

The Great Orlando

Author: Ben Brown

Illustrator: Helen Taylor

Synopsis

Sunday Jones lives with his father at the end of Bastion Street. His father is a cruel and miserable man who doesn't really care about his son. Sunday's mother, a warm and loving woman, used to protect him from his cruel father. But now that she is dead, Sunday's father makes his life a misery. He has to cook and clean and take care of himself in every way.

When Sunday's principal tells the students that there is going to be an end of year show at the school, Sunday decides to be a magician. He remembers the wonderful stories that his mother told him when he was younger about The Great Orlando, a boy magician who could make himself invisible or change himself into a bird or a wisp of smoke and fly away. Like his hero, Sunday wants to perform card tricks, pull a dove from a hat and disappear in a cloud of smoke.

Sunday practised a lot before the show practising card trick sleight of hand and the difficult art of disappearing into a cloud of smoke. He made himself a hat that was big enough to hold a dove and still sit on his head. The only thing he didn't have was a dove.

Even Sunday's father attends the school performance, although this is more for the supper afterwards than to see his son perform. The Great Orlando impresses everyone in the audience with his card tricks (except his father, who doesn't believe in magic). But The Great Orlando isn't finished yet. He reaches into his hat to pull out a dove, but his hat is empty. The audience waits with bated breath and you'll never believe what happens next...

Text Type

The Great Orlando is a delightful illustrated book designed for children but suitable for readers of all ages. The story contains some sophisticated ideas which could be examined in depth with older students. These include abuse, losing someone you love, freedom, hope and revenge. The story is about magic and how important it is to have something to believe in.

The book contains gorgeous illustrations that bring the story to life. Recurring motifs of a blue butterfly and cards suggest that even though life is a game of chance, you have the ability to shape your own destiny and transform yourself. The dove is a well-known symbol of peace and freedom.

Sharing the Story

The story can easily be read in one setting. It could be read aloud or students could read it individually. It is important that students examine the illustrations because these really bring the story to life. Of primary importance at this stage is that students enjoy the story.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Why do you think the story is called *The Great Orlando*?
- What clues do the cover illustrations give you about what the book might be about?
- Who is the main character in the story?
- What does the main character believe in?

After reading the illustrated story students discuss and answer the following questions:

Comprehension and Discussion

- Where does The Great Orlando live? What is The Great Orlando known as at the start of the story?
- Does Sunday's house seem like a nice place to live? Why/why not?
- What does the illustration of Sunday sitting in front of his house suggest about Sunday's mood or feelings?
- Describe Sunday's dad.
- What happened to Sunday's mother? What bedtime stories did she used to tell him? How did Sunday's life change after his mother died? What does the illustration suggest that Sunday's life was like while his mother was alive?
- What does the author mean when he says that Sunday "made his own way in the world"? How do you think Sunday's father's abuse and neglect makes him feel? What does the illustration on this page reveal about Sunday's feelings? What do you think is significant about the window?
- What announcement does the school principal make during the last term of school?
- What do the Emiline sisters want to do for the concert? What about Jeremy Johnson and Monty and Blake?
- What does Sunday Jones say that he wants do for the concert? Why do you think he chooses this act?
- How does Sunday practise for the show? What do you think is meant by "sleight of hand"? Why does Sunday need an extra large hat?
- Why does Sunday's father go to the concert?
- Why do you think the blue butterfly is in so many of the illustrations? What might this butterfly represent?
- Why doesn't Sunday's father like the Emiline sisters' song?
- What does Jeremy Johnson juggle? Does it matter that he dropped one?

- How does The Great Orlando impress the crowd? Why isn't Orlando's father impressed by his son's performance?
- What happens when Orlando reaches inside his hat? Why is Orlando sad when he looks out at the audience? What does the author mean when he says that "even" Sunday's father was curious to see what happened?
- What happens when The Great Orlando claps his hands together?
- How does the audience react to this trick?
- What comes out of The Great Orlando's hat when Mr Gribble picks it up? Where do you think the dove came from?
- What happens to Sunday's father at the end of the story?
- How do you think Sunday's life might be different after this night?
- Do you believe in magic? Why/why not?

Activities

Diary Entry – Imagine that you are Sunday. Write a diary entry about the day of the End of Year concert. Remember to include your thoughts and feelings about what is going on.

Character – Explain how you are similar or different to Sunday, or explain how your father is different than Sunday's.

Advice for a character – Many characters in books need advice on how to deal with a problem. Write a letter to Sunday. In the letter give him advice on how to deal with his miserable home life.

Poster – Design a poster advertising the book *The Great Orlando*. Include a brief summary about the book and illustrations that show the settings and events in the story.

Writing – Write an epilogue for the story that explains what happened after the end of year concert.

Questions – Write 5 discussion questions for the story.

Letter to the Author – Write a letter to the author of *The Great Orlando*. Explain what you liked about the story and what lessons it taught you.

Monologue – Create a monologue for Sunday in an important part of the novel. What is he thinking and feeling in that moment? Why?

Round table – Have a discussion with a group about what intrigues, bothers, interests or confuses you about the story.

Static Image – Design a programme for the end of year concert.

Personal Effects – Put together a collection of Sunday’s personal effects (objects or things that are important to him). Explain the significance of these items to Sunday.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd