



PSEUDONYMOUS BOSCH

TEACHERS' NOTES

SYNOPSIS

Cass is a survivalist. And Cass is great at spotting potential disasters wherever she goes. The only trouble is that Cass spots so many disasters that no-one ever believes her when she tells them about it.

But then Cass meets Max-Ernest who is desperate for a friend to listen to him – he loves to talk – and suddenly Cass has a willing sidekick for her adventures.

Cass introduces Max-Ernest to the Symphony of Smells, a strange box full of strange smelling vials that turned up at her grandfathers' antiques store, and together they begin to unravel the mystery that surrounds it.

This mystery takes them to a magician's house where they discover a notebook containing the story of the Bergamo Brothers – yet another mystery to be solved. And it's at the magician's house that they first come across Dr L. and Ms. Mauvais and realise immediately that there is something very strange about these two.

Then Ms. Mauvais and Dr L. turn up at Cass and Max-Ernest's school and Cass knows that they won't be there for a good reason. She tries hard to warn her principal, but as usual, her warnings fall on deaf ears. Then artistic prodigy Benjamin Blake goes missing and Cass knows that Ms. Mauvais and Dr L. are responsible.

With her warnings about Benjamin Blake ignored, Cass decides to take matters into her own hands, and journeys to the Midnight Sun – supposed spa and home to Dr L and Ms. Mauvais. Here Cass finds herself in much more danger than she ever could have imagined, and involved in a secret world much more mysterious than she could ever have made up.

With the help of her ever faithful friend, Max-Ernest, Cass must try to tie all the pieces of the mystery together to find Benjamin Blake and save him from whatever nefarious scheme Dr L. and Ms. Mauvais have in stall for him.

THEMES

As is clear from the title, secrets is a key theme in this novel. Cass and Max-Ernest show us both the danger of keeping secrets, but also how they can help to build unlikely friendships and cement them for the future. Alongside secrets, mystery and suspense are also key themes, with the novel centring around the sleuth work of Cass and Max-Ernest, and the gradual unravelling of clues to solve the mystery of the Symphony of Smells.

Friendship is another key theme, with Cass and Max-Ernest learning how to navigate their new friendship, whilst facing the challenges that come with it along the way. Both learn about the importance of friendship and about the need to stand by your friends no matter what the circumstances.

The senses are also central to the storyline, with the Symphony of Smells and all the mystery around it wrapped up in the senses. The novel explores the importance of them, and how adults forget how valuable they are.

Finally, the novel looks at truth and lies, and how sometimes you have to believe the impossible, because sometimes that's where the truth lies.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES

SYMBOLS

There are several recurring symbols across the novel. What do you think each of these suggest? Are there any others that you think are important?

- Books
- The Magician's notebook
- The Symphony of Smells
- Cass's rucksack

Re-read the last paragraph on page 87. Pick three of the objects and explain what you think they were used for.

CLUES

The novel is full of lots of clues to solve the mystery of the Symphony of Sounds. As you read, note down the clues and start to make connections between them.

BOOKS

- 'Generally speaking, books don't cause much harm. Except when you read them, that is. Then they cause all kinds of problems. Books can, for example, give you ideas. I don't know if you've ever had an idea before, but, if you have, you know how much trouble an idea can get you into. Books can also provoke emotions. And emotions sometimes are even more troublesome than ideas. Emotions have led people to do all sorts of things they later regret – like, oh, throwing a book at someone else.'
- What is the significance of books in the opening of the novel? Do you think this was a good way to open the novel? Do you agree with what the author is saying about books?

- 'To her mother, books were better than travel. "Who needs to go somewhere when you can read about it," her mother liked to say.' p104 Do you agree with Cass's mother? Why do you think she thinks like this?
- In the Midnight Sun, Cass and Max-Ernest find 'a small vault-like library crammed with books – piles and piles of books – all of them, you could tell at a glance, rare and priceless. [...] It was like walking into a treasure trove of books, hoarded by private librarians.' p296 Why do you think Dr L. and Ms. Mauvais have so many books? What do you think the value of them is?
- In the fire, the books are all but lost: 'Portraits of medieval monsters were devoured in flames and bits of engraved bat wings flew through the smoke. It had been the best library of its kind this side of Budapest. Now it would be gone for ever – and no one even stopped to look.' p334 What is the significance of the burning books? Why do you think 'medieval monsters' and 'bat wings' were mentioned? What does the last sentence in particular suggest?

