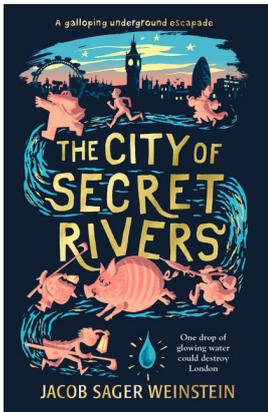




# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## The City of Secret Rivers

By Jacob Sager Weinstein  
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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

An exciting subterranean London adventure, the first in a middle-grade trilogy. Hyacinth Hayward has recently arrived from America and is having difficulty adjusting to her new surroundings, especially being in the sole company of her eccentric mother. Everything feels strange. Very strange. And it gets stranger the day she accidentally unleashes the power of a secret river running through London. To prevent a second Great Fire, Hyacinth needs to retrieve a single, magically charged drop of water from somewhere in the city sewer system. Along the way she encounters an eclectic cast of characters – the shambling, monstrous Saltpetre Men who kidnap her mother, the Toshers who battle for control of magical artefacts and a giant pig with whom she has a tea party. The clock is ticking – will she figure out who to trust?

## Author/Illustrator Information:

Jacob Sager Weinstein is the author of four non-fiction books for adults and has written for *The New Yorker*, HBO and the BBC. He is also a former contributor to *The Onion* and has won a Writers' Guild of America Award. The idea for *The City of Secret Rivers* came to Jacob while walking along the Thames Embankment, as he started thinking about London's secret underground rivers and "discovered that London's history is so magical that it only takes the slightest of tweaks to make it into a fantasy story." He lives in London with his wife and two children.

## 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.

<p><b>These notes are for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary years 5-6</li> <li>• Ages 9+</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Learning Areas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> </ul>	<p><b>Example of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Novel</li> <li>• Fantasy</li> <li>• Adventure</li> </ul>	<p><b>Themes/Ideas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendship</li> <li>• Courage</li> <li>• Quests/journeys</li> <li>• Humour</li> </ul>
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### National Curriculum Focus:\*

ENGLISH	Year 5	Year 6
	ACELA1500	ACELA1523
	ACELA1512	ACELA1524
	ACELT1608	ACELA1525
	ACELT1609	ACELT1613
	ACELT1610	ACELT1614
	ACELT1612	ACELT1616
	ACELT1798	ACELT1618
	ACELY1698	ACELY1709
	ACELY1699	ACELY1710
	ACELY1796	ACELY1712
	ACELY1700	ACELY1801
	ACELY1701	

\*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:

### English

Before reading, examine the cover of the book and the line “One drop of glowing water could destroy London.” What do you think the story will be about? What do you think will happen? Write your answers down and revisit them after you finish reading the book. Were your assumptions correct or incorrect?

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.

When Hyacinth first moves to London, she feels confused by things that are different to her previous home in America. Has anyone in your class moved countries before? What did they find different or similar?

There are lots of silly moments in this book. Which ones made you laugh? Can you think why they were funny?

Little Ben has lost his memory. Who do you think he really is? Write a story about Little Ben’s past, and how he first met Oaroboarus.

In groups, discuss how the following values are demonstrated in the novel:

- Courage
- Kindness
- Honesty
- Persistence
- Resourcefulness/ingenuity
- Loyalty

Are there any other values you would add to this list?

In the author’s notes, Jacob Sager Weinstein says he “made up much less of the book than you might think.” Were you surprised to learn this? What did you think when you saw the real photos?

Throughout the book, different characters appear to be friends or foes to Hyacinth, but then we learn the truth about their intentions. Did your opinions of characters like Lady Roslyn, Little Ben, the Toshers or Oaroboarus change as you read the book? How so?

In small groups, create a character map for a character from the book. Each group should look at a different character – you could include Hyacinth, Lady Roslyn, Little Ben, Oaroboarus and the Toshers. Draw a picture of the character in the centre of a large sheet of butcher’s paper and then around it include:

- adjectives that describe their personality
- information about their skills, fears, ambitions, etc.
- their actions in the novel
- how/if they change throughout the novel their relationships with other characters
- three quotes from the book that 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.

Has anyone in your class ever lived in or visited London? If so, have them share their experiences with the class.

Visit your school library and find other books set in London. How does the London in these stories differ from the alternate world in *The City of Secret Rivers*? Which portrayal is your favourite? Why?

*The City of Secret Rivers* is told through first person narration, in Hyacinth’s voice. Rewrite a key scene in the novel from the perspective of another character. Would they view the situation differently to Hyacinth? How?

Write a book review about *The City of Secret Rivers*. Write what you liked or disliked about the book. Also mention what other books *The City of Secret Rivers* is similar to and who you think would like to read this book.

### Arts

Analyse the visual techniques the designer has used on the cover of the book. For example, colour, font, images, symbolism, composition (where things have been placed). Design an alternative cover for the book featuring your new title. Present it to the class, explaining how you have used visual techniques to emphasise the themes, subject or mood of the book.

Transform a section of the novel into a comic strip or graphic novel.

The first Saltpetre Man we meet is described as being “...seven feet tall. It had a perfect red circle running all the way around its bald head, but other than that, its skin was lumpy and pale grey with white droppings that looked like bird poop. In place of eyes, it had two bits of glittering rock,” pages 36- 37. Draw an image of the Saltpetre Man in their Royal Mail uniform.