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The Time Traveller and the Tiger

By Tania Unsworth

Summary

Face to face with the mightiest and most majestic predator in the jungle, Elsie is in awe of the tiger's beauty. She's on a mission to have the adventure of a lifetime, save the tiger and change the future. With echoes of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Tania Unsworth writes about transcendent friendships and conservation in the animal kingdom.

Elsie is not looking forward to the long summer holidays with her creaky, old Uncle John. She longs for adventure like her heroine Kelsie Corvette, who she writes about and whose daredevil escapades, full of thrills and spills, Elsie envies. But then the unimaginable happens as Time unravels and Elsie tumbles back to 1940s India to meet her Uncle John as a young boy on a tiger hunt. Can Elsie stop him from doing what he's already told her is a wrong he can never right?

Elsie, Uncle John and his childhood friend, Mandeep, tread a dangerous path deeper and deeper into the jungle on their quest to save the tiger.

Key Learning Outcomes

ACELA1553, ACELT1635, ACELT1770, ACELY1742

Themes

Regret, Imagination, Magic, Journey, Friendship

Recommended Ages: 10+ (these notes have been prepared for Year 9 students)

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Before Reading

Imagination and magic

Texts can engage, inspire, educate, amuse, inform, persuade, entertain and delight. They make us feel good, scared and reflect about life. Why do we like reading texts with an element of fantasy?

Magic potions, and altering time and perception have been a feature of storytelling since humans started telling stories. For example, a flower has a magical quality in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and plays a key role in the plot. Read through this speech and identify the magic quality of the flower.

In Act 2, Scene 2, Oberon, King of the Fairies, instructs Puck to find a flower.

Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell.
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound.
And maidens call it 'love-in-idleness.'
Fetch me that flower. The herb I showed thee once.
The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

The drops from a special flower, 'love-in-idleness', make a person fall madly in love with the first person they see. In this story, *The Flower That Catches Time* enables Elsie to travel through time. Why do we like such tales? What is the attraction of time travel?

In groups, write a 500-word short story about a special power that a magical flower would grant you. Create a visual representation of the location where the flower would be found and the sounds, smells and tastes of the world in which the flower exists.

Shock, wonder and awe

A key element of the Romantic period of literature stressed awe and connection to nature in art and language. As a class, research the Romantic period and read John Keats's poem, 'Ode to a Nightingale': <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale>

- How does Keats celebrate nature in this poem?
- What other ideas does nature represent in the poem?
- What deep questions does Keats ask by observing the nightingale?
- When have you felt a sense of awe and wonder about something in nature?
- When has nature shocked you?
- What are some of the contradictions we can see within nature?
- Write a poem with four stanzas conveying the wonder and awe of nature.

During Reading

Motifs

Motifs are an important literary device, which develop the central themes of a story. Motifs are a repeated, recurring element in a novel, film or story and they help point a reader towards the story's big idea or theme. A motif can be a physical object, image, action, sound, symbol or abstract idea.

Think about the tiger as a motif in this story.

- What meanings and associations does the tiger evoke?
- Consider the poem, 'The Tyger' by William Blake: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43687/the-tyger>, and the tiger character in the book and the film, *Life of Pi*. What values could a tiger represent?
- What obvious message does the motif of the tiger communicate to the reader?
- What lesson is the author asking the reader to learn?
- How does a tiger represent shock, wonder and awe?

Drawing on evidence from the text, write a response on the ideas and values the tiger represents in the novel. Write a 400-word story about wonder, shock or resilience, and add a motif throughout the story.

Setting

Setting is very important in novels, poetry and film. Writers choose settings very carefully because they add layers of conflict and history to a story. Setting includes:

- The time period a story is set.
- The amount of time covered in a particular setting.
- The location itself.
- The level of conflict experienced in a setting.

Many of the most interesting stories are set in a time and place experiencing many types of conflict.

Read Ben Okri's poem, 'An African Elegy': <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/an-african-elegy-2/>.

- What is he saying about a period of time?
- What kinds of conflicts does he consider?

Think about the novels or films you have liked the most.

- Where are they set?
- In what time period?
- Why do you think they have been set in those particular times and places?

This story is told across a number of time periods and locations. Why?

- Why is the year 1946 significant in Indian and global history?
- What happened in 1947?
- How does this add to the story?
- Read the opening paragraphs of *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. Why did he set and start his story at that particular moment?
- What are the locations in *The Time Traveller and the Tiger*?

- What is the geography of the locations?
- How do these specific locations add to the story?
- What are the relationships between the characters in these time periods and locations?
- What are the inner conflicts experienced by the characters?
- What are the conflicts between characters?
- How does the setting impact the characters and how they interact?

With a partner, brainstorm a setting that allows you to consider a particular point in history; a location that symbolises that point in history, and a conflict between two characters to examine that conflict more closely.

- For example, if you wanted to discuss an issue about COVID-19, where would a good place, full of conflict, be to set your story? The Victorian/New South Wales border? A cruise ship? A hotel?
 - What two characters could you create to explore the conflict? A doctor or a politician? A TV reporter? A resident? An older person or a teacher?
 - What would the characters be worried about? What conflicts would they experience?
 - Write a 300-word orientation for your story.

After Reading

Narrative Voice

The novel is told from multiple perspectives with different characters. Writers can use first-, second- or third-person to voice a narrator in order to create different effects. A first-person narrator uses 'I', a second-person narrator uses 'you/we', and a third-person narrator use 'she/he/they'.

In terms of how much the narrator tells about the story, there are two main types.

1. The all-knowing narrator – the narrator knows all and sees all. This can be done to varying degrees.
2. The narrator only reports what the characters say or do – the narrator does not know the reasons for the character's behaviour nor their private thoughts or feelings.

Compare the narrative perspective and voice for each character in the novel. For example, the Tiger and Elsie. What different effects does each voice create?

The Tiger

He had been born on this path and had walked it all his life. It was the path of greatest advantage, where his feet felt the softest, and the cover was greatest, and the light tricked every eye but his. Never wider than the length of his whiskers, never louder than the snapping of a twig. The unrelenting path of the hunter who knows he is also the hunted. (p. 35)

Elsie

Elsie nearly screamed when she opened the door. Then she saw it wasn't a tiger. It was just something that had once been one. Now it lay with its empty legs spread out, as flat and as dry as a great, striped flower pressed between the pages of a book. Only its head had been left intact, its jaws frozen in a roar.

There wasn't anything else in the room, apart from a glass cabinet full of what looked like a hundred identical cups and saucers. Elsie walked all the way around the tiger, gazing at it. Then, holding her breath, she bent and touched its head with the tip of her finger. (p. 7)

- How do the narrative perspectives and voices differ and why?
- Are the voices in third- or first-person?
- Why has the author given the character of the tiger a voice?
 - What is the author's purpose?
- Go back to the story you used for the setting exercise. Write 200 words in third-person for each character, from the perspective of an all-knowing narrator.

Essay/Short Answer Questions

1. Discuss the value of shock, wonder and awe in life.
2. Why do we like to read fantasy stories? Why are they relevant today?
3. How does the author use setting and animals to convey the central themes of the novel? What is the author's purpose?
4. What past wrong would you travel through time to correct? What choices would you make as a composer to tell the story?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tania Unsworth is the daughter of the late Barry Unsworth, whose book *Sacred Hunger* won a Booker Prize. She spent her childhood in Cambridge before moving to America in her early twenties. She comes from a family of writers. She lives in Boston, USA, with her husband and two sons.

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