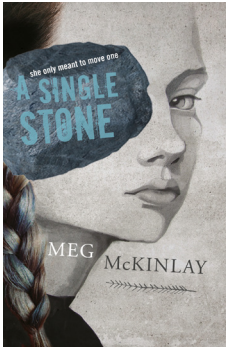




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



A Single Stone

Meg McKinlay
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia
Locked Bag 22
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

Ph +61 2 9517 9577
Fax +61 2 9517 9997

These notes were created by Steve Spargo.
For enquiries please contact:
educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au

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Outline:

Every girl dreams of being part of the line – the chosen seven who tunnel deep into the mountain to find the harvest. No work is more important. Jena is the leader of the line – strong, respected, reliable. And – as all girls must be – she is small; her years of training have seen to that. It is not always easy but it is the way of the things. And so a girl must wrap her limbs, lie still, deny herself a second bowl of stew. Or a first. But what happens when one tiny discovery makes Jena question everything she has ever known? What happens when moving a single stone changes everything?

Author Information:

Meg McKinlay grew up in Bendigo, Victoria, in a book-loving, TV- and car-free household. On the long and winding path to becoming a children's writer, she has worked a variety of jobs including swim instructor, tour guide, translator and teacher. These days, she lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia, where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese, and Creative Writing. Meg divides her time between teaching and writing, a balance that swings wildly between chaos and calm. She is always busy cooking up more books and you can visit her on the web at www.megmckinlay.com.

How To Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Ages 10+
- Primary years 5-6
- Secondary years 7-8

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Novel

Themes/Ideas:

- Responsibility
- Sustainability
- Societal pressures
 - Conformity
 - Belief systems

National Curriculum Focus:*

English

Year 5

ACELA1500
ACELA1501
ACELA1504
ACELT1608
ACELT1609
ACELT1795
ACELT1610
ACELT1611
ACELT1612
ACELY1698
ACELY1699

Year 6

ACELA1516
ACELT1613
ACELA1615
ACELT1618
ACELT1800
ACELT1709
ACELY1711
ACELT1801
ACELY1714

Year 7

ACELA1528
ACELA1529
ACELA1782
ACELT1619
ACELT1620
ACELT1621
ACELT1803
ACELT1622
ACELT1625
ACELT1720
ACELY1721
ACELY1723

Year 8

ACELA1540
ACELA1541
ACELA1542
ACELA1547
ACELT1626
ACELT1627
ACELT1807
ACELY1729
ACELY1732
ACELY1733

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.



Walker Books Classroom Ideas

Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before reading *A Single Stone*, view the cover of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The tagline
- The publisher
- The blurb

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book – how close were your predictions to the actual novel? Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

What is the purpose of this novel (i.e. to entertain, to inform or to persuade)? How can you tell? Write a paragraph about the novel using only informative language that is unbiased. Write another paragraph using persuasive language to convince the reader to share your opinion of the novel. What are the themes in this novel? Identify and list the themes as a class or in small groups. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

A novel will describe the setting and action in words, allowing the reader to visualise using their imagination. A comic strip or graphic novel uses illustrations to show the reader the setting, action and character's emotions. Create a comic strip of a key scene from the novel.

"A first daughter, but a sixth child. Jena winced, thinking of the hunger, the cold. The weight of a whole family on those fragile shoulders." Page 22

Discuss the cultural importance of daughters in the world of *A Single Stone*. Compare this to the cultural importance of daughters and sons in modern and past times (for example look at the 1950s and the 1900s).

The people of the village in *A Single Stone* see the mountain as an entity that provides them with gifts and takes revenge when it has been wronged. Write a piece of dialogue between a parent of this world and a child, with the parent explaining the myths surrounding the mountain and how the townspeople are expected to behave towards the mountain.

"The Gash was not the only place their ancestors had wronged the mountain, but it was where the rock fought back. Where it finally said enough. It opened its throat and swallowed their world, and them with it." Page 25

Compare this quote to arguments for climate change in our world. Do you think the author was intentionally making a statement about climate change? If so, what arguments do you think the author is trying to make about how we use our natural resources?

"She will not cry. She will set her mouth in a line and take the stone from Berta's trembling hands. She will kneel and place it soft upon the quiet earth, and she will say goodbye. For that is what a girl does when her mama goes." Pages 48-49

In this scene Jena is fighting against her natural reaction to her mother's death and funeral (i.e. crying) because of a sense of duty. Why do you think girls' emotions are suppressed in this society? Do you think this is healthy or dangerous? Why?