SECRETS

- Re-read the description of secrets from the start of the novel (before Chapter 1) and pick out three points that you think are important about secrets. What do you think they suggest might happen in the rest of the novel?
- Chapter 3 starts with 'Question: What is not enough for one, just right for two, and too much for three? Answer: A secret.' p38 Do you agree with this statement? What do you think will go wrong for Cass in the novel?
- When Max-Ernest tells Cass his joke about secrets (the quote above) Cass replies saying "But that doesn't make any sense. One person can have a secret. Three people can have a secret. It doesn't matter how many people have a secret, as long as they don't tell anybody else." p48 Who do you agree with? Does Cass's point make sense? What would your definition of a secret be?
- In chapter 5 we find out what happened to Cass's dad. She then says to Max-Ernest "Anyway, it's a kind of secret. I mean, not a secret secret. Just – I don't like to talk about it." p70 Why do you think she's shared this secret with Max-Ernest. What do secrets mean to Cass?
- Why does Dr. L personify 'the Secret' in chapter 25?
- Dr. L tells the kids that "it's what the Secret will do to you that you should be scared of." And Max-Ernest replies saying "What do you mean? Secrets don't do anything." p269 Who do you think is right? Do you think secrets have the power to scare others? How do you think this 'Secret' could hurt Max-Ernest and Cass?
- What do you think the final secret is and why do you think the secret holder chose to invite Max-Ernest and Cass into the circle of the secret?

NARRATIVE DEVICES

- How does the author use narrative hooks to make you want to read on in the opening chapters?
- On p31, Gloria is talking about decomposing corpses, and the narrator says '(although,

I hasten to point out, her knowledge of corpses was not yet first hand)'. How is this a narrative hook? What does it suggest will happen later on in the novel?

- The novel contains lots of footnotes. Why do you think this is? What does it suggest to you about the narrator?
- The narrator addresses the reader throughout the novel. Why do you think this is? Find some examples of where the author does this and explain how this engages the reader in the story.
- Chapter 17 is purely from the perspective of the narrator, why do you think Cass and Max-Ernest's story is told within another story? Did this chapter engage you as a reader? Why? Why not?
- Chapter 18 includes lots of pathetic fallacy. Find three different examples of the weather in the chapter and explain what each of them could suggest about Cass's situation.
- The narrator starts chapter 19 by saying 'I hope it's not giving away too much to tell you that, only two days later, the Midnight Sun would be devoured by fire.' p204 Why do you think the narrator gives the reader this information? Do you think it is giving too much away?

CASSANDRA

- What's the significance of the name Cassandra? Re-read page 22 to help you. How is the real Cassandra similar or dissimilar to the myth Cassandra?
- What do you learn about Cass in chapter 2? Which points do you think will be the most significant as the novel progresses?
- In chapter 3 we learn a bit more about Cass's life at school. How do the other children treat her? How do you think she feels about this? Use quotations from the chapter to support your points.
- Why does Cass think 'Maybe Max-Ernest wasn't so bad after all.' p50 at the end of chapter 3?
- At the end of chapter 8, Cass talks about how with her mother gone she'll be able to investigate more about the magician and how she wants everyone to 'know what a hero she was and that her predictions were real and that she wasn't crying wolf.' p105 Why is this important to Cass? Why does she want other people to see her as a hero? Why does she need others to believe that she wasn't crying wolf? What do these things show us about her as a character?
- When Max-Ernest tells Cass he has a doctor's appointment and can't go to the magician's house, Cass says "'Don't worry, I know how to handle myself," said Cass, which was a line she had once heard in a movie.' p113 Why do you think Cass chooses to copy someone else's words rather than using her own?
- There are multiple moments throughout the novel where Cass says something that offends another character and then feels bad about it afterwards. Find an example in the novel of this and explain why you think Cass acts this way.
- Why do you think Cass believes that Benjamin Blake going missing is her fault?

- Why do you think Cass says no when Amber offers her a Smoochie at the end of the book? How does this show development in her as a character?

