

# REMEMBRANCE by Theresa Breslin

## TEACHING NOTES by Bridget Carrington

**REMEMBRANCE** (Corgi 2003 £5.99) ISBN: 0 552 54738 7

Reading Age 9+  
Interest Level 12+

Audio edition: Read by Frances Thorburn & Gary Bakewell (Random House Audio) 6CDs £12.99 ISBN: 1 85686 860 5

Theresa Breslin is the critically acclaimed author of over 30 books whose work has been filmed for television and dramatised for radio. She has been described as an outstanding writer who combines a powerful sense of drama with memorable characters and superb storytelling. She writes for all age groups covering most fiction genres with some titles especially suitable as EAL readers. She won the Carnegie Medal, the most prestigious award in children's literature, for *Whispers in the Graveyard*, her compelling story of a dyslexic boy.

More information on website: [theresabreslin.com](http://theresabreslin.com)

Bridget Carrington has taught in the primary sector over the last thirty years. She has an MA in Children's Literature and her research for this will form part of the forthcoming Pied Piper Publishing 'Neglected Children's Authors' book *A Victorian Quartet*.

She is currently researching the early history of writing for young adults for a doctorate at Roehampton University. She writes about, reviews, and provides teaching material on a wide range of children's literature.

**REMEMBRANCE** is an **historical novel**, concentrating on the First World War, but it deals with life themes and emotions that are universal and timeless.

**First and foremost it should be read for enjoyment, and analysis of its material should never be allowed to detract from this, its primary intention.**

### **Curriculum links**

The main areas of the curriculum covered by its themes are: **History, PSCHE** – particularly **Citizenship, English** and **Art**.

Themes which relate to the history, English and PSCHE curricula permeate *REMEMBRANCE*. Some of the main areas to consider are indicated below, and can be expanded using themes elaborated later in this guide.

### **History at key stage 3 (Year 9)**

**Unit 18:** Hot war, cold war - why did the major twentieth-century conflicts affect so many people?

**Section 1:** What were the main features of twentieth-century warfare?

### **PSCHE**

Many aspects of PSCHE can be related to the issues raised in *REMEMBRANCE*. Some of the more obvious are:

### **Citizenship at key stage 3 (Year 7-9)**

**Unit 09:** The significance of the media in society

Pupils investigate how the media presents different issues and views; how it can be used to promote causes and campaigns

### **Citizenship at key stage 3 (Year 7-9)**

**Unit 12:** Why did women and some men have to struggle for the vote in Britain? What is the point of voting today? In this unit, pupils learn about the struggle women, and their male supporters, faced in order to achieve universal female suffrage. This is put within the context of the struggle for full male suffrage, and of contemporary ideas about power, voting and the roles of men and women. Pupils will learn that granting the vote to women was, in part, a reflection of changes in society, including changes in beliefs about women's status and role.

### **Citizenship at key stage 3 (Year 7-9)**

**Unit 13:** How do we deal with conflict?

### **Citizenship at key stage 4 (Year 10-11)**

**Unit 08:** Producing the news

In this unit, pupils explore the roles and responsibilities of those in the media who provide information to the public, within the context of a democratic society

## English

The **Framework for Teaching English** seeks to stress that, in the modern world, we place a high premium on the written and spoken word, that reading and writing permeate every aspect of life, and that pleasures often derive from good discussion, excellent books and the power of writing.

As an example, in Year 8 areas of the Framework encourage students to **Write to persuade, argue, advise**

13. present a case persuasively, making selective use of evidence, using appropriate rhetorical devices and anticipating responses and objections
14. develop and signpost arguments in ways that make the logic clear to the reader
15. give written advice which offers alternatives and takes account of the possible consequences

and

### **Write to analyse, review, comment**

16. weigh different viewpoints and present a balanced analysis of an event or issue, e.g. *an historical investigation*
17. integrate evidence into writing to support analysis or conclusions, e.g. *data, quotation*

The power of **poetry** and its ability at times to speak more directly to an audience than prose is particularly important to *REMEMBRANCE*. This can be used directly in Year 9 where students

‘write within the discipline of different poetic forms, exploring how form contributes to meaning, e.g. *different types of sonnet*.’

