

These notes are for:

- Late Primary - Years 5 & 6
- Early Secondary - Year 7-8

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Art
- Science

Example of:

- Novel
- Australian fiction

Experience of:

- Reading
- Writing
- Representation
- Personal reflection
- Groupwork

Values addressed:

- Care and compassion
- Doing your best
- Respect
- Understanding, tolerance and inclusion

Themes:

- Friendship
- Coping with change
- Bullying
- Creativity and art
- Appearance and reality

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

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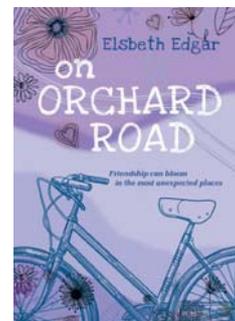
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On Orchard Road - Overview

On Orchard Road

Author: Elsbeth Edgar
 ISBN: 9781921720291
 ARRP: \$16.95
 NZRRP: \$18.99
 No. of Pages: 272
 August 2011



Outline:

Friendship can bloom in the most unexpected places ...

Jane's world has been turned upside down. Her baby sister, Sylvia, is ill in hospital. Her mother must stay in Melbourne to look after her, while Jane and her father move to a small town where she feels like an outsider. Jane's only consolation is her writing.

But then she meets a curious boy, a shy dark-haired girl and Miss Harrison, a mysterious old lady who lives in a house with an astonishing garden. Jane is sure that Miss Harrison has a secret. And as this secret is gradually revealed, both of them learn valuable lessons about trust, nature and the healing power of art.

Author Information

Elsbeth Edgar

After completing her university course (majoring in French Literature) and teaching for one year, Elsbeth travelled overland from Katmandu to London. For four years she spent the winter months working in London and the summer months travelling in Europe. When she returned to Melbourne, she taught English as a second language to the first wave of Vietnamese refugees for several years, before moving to Canberra to study for her Graduate Diploma in Librarianship.

Elsbeth took time off to raise her children before returning to library work when her children were all at school. She has always written, but once she had children she began writing stories for them and rediscovered her love of children's literature.

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.



Elsbeth Edgar on writing *On Orchard Road*:

“*On Orchard Road* began a long time ago as a story for my children. One of my daughters was interested in writing so Jane became a writer. My other daughter loved dragons so Jane’s book was about a little dragon. My son had a bike so Jane also had a bike. The story was tailored to their world. At that time it was quite short but when I came back to it years later I saw things I wanted to change and develop. I liked the way the two prickly personalities, Miss Harrison and Jane, found a friendship which allowed their creativity to blossom but I wanted to give Michael a stronger role and to create a more complex background for the three central characters. It was at this point that Miss Harrison became the daughter and granddaughter of botanists and acquired a yearning for travel. She also began grieving for her lost brother. It was also at this point that Jane started to constantly jot down ideas in her notebook and use her imaginary world as a refuge from the changes taking place in her life. Slowly the story, originally entitled *The Dragon Book* and tied very closely to our family life, expanded and evolved to become *On Orchard Road*.”

Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions

- At the start of the novel, Jane resents Sylvia for disrupting her life and taking her parents’ attention away from her. By the end of the book, however, she has come to feel a deep attachment to her baby sister and to feel that the family is incomplete without her. What evidence of her change in attitude can you find in the book? What are some of the things that contribute to this change?
- Change is one of the main themes of the novel. What are some of the other changes characters in the book have to deal with? What are some of the consequences of these changes? How do the characters respond to or cope with them? Think about both negative and positive responses.
- Write a personal reflection about a major change you have experienced. What happened? What were some of the consequences? How did you cope with them? Did your experience teach you any important lessons or change you in any way?
- Do a “visual summary” of the book.
 - Rule three pages into six even squares (2 across x 3 down).
 - Use the first two squares to do a heading for your work.
 - Each of the other squares will cover two chapters of the book (except for the last square which will cover only one chapter.) Label your squares “Chapters 1-2”, “Chapters 3-4” and so on.
 - In each square, draw a picture representing the key development in those two chapters. You could depict an event that occurred in the chapter or could even draw a symbolic representation of a theme or a character’s feelings – try to be as creative as possible!
 - Below each picture, write a quote from the two chapters which links to your image. Remember to use quotation marks!
- Why has Miss Harrison named her cat “Fatapurr”? What does this reveal about her character? Look up the real Fatepuhr Sikri on the internet.
- Write a diary entry for Miss Harrison as a young woman.
- In small groups, create a character map for a person from the book. Each group should look at a different character: make sure you include Jane, Mr MacConnachie, Mrs MacConnachie, Miss Harrison, Michael, Maria and Darren.

