick

Readers' Notes written by Clare Zinkin

Children's Reading Consultant