**Drama:** many of the situations in *REMEMBRANCE* provide powerful stimulus for drama

Year 8 should

15. explore and develop ideas, issues and relationships through work in role
16. collaborate in, and evaluate, the presentation of dramatic performances, scripted and unscripted, which explore character, relationships and issues.

The issues at the core of the novel also provide excellent material for

**Group discussion and interaction**, particularly, in Year 9

9. discuss and evaluate conflicting evidence to arrive at a considered viewpoint

## Art

Characters in *REMEMBRANCE* find solace in sketching their world. This was true for those who served in the First World War as soldiers, but most people now remember the official war artists who were sent to record the scene, and the photographs which survive.

### Art and design at key stage 3 (Year 7)

**Unit 7C:** Recreating landscapes  
to record and analyse first-hand observations

## Synopsis

It is the summer of 1915, and the sound of the guns at the Western Front can be heard across the Channel in England. Throughout Britain, local regiments are recruiting for Kitchener's Army. In the village of Stratharden, the Great War will irrevocably alter the course of five young lives...

*REMEMBRANCE* follows the lives of these five young people through World War 1. This was a time of huge change and upheaval, with issues of pacifism, militarism, the emancipation of women and the development of sociological ideas. It examines the concept of human expression through Art and Literature.

### Analysis of the text:

**Style:** the book describes places and people which are both remote from our own time, but still closely connected with family and community memory.

**How** does Breslin **engage** her readers with her characters, her plot and the events of the time?

Look at the **balance of male and female characters** with whom readers can identify.

- How does the author intersperse the narrative with the facts of historical background?
- What benefits are there from using a third person narrative for this book?
- What difference would it make to tell the story in the first person?

### Language:

The **poetry of the First World War** is renowned for its insight into the reality of warfare. It was written by soldiers who had seen the horrors of the battlefield, and who tried by their writing both **to counter the jingoistic views** which were the official reports, and to address their own mental anguish.

Some of this poetry is featured in Breslin's novel, particularly that of a young infantry officer, **Siegfried Sassoon**.

Sassoon is quoted in both prologue and epilogue to the book, and the publication of his poetry during the war is referred to on pages 227-229.

In this novel **descriptions of emotions and events** are both written in **poetic and powerful** language. Sometimes these combine in passages which emphasize the enormity of warfare in human experience. In the following passage John Malcolm goes 'over the top', and we see his personal isolation, his great vulnerability and his absolute conviction in what he is doing:

*The sense of dislocation that he had experienced on his first tour of duty in the trenches had gone. To begin with, walking in these deep angular fissures of the earth, with the only fixed constant being the narrow running strip of sky above, had made him feel at once remote and insignificant, yet at the same time as if at any moment he could be plucked out and up into the cosmos. All that had now dissipated. This morning he was clearly fixed in time and space, with a deep sense of identity and purpose. He stood with the absolute firmness of spirit that comes with certitude of resolve, his heart singing with confidence...*

*...The whistles for his battalion blew, and laden with his full pack, John Malcolm clambered along the trench line and out through the path marked in their own wire. He struggled to his feet, gripped his rifle firmly with both hands, and walked steadily into the rising sun.*

(from *REMEMBRANCE* pp126-127)

❖ **Construction:**

- What is the purpose of dividing the novel into **parts by year**? How does it help us construct a **timeline** of personal events against the historical timeline of WWI?
- Look carefully at the **cartouches** which preface each year. How does the illustration signal the events to unfold in that year?
- From chapter 13 onwards there is an exchange of **letters** between Charlotte and Francis, and others. Why has the author used letters rather than narrative to describe events and emotions? Compare the different ways in which Vera Brittain wrote about her experiences in her **published account** *Testament of Youth*, her **diary** *Chronicle of Youth*, and the exchange of **letters** between her and soldiers in *Letters from a Lost Generation*
- The war changes young people's lives for ever. **How** does the movement between events on the Western Front, and

those back in Stratharden convey the uncertainty of the time?

- How does the novel help readers to find out about **living and growing up** at a **different time** and in a **different place**?
- Novels in which young people **journey physically**, but also travel from child to adulthood are called '**bildungsroman**'. How does the author's language show that Charlotte, Francis, Maggie, John Malcolm and Alex are travelling **emotionally** as well as physically?
- Another term often used for novels about significant life stages is '**right of passage**'. This recognizes we must have different experiences at different stages in our lives in order to come through them successfully.

