



TEACHERS' NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Middle to upper primary (ages 9–11; years 4 to 5)

CONTENTS

1. Plot summary	1
2. About the author	2
3. Author's inspiration	2
4. Pre-reading questions	3
5. Writing style	3
6. Key study topics	3
7. Discussion questions	4
8. Suggested Activities	4
9. Themes	5
10. Further research	5
11. Further reading	6

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, History
- **General capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking; Intercultural Understanding; Literacy

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Story forms: historical fiction/fantasy, fairytale and literary references
- How an author constructs voice and character
- Researching history, building vocabulary
- Explore values: bravery, selflessness, fortitude, resilience and friendship

THEMES

- Confidence, courage and belonging
- Bullying and overcoming adversity
- Friendship and cooperation
- Wealth and poverty/equality and justice
- History: Italian Renaissance

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Belinda Murrell, 2021

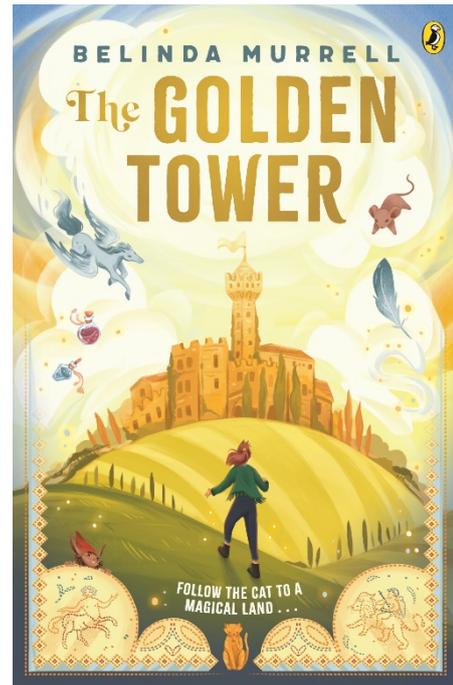
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The Golden Tower

Belinda Murrell

PLOT SUMMARY

In her wildest dreams, Sophie never thought she might be kidnapped by a cat and taken to a world of flying horses and wonder – but also magic, mystery and danger!

Transported to the land of Tuscia, Sophie accidentally saves the daughter of a wealthy family and is swept along on their journey to the Golden Tower.

Now she is the only one standing between sisters Isabella and Bia and the terrible fate their stepmother has planned.

Sophie doesn't think she is brave enough, but with the help of a talking cat, a stableboy and some very tiny mischief-makers, she might be able to save the day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At about the age of eight, Belinda Murrell began writing stirring tales of adventure, mystery and magic in hand-illustrated exercise books. As an adult, she combined two of her great loves – writing and travelling the world – and worked as a travel writer, journalist and public relations consultant. Now, inspired by her own three children, Belinda is an award-winning, internationally published children's author with a history of writing in her family that spans over 200 years. She has written more than 35 books including The Sun Sword trilogy and her time-slip adventures, *The Locket of Dreams*, *The Ruby Talisman*, *The Ivory Rose*, *The Forgotten Pearl*, *The River Charm*, *The Sequin Star*, and *The Lost Sapphire*. For younger readers Belinda has her popular Lulu Bell and Pippa's Island series. Her latest book is *The Golden Tower*, a timeslip/fantasy set in a magical Italian Renaissance inspired world. Belinda lives in Manly in a gorgeous old house overlooking the sea with her husband Rob, her three beautiful children – Nick, Emily and Lachlan – and her dog Rosie. She is an Author Ambassador for Room to Read and Books in Homes. Find out more about Belinda at her website: www.belindamurrell.com.au

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Belinda says:

One of the greatest inspirations for this book is the many travel adventures I have shared with my family, especially in Italy. These have included scrambling through ancient Roman ruins, hiking the Tuscan countryside, staying in crumbling medieval towers, exploring Renaissance palazzos, studying Renaissance art, music and history, and reading Italian fairytales.

Four years ago, while wandering the streets of Trastevere, in Rome with my family, we stumbled upon an alleyway called Vicolo di Mazzamurelli. We joked that it was named after us – the Murrell family. Later, I discovered the alley was named for the neighbouring palazzo that had been home to a group of particularly noisy and mischievous Italian goblins called mazzamurelli, similar to Irish leprechauns or Scottish brownies. This book draws upon this folklore, as well as Italian fairytales such as *Il Gatto Mammone*, the demon cat, and *Petrosinella* and *Bella Venezia*, where young girls are locked in towers and rather than being rescued by a charming prince, must use their wits to escape.

While this story is a fantasy, with elements of magic, mythological creatures and time travel, it is also firmly rooted in the history, architecture, and culture of Renaissance Italy, which I adore. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, daughters of noble families were rigorously educated in the humanist tradition,

learning together with their brothers about philosophy, poetry, Latin, Greek, literature, mathematics, science, art, music, diplomacy and sword fighting. My story is inspired by some of these intelligent, bold and courageous Italian women particularly Caterina Sforza, Isabella d'Este and Lucretia Borgia.

Caterina Sforza, Countess of Forli, nicknamed the 'tigress', was betrothed at 10, married at 14, and became a skilled alchemist, medic, hunter, fencer, diplomat, daring military strategist, and fierce warrior. Over many years, she experimented to produce hundreds of recipes for medicines, cosmetics and poisons. She is famous for storming and winning the fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, leading her troops when she was only twenty-one years old, and while seven months pregnant. She rode on horseback across the River Tiber, wearing a tan satin dress, a plumed velvet hat and carrying a sword.

Isabella d'Este, the Marchioness of Mantua, was engaged at six, married at 15, and known for her keen intelligence, diplomatic skills, humanitarian values and musical ability. She is famous for her studiolo, where she collected curiosities and artworks from around the world. When she was eight months pregnant her husband was captured and taken prisoner by the invading Venetians. She took command of the army, fought off the invaders and eventually secured his release.

Lucretia Borgia was betrothed at 11, married at 13, and was renowned for her beauty and intelligence, being fluent in several languages, playing the lute and violin, and becoming an able politician. The Borgias were famous for murdering their political opponents, using a complex potion called La Canterella. Lucretia was rumoured to wear a ring with a hollow chamber, which she used to poison the drinks of her enemies.

I also drew on the history of Florence's de' Medici family. Cosimo de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, was the grandson of Caterina Sforza. He had several children including Bia and her half-sister Isabella, the principessa or princess of Tuscany, who lived with their grandmother at a villa in the country. Lovely Bia was happy, talkative and adored by her father and grandmother but died from a virulent fever aged five. She is immortalised in a beautiful portrait by Agnolo Bronzino, which hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Isabella was reputed to be impulsive, unusually independent, high spirited, a talented musician and a great beauty, with red hair like her sister. She was betrothed at 11, married at 16 and developed an aptitude for politics, becoming the first lady of Florence. Isabella also died young, reputedly murdered by her husband.



Lastly, I was fascinated by the Tuscan tale of 16-year-old Margherita Marsili, an intelligent and exuberant noble girl from Siena, known as the 'bella rossellana', because of her flaming red hair and sea-coloured eyes. She was abducted from her family's hunting tower, with her younger brothers, by Barbary pirates in 1543 and taken to the Ottoman court in Constantinople as a slave. Margherita charmed her way to freedom, and eventually married Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, becoming Sultana, one of the most powerful women in the history of the Ottoman empire.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

Look at the cover of the book. What type of clues are given within the cover illustration to let you know what type of book this is?

How differently would you imagine Sophie as you were reading if you could see her face on the cover? Why would this make a difference? Do you think this was a deliberate decision by the illustrator?

Analyse elements of the book cover design by Christa Moffitt and comment on what makes them effective. Consider colour, font and images in your discussion. Why were these elements chosen? What would you have done differently if you were designing this book cover?

WRITING STYLE

Questions

1. *The Golden Tower* is a time-slip novel. What do you think that means? Have you read other time-slip novels? Or seen movies or television shows with time-slip elements?
2. How does the time-slip element of the story add to the tension of Sophie's adventure? Do you think the author has used this literary device well?

