



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



The Dollmaker of Krakow

By R. M. Romero
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Outline:

One night a little doll named Karolina comes to life in a toyshop in Kraków, Poland, in 1939 and changes the life of the gruff, broken-hearted Dollmaker. And when the darkness of the Nazi occupation sweeps over the city, Karolina and the Dollmaker must bravely use their magic to save their Jewish friends from a terrible danger, no matter what the risks. This powerful story is about finding friendship in the darkest of places and the importance of love in times of great pain.

Author/Illustrator Information:

R.M. Romero is a Cuban-American author who lives with her family and a menagerie of pets in Colorado. Currently, she occupies her time working in a haunted hotel, reading fairy tales, hiking, studying languages, and writing every moment she gets.

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>These notes are for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary years 5-6 • Ages 10+ 	<p>Key Learning Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English 	<p>Example of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novel 	<p>Themes/Ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassion • WWII • Legends/Folktales • Friendship • Magic 			
<p align="center">National Curriculum Focus:*</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="443 1711 531 1904"> <p>English Year 5 ACELA1511 ACELT1608 ACELT1609 ACELT1610 ACELT1612 ACELT1798 ACELY1701 ACELY1704</p> </td> <td data-bbox="612 1727 702 1904"> <p>Year 6 ACELA1518 ACELT1613 ACELT1617 ACELT1618 ACELT1800 ACELY1709 ACELY1711 ACELY1714</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1114 1727 1270 1908"> <p>*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.</p> </td> </tr> </table>				<p>English Year 5 ACELA1511 ACELT1608 ACELT1609 ACELT1610 ACELT1612 ACELT1798 ACELY1701 ACELY1704</p>	<p>Year 6 ACELA1518 ACELT1613 ACELT1617 ACELT1618 ACELT1800 ACELY1709 ACELY1711 ACELY1714</p>	<p>*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.</p>
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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before reading *The Dollmaker of Kraków*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

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

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.

Fill out the below grid by identifying 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.

Orientation	Complication	Resolution

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

- Resourcefulness
- Courage
- Persistence
- Compassion

Choose a scene in the novel and rewrite it from the perspective of another character. For example, write the scene where the Dollmaker turns the mouse into a toy from the mouse's perspective. Focus particularly on the character's attitudes and feelings, rather than simply recounting events.

This novel is set during World War II. Have a class discussion about WWII. What countries were fighting? What information does the reader learn about WWII from this novel?

Discuss Karolina's relationship with the Dollmaker. How do they support and help each other?

Research Kraków and Poland, both in WWII and now. Does it look the way you imagined? Did anything you learn surprise you?

R.M. Romero chose to set her novel during a real war and in mostly real locations, and even includes a real chronology at the back. Why do you think she chose to do that? Can the information and details about locations and people found in this book be treated as fact? Why or why not? What kind of book would you use to find out factual information about Kraków or WWII?

How are the Trzmiels treated by the Germans during the war, as opposed to the Dollmaker as a *Volksdeutscher*? Consider the different attitudes shown by Brandt, Dombrowski and the Dollmaker himself.

R.M. Romero has used mythical figures and legends from Polish folklore in the story, such as the Lakanica and Juraj Jánošík. Research these characters to find other interpretations of who they are and the powers or significance they have. What other stories incorporate existing real or mythical people in a new story? How are those stories similar or different to *The Dollmaker of Kraków*?

Find four websites that can be used to learn more about the book's setting or time period. Assess the websites to see if the information on them is trustworthy. Identify the purpose of the websites and compare it to the purpose of *The Dollmaker of Kraków*. What techniques have the authors used to achieve their purposes?

At the end of the book, we see Rena as a teenager and know that she survived. Write a companion story to *The Dollmaker of Kraków* about Rena and her experiences. You can set it during the war or afterwards. Don't forget to include Mysz!

Write a short story about a toy you had coming to life. What would you like to talk to them about? What stories would they have to share?

In her author's note, R.M. Romero says: "If there is one thing I hope you take away from this book, it's what Karolina told Brandt: You always have a choice". What does that mean to Karolina and the Dollmaker in the novel? What does that mean to you? Discuss ways you can be brave and kind to those around you.

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