MAX-ERNEST

- What do you learn about Max-Ernest in chapter 3? Find three quotes to describe him.
- Why do you think Max-Ernest 'had been trying out a new joke every day for months'? p49
- 'Cass was becoming very impatient with Max Ernest's strictly logical way of thinking. He reminded her of the artificial intelligence programme she had tried at school; he only gave you the answer you wanted if you asked the right way. The difference was: you could turn off the artificial intelligence program. Turning off Max-Ernest was not an option.' p75 How is the relationship developing between Cass and Max-Ernest. Why do you think Max-Ernest behaves like this?
- Why do you think Max wants to stop the investigation at the end of chapter 14? How is his response to the end of the notebook different to Cass's? What does this show about them as characters?
- Max-Ernest's doctor has a theory that 'Max-Ernest talked about things in order to avoid having feelings about them.' p216 Do you think this is true? Whereabouts in the novel do we see examples of this?
- What do you think Ms. Mauvais and Dr. L have done to Max-Ernest? Why do you think he's acting so strangely on page 245?
- Why do you think Max-Ernest can keep a cool head in chapter 28 to solve the riddle when Cass can't? How has he changed since the start of the novel?

SENSES

- Why is the sense of smell significant in chapter 4?
- When Cass and Max-Ernest are in the magician's house in chapter 6, there are no personal possessions anywhere, but 'Cass could feel the personality of the dead magician.' p80 How does she use her senses to make guesses about what the magician was like?
- In chapter 14, we discover that the magician has synaesthesia 'the confusion of the senses' p153 Why is this significant? How might this link to the Symphony of Smells?
- On page 163, we find out another child with synaesthesia has been kidnapped. What do you think was significant about her and Luciano? What's the connection with the golden haired woman?
- Why is the disappearance of Benjamin Blake significant in chapter 15? How does this link to the senses?
- What do you learn about Benjamin Blake in chapter 26 and why is it important?
- How are Cass and Max-Ernest able to manipulate the senses to save Benjamin Blake? What have they learned about the power of the senses?

TRUTH AND LIES

- 'As much as they differed from each other, Cass and Max-Ernest had one thing in common: neither was a liar. This was unfortunate. As I'm sure you know from experience, lying is an important skill to have.' p62 Do you think this is true? Why could lying be important?
- Why do you think Cass has never lied before? What does this tell you about her as a character? Why is she now prepared to lie to her mother in chapter 5?
- Why do you think 'For Max-Ernest, lying proved more difficult.'? p66
- There are lots of times in the novel where Cass is telling the truth but nobody believes her. Find an example of this in the novel and explain why you think Cass wasn't believed.
- Cass lies to Ms. Mauvais in order to get into the Midnight Sun. Why do you think she has gone from never telling lies at the start of the novel to telling multiple lies later on?
- At the end of the novel, almost no-one believes Cass and Max-Ernest about what really happened to Benjamin Blake. Why do you think the truth isn't always believed in the novel? Why do you think often lies are believed?

FRIENDSHIP

- How does the friendship between Cass and Max-Ernest develop across the novel? How are they similar? How are they different?
- When Cass finds out the way to read the magician's notebook, 'She wanted nothing more than to start reading but she knew that wouldn't be fair to Max-Ernest. As annoying as he was, she reminded herself, they were collaborators.' p129 Why is Cass loyal to Max-Ernest? What does this action show you about their friendship?
- When Cass is talking to one of the most popular girls in school, Amber, Max-Ernest tells Amber "'We're collaborators'" 'Which made Cass want to throttle him.' p169 Why do you think Cass feels this way?
- Why do you think Cass and Max-Ernest fall out in chapter 15? Use quotations to support your answer. Do you think they will make up again? Why? Why not?
- In chapter 16, left without Max-Ernest when going to her dark house, Cass thought 'Had a friend been with her, she might not have felt so uneasy. But she pushed the thought away. It was better working on her own, she reminded herself. That was the whole point of being a survivalist.' p179 What do you think Cass is realising about friendship? Why is she trying to convince herself otherwise?
- When Max-Ernest arrives at the Midnight Sun, Cass was 'No longer angry at him, she was aware only of how lonely and scared she'd been since their partnership had ended.' p243 Why do you think Cass feels like this? Why do you think Max-Ernest has come to the Midnight Sun?
- When Max-Ernest tells Cass he came to the Midnight Sun to rescue her, they become collaborators once more and the narrator says 'I'll point out that as glad as he was, Cass was more so. You see, as many times as she had tried to save the world, nobody had ever tried to save her before.' p268 Consider Cass's relationships with other characters in the novel, why could you suggest that her relationship with Max-Ernest is stronger?