Activities

- Choose a description of one of the buildings featured in *The Golden Tower* (Eg the description of Castello de Vorrone on page 24 or the description of The Golden Tower on page 62) or one of the characters like Bia or Rocco. Now pick a different genre of writing (Eg sci-fi, western, romance, comic.) and describe these buildings or characters as if they were in that different genre's style of book. Use the language and style of your chosen genre. (Eg describe the Golden Tower as if it were a building in a western novel, or Bia if she was a girl living on a space ship.)

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Living in Renaissance Italy

Write a newspaper report describing what life is like for families like Zita's, working as a servant for a rich family, back in the Renaissance period. Consider food, work, clothes, lifestyle, education and entertainment. Include quotes from fictional characters to give differing points-of-view.

Draw a map or floorplan of your own palazzo or castle, labelling all the elements. Does it have towers? Fortifications? Gardens? Open outdoor areas?

Fairytale or archetypal tropes and literary references

This novel is redolent with fairytale motif and literary references in story structure, plot and character.

- Setting: Castle/palace/towers/gardens
- Characters: Heroine (Sophie); villain/wicked stepmother (Ginevre); friends and helpers (Nicco, Pozzaro and Scazzo); damsel in distress (Isabella and Bia); faithful family retainers (Signora Cannoli, Zita); evil henchman (Rocco), rejected suitor (Pappalardo); wise mentor (Nanna/Nonna), animal friends (Baccio, Lupo); mythical creatures (unicorns, mermaids, centaurs, fauns), magical Land (Tuscia).
- Trope of journey, struggle against adversity, escape, and renewal or resolution.

Questions

1. Discuss the parallels between this novel and other fairytales. Eg Rapunzel, Snow White.
2. What were the key events in the journey undertaken by Sophie in this novel?

Activities

- Write your own fairytale, including elements such as talking animals, magical objects or powers, fairy sprites, mythical creatures or curses. Think of common fairytale tropes and how you can change these to surprise your reader. For example, Sophie and Isabella must use their wits to escape from the tower, rather than being rescued by a charming prince. Likewise, Ginevre is a witch, but she is not old and ugly, but rather extremely beautiful.
- *The Golden Tower* was partly inspired by Italian fairytales such as Petrosinella and Bella Venezia. Read these Italian fairytales and compare them to the English version of Rapunzel. How are they similar? How are they different?



Characters

Choose two favourite characters. Write a detailed character description of each including personality, physical appearance, flaws, strengths, values, ambitions and passions. Compare and contrast the two characters. Do they change throughout the story? What do they learn? Draw a character arc to show how they change.

There are magical creatures as well as humans in the story. How does the author make the magical characters sympathetic and likable to the reader? Which is your favourite magical character? List what makes them so appealing. (Eg is it because they sometimes have human characteristics?)

Setting

Identify two of the main settings described in the book. This could be Kent in the present, Castello de Vorrone, the tower or the Palazzo de Fiori in Tuscia, or any of the other places described in the book. Find passages that describe these settings and highlight words and language devices that the author has used to create the sense of place. Compare the atmosphere and physical details of these different settings.

Look at the ways the author uses the weather of a setting to create contrast and mood. Can you think of other stories that you have read where this has been done?

Time-travel story

Write a short story about travelling back in time. Where would you go? How would you get there? (For example, Sophie finds a portal in the Roman ruins). Who would you meet? What do you see? What happens? How do you get back home? How do you feel when you are safely home (relieved, happy, sad the adventure is over, angry)?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the most important theme or message of the book? Find examples of scenes and quotes in *The Golden Tower* which explore this theme. How is this theme relevant to you and your own life?
2. Do you think characters such as Sophie, Nicco, Leo and Isabella change through their adventures? How do they alter? Brainstorm some of the ways these characters change throughout the book.
3. In *The Golden Tower* there are stories of different characters from diverse backgrounds. Make a list of characters and summarise some of their experiences, feelings and history. Are there

similarities in some of their experiences despite their different backgrounds?

