



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## When This Bell Rings

Allison Rushby  
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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

What if you could get inside the world of your favourite books? No, *really* inside them . . .

In London's Belgravia, Tamsin lives next door to Edie St Clair, famous author of the 'London of the Bells' series of graphic novels. With the series' tenth and final novel overdue, Tamsin offers her idol help and discovers that Edie can literally draw herself into her stories. When Edie goes missing, Tamsin draws herself into the novel and lands in a world of unexpected danger. There, Tamsin discovers that Edie needs her more than she could have realised – only she has the power to write the perfect ending to this story. But the perfect ending will come at a great cost to all.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

Allison Rushby, the daughter of an author, was raised on a wholesome and steady diet of classic English literature. Some of her favourite books, re-read countless dog-eared times include Rumer Godden's *The Dolls' House*, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, Dodie Smith's *I Capture the Castle* and Noel Streatfield's "Shoes" series. She has long been a fan of cities with long, winding histories, wild, overgrown cemeteries, red brick Victorian museums, foxes and ivy. She prefers to write with a cup of Darjeeling tea by her side and a Devon Rex cat curled up in her lap.

## 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:

- Primary years 4-6
- Ages 9-12

### Key Learning Areas:

- English

### Example of:

- Fiction

### Themes/Ideas:

- Imagination
- Storytelling
- Identity
- Friendship



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## Discussion Questions and Activities:

### Before Reading

Before reading *When This Bell Rings*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The illustrator
- 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 story to see if your predictions were correct.

### Exploring the Text

What are the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Identify the orientation, complication and resolution of the story. Ask students to try to identify this structure in other books or movies. As a class, discuss how these narrative features give meaning to stories.

Discuss the title of the book. Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not? If you were asked to choose an alternative title for the book, what would it be? Remember, a good title should capture the audience's attention and give them some idea of what the book is about.

Consider the worlds Allison Rushby has created in *When This Bell Rings*: both the real world and the world of the London of the Bells series. How has she mixed fantasy and reality? What seems real to you and what doesn't?

*When This Bell Rings* has an epigraph – a quote that appears before the start of the book. Do you agree with the quote from Rebecca Solnit? How do you think this epigraph relates to or summarises *When this Bell Rings*? Can you think of an alternate epigraph for the novel?

*"All those journalists – they like the fact that Edie St Clair is struggling to finish book ten. I think that's sad. Why does the world enjoy hearing about someone's failure more than their success?"* (page 9). Do you agree with this quote from Tamsin? Do you think we see more stories of success or failure in the media?

*"I know it sounds silly to call them my best friends, but why not? I spend all my spare time with them. They are as real to me as real people. I even talk to them"* (page 11). Do you have any fictional characters in a TV show, book or movie that you feel connected to? Write a paragraph about how and why they're special to you.

How did you feel about Edie as a character? Did your opinions change as the novel progressed? Why or why not? Consider how Tamsin feels when she meets Edie for the first time. Have you ever met an author, musician, actor, athlete, or someone else you're a big fan of? How did meeting them make you feel? Was it different to how you expected?

*"I nod. "I know what happened. But the ending is yours to write. You don't owe anyone anything." "Don't I?" Edie St Clair stares at her desk" (page 31).* Do you think fans are "owed" anything by famous people they follow or look up to? Have a class debate on this topic.

Has anyone in the class been to London? How is the London in the world of 'London of the Bells' similar or different to reality?

What fictional world from a book would you want to visit and why? Write a short paragraph in the style of a tourism ad, convincing another student to visit your chosen world.

*"I'm home. Home. The word makes me pause. It seems strange to call this my home, but that's what it feels like. I belong here. I don't belong in the real world, where people make fun of my reading and spelling. Where people think I'm stupid. I spread my fingers wide and try to catch the air that flows through them. And I grin again. Home"* (page 67). Discuss how the novel explores the themes of home and belonging.

In small groups, explain how Tamsin demonstrates the following character traits in the novel:

- Resourcefulness
- Courage
- Resilience
- Compassion

*"But of course we will lose! In books such as these, the dark always loses in the end, does it not? I must admit I find this most amusing. I'm informed that in the real world, evil often wins"* (page 103-104). Do you agree that in books the bad guys always lose, and that in real life it's the opposite? Why or why not?

*"Oh, how those readers will cry and wail at all the deaths. Strange how we provide so much entertainment in this tale, but still no one cares for us"* (page 104). How are the Ravens similar or different to villains in other books you've read? Is there a book, movie or TV show where you find the villain more entertaining than the hero? Why or why not?

Were you surprised when Tamsin's real identity was revealed? Now that you know, can you see any clues or foreshadowing in the story?



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Edie knows that her fans care deeply about how her series ends. Why do you think fans care about endings in particular? Think of a TV or book series that you love that has concluded. Were you sad to see it finish? How did you feel about the ending?

“...because you understand how important stories are to people. You know how real characters can be. And because of that, you care about our perfect ending as much as we do. Which makes you one of us” (page 181). Why is telling stories important to many different cultures, and how does *When This Bell Rings* explore the theme of storytelling?

Keep a “Vocab Journal” while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar and look up their meaning. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and write a note next to each explaining why you like that word/phrase.

## Creative Responses to the Text

Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

Write a short story from another book in the London of the Bells series. Make sure you include Wilf, Bes and Kit, and stay consistent to what we know of them from *When This Bell Rings*. You could be inspired by a previous event in the series mentioned in the novel (Marlie’s death, for example) or an idea all your own.

Imagine that a movie was being made of *When This Bell Rings*. 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. Also choose your ideal cast for the movie and create a movie poster.

## Other Great Titles From Walker Books:



**The Turnkey**  
Allison Rushby  
9781925126921 PB  
Classroom ideas available



**The Seven Keys**  
Allison Rushby  
9781760650797 PB



**The Mulberry Tree**  
Allison Rushby  
9781760650292 PB  
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