❖ **Characters:**

There are five major characters in the novel

- **Charlotte Armstrong-Barnes**, aged fifteen in 1915
- **John Malcolm Dundas**, aged eighteen
- **Francis Armstrong-Barnes**, aged twenty-two
- **Maggie Dundas**, John Malcolm's twin
- **Alex Dundas**, aged fourteen

And a number of others who act as commentators and catalysts:

- **Mrs Armstrong-Barnes**
- **Mr Dundas**
- **Mrs Dundas**
- **Annie**, the Armstrong-Barnes' servant

- Why has the author created fictional characters rather than using real ones?
- **family loyalty and family conflict** feature in this novel. Is it sympathetically portrayed? **Does the reader empathize** with the characters' conflicted emotions or do you think that any of the characters are unbelievable in their actions?
- Francis has very fixed **views about war** which define him as a **pacifist**. Construct **arguments for and against** his case. These could be used in a debate between a supporter of the war, and a **conscientious objector**.
- make a list of the experiences which you think help Charlotte to move from **girl to woman**.
- Which character do you **identify** with most? **Why?**
- How do **characters develop** through their experience? Look at how **Maggie**'s attitudes change between pages 63-64 and 171-179

- To what extent are the **changes** down to the specific experiences attributable to **the war** rather than general **maturation**?

❖ **Plot:**

The novel shows life at an important and distinctive historical period which

still provokes intense debate about ethics and morality.

- **How** does Breslin use her careful **research** into life at these times to inform her **historical** novel? How does she make it **relevant and interesting** to a twenty-first century reader?
- What features of life, opinion and politics show
  - a) **similarities**
  - b) **differences**
 between the way in which we approach war in the twenty-first century?
- How has Breslin used the specific circumstances surrounding the First World War to **liberate her plot** as well as her characters?

**Topics for Discussion:**

➤ **Pacifism / Militarism - Conscientious objectors**

- How far do the attitudes shown by Francis and John Malcolm reflect the **diversity of opinion about warfare** today?
- How do **ignorance and intolerance** fuel this? Look particularly at pages 95-101, 269 and 276
- **Historical comparisons:** how far are the observations about war and soldiering true of more **modern conflicts** such as those in the Middle East?
- Alex is, in effect, a **child soldier**. In WWI this was seen to be heroic. How do we view child soldiers in current conflicts?
- Why did all the men from one area or occupation join the same regiment? What was the consequence of this? What can you find out about **'Pals' Companies** in your area?

➤ **Spin**

- Re-reading pages 59-60 and 162-165 will show how **ensorship** and **media reports** manipulated the dissemination of information to those at home. Today we would call this manipulation of facts 'spin'.
- How far do you believe that the **truth** behind twenty-first century wartime events is made public?

- Why could the **1914-18 spin doctors** not allow descriptions of the battlefield such as appears on page 152 to reach the public at home?
  - Why then was the **poetry written by soldiers** so important to an understanding of the real situation then?
  - **Why is it important now?**
- **Women**
- The First World War was a key factor in the **emancipation** of women. Although she is only 16, Charlotte is expected by her mother to choose a suitable husband and settle down to family life.
  - How does the war change Charlotte's **expectations and life chances**? What difference does it make to her mother's attitudes and expectations? Look at pages 11-12 and 81
  - Maggie comes from a different social background. What are her expectations? What are the expectations which others have of her? Why do they differ from Charlotte's?
  - As Maggie and Charlotte assume their new roles in the workforce, so the barriers between them dissolve. To what general extent are **social barriers** broken down by the new roles women adopt in wartime?
  - **Female emancipation** was largely triggered by the events of 1914-18. **Suffragettes** had fought for this for many years. How was the mind of government changed by the work women undertook during the war?
  - How far do you think the women who handed out **white feathers** understood the conditions at the front, or the arguments against the conflict?
- **Nursing**
- Nursing was always seen as a woman's occupation. How have **wars influenced the organization of nursing?** (remember Florence Nightingale and the Crimean War sixty years before WWI).
  - Charlotte and Maggie discover much to be improved in nursing provision. Enid Bagnold, author of the novel *National Velvet*, was dismissed from her post as a nurse during the First World War because she was **critical of the conditions**.
  - Look again at **Vera Brittain's** writing to see her views

The issues surrounding women and their roles pre, during and post WWI, and an understanding of the impact of the war on whole communities would be central when studying the relevant QCA unit History at key stage 3 (Year 9).

