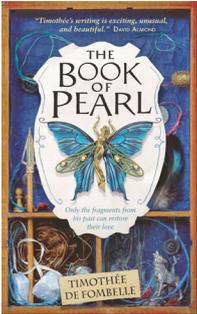




Walker Books Discussion Guide



The Book of Pearl

By Timothée de Fombelle
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

An ode to the power of storytelling by one of France's greatest writers for children. A compelling story of a first love that defines a lifetime; perfect for fans of David Levithan, told with the intricate and beautiful writing style of bestselling author Timothée de Fombelle. Joshua Pearl is from a world that our own no longer believes in. He knows that his great love is waiting for him in that distant place, but he is trapped in our time. As his memories begin to fade, he discovers strange objects, tiny fragments of a story from a long time ago. Can Joshua remember the past and believe in his own story before his love is lost for ever?

Author/Translator Information:

Timothée de Fombelle is a much-admired French playwright, as well as the author of award-winning fiction. His first series, *Toby Alone* and *Toby Alone and the Secrets of the Tree* has been printed in 27 languages and has won numerous awards including France's prestigious Prix Sorcières and the Marsh Award. Timothée's adventure series, *Vango, Book One: Between Sky and Earth* and *Vango, Book Two: A Prince Without a Kingdom* received huge critical acclaim, and book one was granted an English Pen Award for translation. Timothée also contributed to the acclaimed collection *The Great War: an Anthology of Stories Inspired by Objects from the First World War*. Timothée lives in Paris.

Sarah Ardizzone is one of the most sought-after translators working today. She is twice recipient of the Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation, for *Eye of the Wolf* by Daniel Pennac (2005) and *Toby Alone* by Timothée de Fombelle (2009). Sarah appears regularly on the book festival circuit and curates programmes around translation for all ages – including Translation Nation and Translators In Schools.

Sam Gordon is the London-based translator of *Arab Jazz* by Karim Miské, which won a 2014 English PEN award and was shortlisted for a CWA International Dagger in 2015. Sam also translated *Captain Rosalie*, a short story by Timothée de Fombelle, which appeared in the Walker Books anthology *The Great War: Stories Inspired by Objects from the First World War*.

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:

- Secondary years 7+
- Ages 12+

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- History

Example of:

- Novel
- Fiction
- Fantasy
- Historical Fiction

Themes/Ideas:

- Storytelling
- Love
- WWII
- Fantasy
- Emotional and Physical Journeys



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Where and when do you think it is set? What genre do you think it fits into? Once you have finished reading the book, revisit your answers to this question and compare your judgements based on the cover to the actual story. Have a class discussion about whether you should or should not judge a book by its cover.

“In media res” is a Latin term used for when a story starts at a mid-point or at the conclusion rather than at the beginning. Why do you think the author has used this technique with *The Book of Pearl*? Further to this, the chapters are told out of chronological order. How would the novel be different if it was told in chronological order (starting in the Kingdom and ending in Venice)?

Besides Joshua Iliån Pearl, who are the main characters in this story? Write a character assessment for each character. What purpose do they serve in the story?

What are the themes of this novel? Write a statement of belief for each theme, then assess how *The Book of Pearl*'s treatment of these themes makes you feel.

Joshua Iliån Pearl travels far and wide in his adventures. In chronological order, plot his travels on a map of the world (for his travels in the human world) and an invented map (for his travels in the fairy world).

Part of *The Book of Pearl* is set in Europe during the 1940s, during World War II. Why do you think the author chose to set the novel during this time? What storytelling possibilities are available to an author setting a story in a real-world time of unrest? What effect does this have on the reader?

Discuss the significance of Oliå renouncing her fairy powers for her love of Iliån. How is this similar to other fairy tales where a character (usually female) makes a sacrifice for love?

The narration in the *The Book of Pearl* alternates between an unnamed narrator (the character who ultimately writes *The Book of Pearl* towards the end of the novel) told in the first person, and third-person narration. Why do you think the author chose to use this technique? Discuss the effect on the reader of the two styles of narration. How might the story have been different if De Fombelle had chosen to use only one of these styles?

“Already he knew that he had to leave; that he would spend his whole life leaving.” p87

Why does Joshua Iliån Pearl think this? Discuss how this statement resonates throughout the rest of the story.

“Following his godfather’s lead, Iån had drained the land and was now eager to explore other realms, those whose stories were ‘done’, their people supposed to be living happily ever after.” p102

Discuss the characteristics of a fairy tale, particularly happy endings. Compare this to real life, or the human world as described in this book. Do stories in real life ever truly “end”? What implications does this have for Iliån and Oliå in the human world?

“She too was discovering the same secret, forbidden to fairies – the secret of love. The force that brings life. The force that brings birth and death.” p125

Love is one of the main themes in *The Book of Pearl*, how is it explored? Is it represented in a positive or negative way?

The power of stories is another major theme in *The Book of Pearl*. Discuss how this is explored throughout the text, particularly in the following chapters:

- Chapter 13: Joshua tells his story to a wounded Corporal El Fassi, keeping him alive through the night and forging a strong bond between them.
- Chapter 17: “In the end, rumour had it that the palace was surrounded by a ring of evil forces.” p 183. Oliå’s protection of Iliån’s castle results in a story being formed by the locals which in turn protects the castle even further.
- Chapter 26: locals implying Joshua is an imposter and later spreading rumours about his lifestyle.

Discuss the juxtaposition of the fantasy fairy world with the very real horrors of Nazi occupation in Europe during World War II. How does the contrast of these settings affect the story?

“Doubt was his prison: he could only break free from it by finding tokens of proof. That’s what would reverse the spell and return him to where he came from.” p 215

What leads Joshua Iliån Pearl to this epiphany? How does it affect the rest of his life? Is he successful in his quest?

“Happiness is a dance where each step brings you closer together or further apart, but you’re always in each other’s sights.” p 246

How does the narrator’s ideas about happiness apply to Oliå and Iliån’s story?

“As for where Pearl came from, the only thing I’m sure about are these first words, ‘Once upon a time.’” p 90

Discuss the fairy tale tropes the De Fombelle uses in *The Book of Pearl*. How does the use of tropes guide the reader in their interpretation of a story? Were any of these tropes used in surprising or unusual ways?