4. Wouldn't it be amazing if you had a magical power? Brainstorm ideas for different magical powers.
5. Most women had little education or power; poor children worked long and hard from a young age; people frequently died from fevers and accidents. People in the past thought very differently about issues such as equality, behaviour, education, health, culture and the role of women. Can you list some of the differences between Renaissance Italy and today?
6. If you could travel back in time, where would you go and when?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Collage

Create a collage using words and images that represent one major theme of *The Golden Tower*.

Using collage as a medium, create a representation of one of the mosaics found under the hillside at the start of the story.

Letter writing

Pretend you are a character in the book and write a letter explaining what you have experienced. How do you feel? How has your life changed? How can you make your letter as interesting as possible for your reader?

Revolted Recipes

Sophie finds some unusual medical remedies in Ginevre's recipe book, such as this one (based on a real medieval medical remedy) for quinsy (an inflammation or infection of the throat):

For quinsy – take a fat cat. Clean and gut. Stuff the cat with chopped fenugreek, sage, honeysuckle gum, hedgehog grease and bear fat. Roast cat as you would a goose. Anoint patient with roast drippings.

Make up your own revolted recipe for a common ailment, or research other medieval medical remedies.

Famous people

The book mentions or is inspired by some real people who were famous during the Renaissance such as Michelangelo, Botticelli, Agnolo Bronzino, Leonardo da Vinci, Caterina Sforza, Lucretia Borgia, Isabella d'Este and de Medici family. Research some facts about these people.



THEMES

- **Making a difference:** an individual can make a difference to their lives and the lives of others, as Sophie does when she helps Isabella solve her problems and inspires Zita to become an apprentice chef.
- **Friendship:** standing up for your friends, as Sophie does when she confronts Ginevre. Becoming close friends, despite your differences, as Sophie does with Isabella, Bia, Leo and Nicco.
- **Bullying:** Sophie has been bullied by Indigo because of her dyslexia. Initially, she hides and runs away, but Nanna encourages her to face up to her problems.
- **Overcoming adversity:** Sophie struggles with a learning difficulty called dyslexia, which can make it difficult for her to decode letters and numbers.
- **Coping with change:** as Sophie does when she leaves her home and family behind and arrives in Tuscany. Nicco has coped with losing his whole family to a fever, going to live with Nonna, then later becoming a stable boy. Isabella also has to cope with many changes: losing her mother, living with Nonna, being rejected by her father and coming to Bellomo.
- **Courage:** Sophie, Nicco and Isabella must find their courage to fight against Ginevre and Rocco.
- **Kindness and generosity vs intolerance.**
- **Wealth and poverty:** the wealth of the aristocracy vs the lives of poor servants like Zita and Agata.
- **Growing up:** finding your voice, discovering what is important to you and bravely standing up for what you believe in, as Sophie does when she stands up to Ginevre, as Isabella does to Pappalardo.
- **Equality and justice:** rich and poor, men and women, right and wrong.
- **History:** the Italian Renaissance; the lives of rich and poor and the changing role of women in society; preserving the relics and architecture of the past; the art, history, society and culture of Renaissance Italy.
- **Magic and wonder.**

FURTHER RESEARCH

During her research, Belinda visited many important Italian settings including Palazzo Davanzati, Torre Guinigi, Palazzo Vecchio, as well as locations in England, such as Lullingstone Roman villa. Find out more at the following websites:

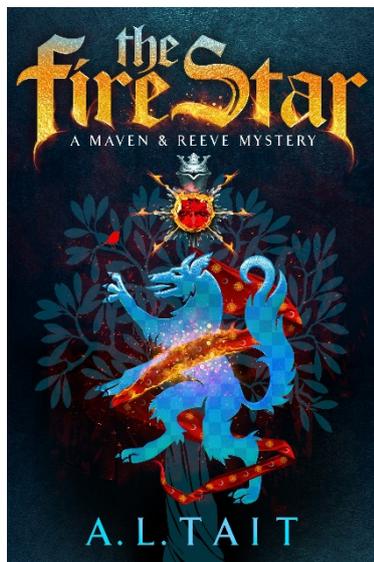
www.visitflorence.com/florence-museums/palazzo-davanzati.html

www.tuscany.co/sightseeing-lucca/torre-guinigi.html
archaeopress.wordpress.com/2019/09/30/culture-and-society-at-lullingstone-roman-villa/

www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/portrait-of-bia-de-medici
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella_de%27_Medici