Possibly the most telling strand of this is



‘that twentieth-century conflicts involved civilians as well as the military’.

Students could research the truth of this by comparing the **role of civilians in conflicts** earlier than 1914.

The **scale of military deaths within communities** indicated by inscriptions on city, town and village war memorials will also indicate the impact of this war on the lives of the civilians during and after the war.

➤ **Class, Education and Equality**

- It was not only class which made an enormous difference to access to education and equality. **Gender** did also. Reread pages 34-5, 115 and 169-170.
- **Expectations** for girls and boys were very different. Accordingly their education was different – look at page 179
- Look at the **options on offer for Charlotte compared with her brother**. Francis had been to university. Was this an option for Charlotte? How did this change as a result of the war? Reread pages 284-5.
- **Etiquette** plays an important part in Mrs Armstrong-Barnes’ life. How is it reflected in both the military and nursing hierarchies? Does it change as the war drags on?
- Look at the structure of **village life** in Stratharden. It is largely determined by class divisions. Is it changed by the events of the war?
- How different is **life in the city?** – reread page 114. **Working conditions** and the importance of **trade unions** (page 118) underline some of these differences

### TAKING IT FURTHER

Andrew Hammond: *English for the Common Entrance* (Hodder Murray 2007) P83 Studying Prose – War Stories: Extract from *REMEMBRANCE*

#### **Research**

Students could research what buildings (often, as in *REMEMBRANCE*, the local ‘big house’) in their neighbourhood had been used as hospitals or nursing homes in WWI

#### **Places to visit**

The **Imperial War Museum (IWM)** in London has an extensive collection of material relating to the First World War. Many local museums have

small collections, as do regimental museums – some re-construct an experience centred on trench warfare.

**The Cenotaph** in Whitehall, and the **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier** in Westminster are two of London's well-known monuments, but the scale of the loss of life can be seen by the fact that virtually **every village in the UK has its own war memorial** for the local soldiers, seamen and airmen it lost in this and the 1939-45 war.

**Battlefield Tours** are an invaluable aid to understanding the enormity of the 1914-18 War. The vastness of the cemeteries, and the fact that nearly a hundred years later, daily collections are made of material unearthed in the fields of Flanders – Belgium and Northern France - by farmers – often live ammunition. Any visit should include the

**Cloth Hall at Ieper (Ypres)** an amazing record of WWI in a medieval hall destroyed in the conflict and impeccably rebuilt.

**War Memorials – the Menin Gate in Ieper** with its walls covered in the names of those who died. Large monuments are also to be seen at **Thiepval** on the Somme, and at the other major battlefields.

Virtual tours of all these are available online, but nothing can ever reproduce the powerful effect of seeing the actual cemeteries and monuments.

### **WWI Art in Museums**

<http://www.art-ww1.com/gb/present.html>

Shows work from artists of many different nations, accompanied by poetry and prose which further describes the scenes.

Many museums and galleries have WWI artwork. A visit (real or virtual) to a museum or gallery will allow you to see graphic representations of the War.

### **Bibliography**

First hand accounts of women's experience:

Enid Bagnold: *A Diary without Dates* (Virago 1978)

Vera Brittain: *Testament of Youth* (Virago)

Vera Brittain: *Letters from a Lost Generation* (Abacus 1999)

Vera Brittain: *Chronicle of Youth* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson 2002)

Prose, drama and poetry describing the soldier's experience:

Robert Graves: *Goodbye to All That* (Penguin 1999)

Ernest Hemingway: *A Farewell to Arms* (Vintage 1999)

Erich Maria Remarque: *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Vintage 2007)

Siegfried Sassoon: *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (Faber 2000)

David Roberts: *Out in the Dark: Poetry of the First World War* (Saxon 1998)

R.C. Sherriff: *Journey's End* (Penguin 2000)

As well as anthologies of poetry, there are also collections of the writings of individual soldiers.