- How does Cass and Max-Ernest's friendship develop further in chapter 30? Try to reference the footnote at the end of the chapter in your answer.
- What do you think Cass learns about friendship by the end of the novel? Use quotations to support your ideas.

DR. L AND MS. MAUVAIS

- In chapter 7, we are introduced to Dr. L and Ms. Mauvais. How does the author create an air of suspicion around these characters? Use quotations to support your points.
- How does the author show that Dr. L is a creepy character in chapter 19? Use quotations to support your points.
- How does Ms. Mauvais start to make Cass doubt herself in chapter 22?
- What do you think Dr. L and Ms. Mauvais have done to the guests at the spa? Why are Max-Ernest and Gloria acting so strangely in chapter 23?
- Over dinner at the Midnight Sun, Ms. Mauvais brings up the magician's notebook. Why do you think Dr. L 'had remained remarkably quiet ever since she had brought up the notebook.' p256?
- How is Ms. Mauvais shown to change in chapter 25 now her secret is out? Find quotations to support your answer.
- What do you think these two characters teach us across the novel?

ADULTS

- In one of the footnotes it says 'Grown-ups can be useful at times – money and car rides come to mind. But they also have a habit of getting in the way when you want to do something they don't approve of.' p120 Do you agree with this statement? How do you think the adults in this novel get in the way of Cass and Max-Ernest's plans?
- Dr L. explains in chapter 29 that for babies "'The world is a blur of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch – and maybe of senses we don't even know about. As the baby grows older, the senses separate from each other and forget that they all once sang the same song [...] We think of this new adult world as 'reality'. But what if it is reality that is lost? What if the real world were the baby's world, a world where everything and everyone were interconnected?'" p313 Why do you think he wants a world like this? What do you think he thinks the problem with the adult world is?
- Why do you think the character Owen is included in the novel? How is he presently differently from the other adults? Find quotations to support your answer.

What do you think the purpose of Grandpa Larry and Grandpa Wayne is in the novel? What do they show us about adults? Use quotations to support your points.

CREATIVE TASKS

USING A STIMULUS

- Using the exact structure of letters and words, make up the story of Chapter 1.
- In chapter 6, Cass and Max-Ernest go to a magician's house. Design your own floor plan for what you think a magician's house would look like.
- Re-read the last paragraph on page 87. Pick one of the objects and write a short story that starts off with someone discovering that object.
- Come up with a title for chapter 8.
- Create your own story of what happened to Luciano.
- Use the title of chapter 16 'A Rumour About Monkey Blood, A Forged Ransom Note, And a Scary Phone Call' as the start of a short story
- Re-read page 295 and create your own file for a child prodigy, then write a short story about how they met Ms. Mauvais and Dr. L.
- Pick one section from chapter 32 and using the information given to you, write a short story about what happened in that section.

WRITING FROM A CHARACTER'S PERSPECTIVE

- Re-read the Magician's story from page 142-149. Pick one of the other characters that appears in the story e.g. the ringmaster or Sammy and re-tell it from their perspective.
- Tell the story of the night of the fire (page 162) from Luciano's perspective.

WRITING TO PERSUADE

- Read the description about the Midnight Sun on page 181 – Create a poster advertising the spa using the information given to help you.
- Imagine you are Ms. Mauvais. Write a speech persuading Benjamin Blake to join you at the Midnight Sun.
- Imagine you are Cass. Write a letter to Mrs Johnson convincing her about what really happened to Benjamin Blake.

PROMOTING THE NOVEL

- You work in the marketing department for Usborne publishing. Plan a marketing campaign to promote The Name of this Book is Secret Include:
 - A poster to go up in school libraries
 - A bookmark aimed at readers
 - A review of the book (can be written or recorded)
 - An advert in a newspaper or magazine
 - Merchandise to be sold in bookshops