The author employs a dual narrative of Jena and Lia's worlds. Why do you think she uses this technique? Compare the two worlds, making note of their customs, superstitions and values, and how their environment has shaped these beliefs. Based on this comparison, how much do you think environment and upbringing shape a person? How different do you think Jena would be if she were raised in Lia's world?

Discuss the juxtaposition of the villager's respect for nature with the Mothers' manipulation of nature to make babies come early.

Discuss the Mothers' motives for why they manipulated the pregnancies. Do you think their actions were justified? Conduct a class debate as if it were a trial of the Mothers after the revelation at the end of the novel. One side should be the Mothers and the other should be the villagers. The debate should focus on whether the Mothers' actions were justified for the sake of the greater good, or if their actions were inexcusable.

After reading chapter 13, discuss how the author creates a feeling of tension and claustrophobia while the girls are navigating the inside of the mountain. Make a note of literary techniques that are used for this purpose.

In chapters 13 and 14, Jena faces two very tough leadership challenges. The first being Kari getting stuck in the rock and the second being Min falling from the mountain to her death. How does Jena respond to these problems? Does she blame herself? Was there anything else Jena could have done to avoid these?

"Jena could not bring herself to reply. Although she had done this before, today was different. Standing here, she felt like a hunter sizing up a bird or a rabbit. Which to take, and which to leave for another day?" Page 173

What turning point has Jena reached that has changed her view on this situation? How does this affect her view of her society and her role in it?



Walker Books Classroom Ideas

Make a list of the colloquialisms and slang that people in Jena's world use that are different to our own. This different language could be caused by the society developing in isolation from others. Compare this to colloquialisms that are used in your local area, your country and other countries now and in past times. Discuss how language changes over time depending on environmental factors and trends.

Girls who form part of the line are revered in this society. Why do you think that is? What do you think the transition would be like from being part of the line to entering normal society? Write several diary entries from Kari's point of view from when she is still part of the line to when she discovers that she is too big to be part of the line and enters normal society. How does Kari and Jena's relationship change from when they're both in the line together to after Kari has left the line? What do you think caused this change to occur?

Discuss the parallels between the world of *A Single Stone* where girls are traditionally bound or altered to conform to a specific body type and our own world where people experience strong expectations to look a certain way and take extreme measures to achieve a desired body type. Do you think it is acceptable for parents, guardians or those in power to make these kind of changes to an infant if the changes serve a purpose (such as being part of the Line)? What about if these changes were for cosmetic reasons?

"Berta was so close now; her eyes were right there and they were kind. They had always been so. Yet there was something hard in them too. Flinty and cold, like dull grey stone in the light of a headlamp ... Wasn't it Berta who had taught her this – that all you needed was the smallest crack? As long as there was an opening, you could find a way in." Page 209-210

What two literary techniques has the author used in this passage to increase the richness of the text? What are the purposes of these techniques? Find other examples of these literary techniques throughout the novel.

"It reached the canopy and Jena thought oh, for the branches were thick with leaves and there was no way through. But as she thought this, the bird gave a flick of its tail and pushed higher and she saw that there was a space – were spaces – after all. That there had been all along, if you were a bird. And if you were not – if you were a girl, feet held fast to earth – you could at least follow its passage, stand below and watch as it went through, turning this way and then that like an old Mother threading the finest of needles." Page 166

Describe the use of extended metaphor in this passage and its significance to the following:

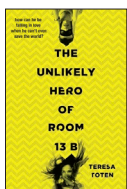
- Jena/the Line and Lia navigating the seemingly impassable network of tunnels in the mountain
- Finding a solution to a seemingly impossible situation (such as the village adapting to life after Rockfall and Jena and Lia leading the villagers out of the valley at the end of the novel)

What is the meaning of the title *A Single Stone*? Does it have more than one meaning? Does it mean different things to different characters?

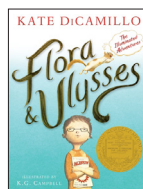
Write a book report on *A Single Stone*. Write about how much you enjoyed the book, using evidence from the text to support your evaluation. Make a recommendation about who would be interested in this book and draw connections to similar or related books.

Imagine that a movie was being made of *A Single Stone*. In small groups, create a soundtrack to accompany some of the key scenes, thinking particularly about the mood you want to convey. You could either make a compilation of existing songs or compose your own musical pieces. Present your soundtrack to the class, explaining why you have chosen the pieces you have.

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