

Prisoner of the Inquisition by Theresa Breslin

Book Notes by Julie Gormley – former Staff Tutor

Prisoner of the Inquisition by Theresa Breslin is a novel suitable for students from ages 11 to 16. The novel could be used as a bridging novel between primary and secondary, as the basis of a literary study in Year 7/8. or as an in depth study for older students. It is a rich novel which allows teachers opportunities to combine the disciplines of English language and literature with history, geography, personal, social and moral education as well as embracing many issues relevant to citizenship.

STUDY OF CHARACTER

The novel has two very interesting main characters, Saulo and Zarita, both realistically drawn with faults and frailties as well as strengths.

- The character of Zarita and how she responds to, and overcomes, the cruelties of life
- The character of Saulo and how he develops from a vengeful boy to a forgiving adult
- The role and function of the minor characters - Lomas, Christopher Columbus, Aunt Beatriz and Sister Maddalena - as they influence, in a positive way, the young Zarita and Saulo
- The cruelties and weaknesses of some of the minor characters – Ramon Salazar, Lorena, Panipat, Father Besian

STUDY OF THEMES

A thematic study would encourage students to consider their own values as well as respond to the issues raised in the novel.

- Love in all its different aspects (the foolishness of romantic love, the strength of paternal and filial love, the purity of sacrificial love)
- The destructiveness of the negative emotions of hatred, resentment and revenge
- The life-giving emotions which can conquer the destructive emotions (love/hate, remorse/revenge, tolerance/injustice, forgiveness/cruelty)
- Universal issues of injustice, prejudice, racial and religious cruelty and the importance of tolerance

STUDY OF PLOT

- The structure of the novel, including the purpose and function of prologue and epilogue
- The purpose and effectiveness of the dual narratives
- The purpose and effectiveness of the first person narratives
- The intertwining of the two narratives and its effectiveness
- The use of motifs and symbolism
- The use of cliffhangers – especially the ending

STUDY OF SETTING

Although the novel is set in a historical context (15th century Spain), it has universal significance for all countries at all times, especially where a climate of fear and suspicion gives rise to atrocities.

- How the writer creates an atmosphere of fear and suspicion
- How the realistic setting in time and place allows the writer to balance the cruelty and atrocities with compassion and mercy

Students could create a glossary of place names and research the towns/cities mentioned, and draw a time line in the life of Saulo and Zarita.