There are also a number of modern novels for children which vividly portray the time:

Dennis Hamley: *Ellen's People* (Walker 2006)

Michael Morpurgo: *Private Peaceful* (Harper Collins 2004)

Linda Newbery: *The Shell House* (Random House 2003)

And novels written for adults, such as

Sebastian Faulks: *Birdsong* (Vintage 1994)

Pat Barker: *Regeneration* (Penguin 1992)

Susan Hill; *Strange Meeting* (Penguin 1973)

There are many authoritative non-fiction books about the events of the First World War.

Rose E. B. Coombs: *Before Endeavours Fade* (After the Battle 2006) is an excellent guide to present day Flanders and its WWI heritage.

As well as anthologies of poetry, there are also collections of the writings of individual soldiers.

## Online Resources

Theresa Breslin writes about her research for *REMEMBRANCE* on her own website at:

[www.theresabreslin.com](http://www.theresabreslin.com)

The Write Away website has a guide to The First World War in Children's Literature at [http://www.writeaway.org.uk/images/Infocus/nov\\_dec\\_rg.pdf](http://www.writeaway.org.uk/images/Infocus/nov_dec_rg.pdf)

## WWI

An excellent, extensive site can be found at <http://www.firstworldwar.com/index.htm>

Here you will find information on all aspects of the 1914-18 War, and its repercussions. The section on WWI Poetry is particularly useful, reproducing in its entirety a collection published in 1917.

For more about the poetry, try

[http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/FWW\\_index.html](http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/FWW_index.html)

The BBC Schools site is good, at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/worldwarone/>

It includes links to many websites which have primary material for students to use in their research. Perhaps the single best of these is:

<http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/greatwar>

More information, interactive movies, animations, feature articles and 3-d models can be found at the BBC History site at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/>

An interesting Dutch site (in English) highlights boys like Alex, who joined up under age, together with some images of modern child soldiers.

<http://www.greatwar.nl/>

This site also shows how war photos were manipulated (rather like airbrushing or Photo Shop now!) to produce the image required.

## USING FICTION TO TEACH HISTORY

I have often maintained that fiction may be much more instructive than real history.  
John Foster, preacher, essayist and educationalist (1770 - 1843)

### Why use fiction?

- ❖ whereas textbooks provide generalities and overviews, fiction offers a particular and personal view of life and events in any given period
- ❖ because it is descriptive, it is equally accessible to all students, whatever their level of prior knowledge
- ❖ it offers a 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' approach: it focuses on the detail of people and everyday life rather than that of the elite, political or chronological
- ❖ readers are immersed within the fictional action and must come to their own conclusions about events, characters and motivations
- ❖ it portrays the complexity of issues, introduces students to characters who have different points of view and offers examples of how people deal differently with problems
- ❖ the use of a variety of fiction focussed on a single historical period demonstrates the concept of different interpretations of history
- ❖ it encourages empathy with the reality of history

### What fiction to use?

**The choice of texts is crucial.** To use fiction to best effect, ensure that the texts

- ❖ combine historical accuracy with an engaging narrative
- ❖ portray characters realistically and sympathetically

- ❖ place the action within authentic settings
- ❖ deliver historical fact well integrated into the narrative
- ❖ if illustrated, include images that are historically accurate
- ❖ are sensitive to difference, and avoid stereotypes and myths

### How to use it?

- ❖ **carefully!**
- ❖ as a means of immersing students alongside protagonists in a historical period
- ❖ to introduce **interpretations of history**. As with non-fiction history texts, students should look at fiction in the light of these questions:
  - **purpose**: why was it written – to persuade, entertain, inform, communicate or commemorate?
  - **process**: which parts are factual, points of view, or imagined? Did the author go back to the sources? Did they use these sources rigorously? Have they acknowledged their sources?
  - **perspective**: what influenced the author's viewpoint? Is it balanced? Has it been influenced by their ideology, values, nationality, personality or expectations?

History never looks like history when you are living through it.

John Gardner, novelist, 1912-1982

### Bibliography

Collins, F. & Graham, J. (eds) (2001) *Historical Fiction for Children: Capturing the past*

Counsell, C. (2004) *History in Practice: History and Literacy in Y7: Building the lesson around the text*

Martin, D. & Brooke, B. (2002) 'Getting personal: making effective use of historical fiction in the history classroom' in *Teaching History*, Issue 108  
<http://www.learningcurve.gov.uk/> (the National Archive teachers' website)  
<http://journals.aol.co.uk/kha200/Usinghistoricalfiction> (Ireland in Schools web journal)