Draw a picture of the character in the centre of the page and then around them include:

 - adjectives to describe their personality
 - information about their family, hobbies, skills, fears, ambitions, etc.
 - what role they play in the novel
 - how they change throughout the novel
 - three quotes from the book which give insight into their character (make sure you use quotation marks).

Re-form into new groups made up of one member from each of the original groups. Each group member should present their character while the other members of the group take notes. At the end, students should have notes on all of the characters in the book.
- Darren is a bully in the novel. However, as the story goes on we learn that he uses this behaviour as a way of coping with problems in his life. What are some of the other ways characters cope with their problems?
- On pages 17-18, Mr Taylor speaks of illuminating a “metaphorical” darkness as he shows the class an experiment with electricity: “I hope to bring light to the darkness of your understanding. And to make physical light at the same time.” What is a metaphor? Are there any other metaphors in *On Orchard Road*? How is a metaphor different to a simile?
- Write a descriptive passage about a wonderful garden. Include strong adjectives, similes and metaphors. Read your passage out to the class.

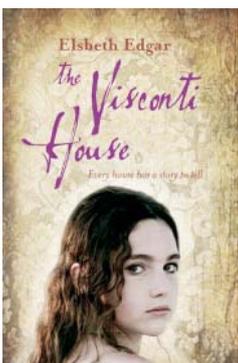


- The author says of Jane, “Finding the right words always made her feel good” (45). What roles do art, creativity and imagination play in the novel? Think about Miss Harrison’s painting as well as Jane’s writing. Some ideas to consider could include: helping people escape from difficult situations, forging connections with others and allowing people to work through adversity, sadness and grief.
- Locate the section in the book where Jane gives a brief summary of her dragon story. Using this information as a guide, write your own version of Jane’s dragon story and draw pictures to accompany it.
- Miss Harrison is an admirer of the artist Albrecht Dürer’s work. Research his life and work on the internet, and look for images of his paintings. Which of his paintings is your favourite? Why? What words would you use to describe his style?
- In small groups, choose an artist to research. Compile information on your chosen artist including:
 - when and where they lived
 - major events in their life
 - artistic style
 - influences
 - major works
 - why they are significant.

Present this information to the class as if you were a group of art curators preparing a major exhibition. You may like to use costume, props or other visual aids to help bring your presentation to life!
- At the start of the book, Miss Harrison paints mainly still lives. Why does she do this? How does her artwork change after she meets Jane? Why does this change occur?
- Invite an art teacher or local artist to speak to the class about techniques used in art. (For example, colour, line, perspective and shading.)
- Create your own still life arrangements using materials found in your garden or the school playground. Create paintings, drawings or photographs of your arrangements. Which medium do you prefer? Why? Is there one that seems to suit the subject more than the others? Display your work in a class “gallery”.
- Create a leaflet providing information on the plants in Miss Harrison’s garden. Some plants are mentioned by name in the book. You could also include exotic plants from the parts of the world Miss Harrison’s grandfather visited. Make sure you include images!
- Visit a botanical garden in your area. What unusual plants do they have? Where do these plants come from? What properties do they have? Are there any interesting landscape features, buildings or statues?

Alternately, visit the website of a major botanical garden. Some possibilities include the Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne (<http://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/>), the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney (<http://www.rbg.nsw.gov.au/>) and the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide (<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/botanicgardens/home>)
- Design your ideal garden. Try to include plants which are appropriate for your local environment in terms of climate, water requirements, soil, etc. Also consider ways you can make your garden environmentally sustainable and eco-friendly in terms of water usage, pest prevention and impact on the local ecosystem. Draw a landscape plan or scaled diagram to show the size and position of garden beds, paths, lawns, trees, watering systems, ponds, fountains, statues, etc.
- Research the history of an historical building in your suburb. This could be privately owned or National Trust. Write a short story set in this building.

Also by Elsbeth Edgar:



The Visconti House

9781921529016 * 304 pg * AU\$16.95/NZ\$19.99 * July 2009 * 9-12

Laura Horton pretends a lot of things but she can’t pretend about her house, an old, rundown Italianate villa that rises in faded and dominating splendour above the small country town in which they live. To everyone at school, Laura Horton’s just the girl from the haunted house. Everything changes with the arrival of Leon Murphy, a loner with a dark and tragic past. With Leon’s help, Laura discovers there is more to her house than meets the eye ...

Themes: alienation, difference, bullying, friendship, tragedy