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



The Fire Star: A Maven & Reeve Mystery
by A. L. Tait

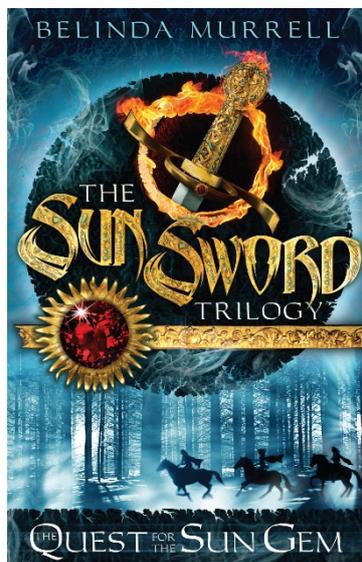
A maid with a plan. A squire with a secret. A missing jewel. A kingdom in turmoil.

Maven and Reeve have three days to solve the mystery of the Fire Star. If they don't, they'll lose everything.

This could be a complete disaster . . . or the beginning of a friendship.

Bestselling author A. L. Tait is back with the intriguing story of two unlikely allies and a mystery to solve that could change their lives.

'I was up past midnight finishing this book! The mystery kept me turning the pages, and I felt like I'd known Maven and Reeve forever.'
– Amie Kaufman, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Ice Wolves*

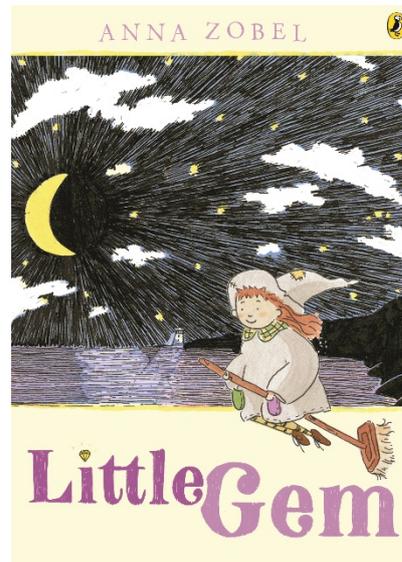


Sun Sword 1: Quest for the Sun Gem
by Belinda Murrell

After their village is attacked, a young brother and sister set off on a dangerous quest to save their captured family and friends – and free their land from the Sedah invaders.

Where are Ethan and Lily's parents being held? And where have the Sun Sword and its magical gems been hidden? Joined by their friend Saxon and the determined Princess Roana, Ethan and Lily must solve puzzles and riddles, escape legendary sea monsters and outwit bandits along the way.

But the greatest threat to the children is the sinister Sedah tracker, Sniffer, who is close on their trail ... Can the four friends find the Sun Gem - before the Sedah can find them?



Little Gem
by Anna Zobel

Sometimes getting a little lost can help you discover who you really are . . .

When her spell at Witchcraft School goes wrong, Gem lands in an unfamiliar, empty cottage, outside a strange, colourful town.

Everyone in Ellsworth Pining thinks Gem is their new village witch, even when Gem tries to correct them. And Gem's new friends do need her. The Weather Worker is missing, and there are tales of a terrifying beast in the woods.

Gem might know a spell that could help – if she can get it right.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
The Golden Tower	Belinda Murrell	9781760897093	4-5	\$16.99		
The Fire Star	A.L. Tait	9781760897079	6+	\$16.99		
Sun Sword book 1	Belinda Murrell	9781760891008	4-6	\$15.99		
Little Gem	Anna Zobel	9781760896089	2-4	\$14.99		
TOTAL						

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