

Teachers' Notes

The Field of Hum

Jon Gamble

Synopsis

Everyone at school thinks Ruby is a nerd. While other teenagers are texting each other, Ruby has her nose in a stuffy, old poetry book. Go figure!

But when Ruby starts to have conversations with her cat, people begin to worry. Their worry changes to wonder when Ruby, through some mysterious magic, says she can save her family's farm from being ruined by the mining company. *Nerdy* has turned into *awesome!* But then to everyone's amazement, Ruby announces on TV that she is now going to save the *whole* Shire from ruin! Her cat has told her what she must do. Now she is *totally cool*. Even the school bully wants to be like her. And the adults notice something very different about her.

What secret does she know? And what's it got to do with her cat? And what did she find in the old poetry book? And why are her farm animals behaving so strangely?

www.thefieldofhum.com

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Themes

- Being different
- Living with bullying and anxiety
- Nature and the environment
- The wisdom of our forefathers
- Discovering and connecting with your inner life and the power that brings

Writing Style

The Field of Hum is written in the third person voice of an omnipotent observer. The story is rich in comic dialogue and antagonism, which develops the reader's sense of the characters - both human and animal.

Author Motivation

The author spent his younger years studying meditation and philosophy. He then started practice as a health care practitioner. Many people describe how they have lost their sense of their inner life. Jon wanted to explore connecting with nature as a way to find that inner life. This includes living with animals, in this case the animals of the farm, and discovering the peacefulness of nature as a way to connect with self. The romance writers of the 19th century had a similar reverence for nature.

Editorial Comment

The Field of Hum is ideal for Years 6 to 10 English students. It explores 19th romantic poetry as a way to connect to the wisdom of earlier generations and the power of nature. But poetry just inflames the school bully! The addition of line drawings helps to bring the characters alive, and is in keeping with the illustrative tradition used in the romantic literature.

Marketing and Promotion

A media release was sent to selected bookshops, reviewers and bloggers, and advance copies of the books were sent out for review purposes. Interviews are planned for 2018.

STUDY NOTES

Setting and Context

- The setting of this story could be many countries - the descriptions of the countryside are nondescript. But when Ruby describes her “native” flowers - look up and see where in the world those flowers might grow.
- Describe how nature is central to the theme of this story.
- When the Oracle describes the sound of silence, which you can hear at night when all the sounds of the world have finished for the day, do you know what he means? If not try it and see.

Language and Dialogue

- This story has some words which are no longer in use, or words whose meaning you don't understand, like *borborygmus*. Look up one of these words then put it into a sentence of your own.
- This story is written in the third person, which is faithfully narrated by “O”. Who is “O”, and why do you think he knows everything that happens?

Character Development & Dramatic Action

- Create character profiles for each of the main characters.
- Compare the language of two of the main characters, for example the language that Rufus uses compared with the Oracle. Or how Bella speaks compared with Ruby.
- In what way is Ruby changed by the happenings in this story, or ‘transformed’ to use the Oracle’s words?

- Create a storyboard for the critical happenings in this story. How are the characters affected by these events? Which of these events was the most important or moving one for you?

Themes and Issues

- What does the Oracle mean when he tells Penny that it is she in Ruby's recurring dream?
- How is it that Ruby can be seen as different by other children at school, yet she does not seem to mind?
- Do you think that all bullies, like Bella, all act out of stress at home?
- On page 158 Mrs Brown has a little cry. Why do you think she does that?
- The Oracle talks about the destruction of the natural environment, eg by the Mining company, but he also says the human tribe is deteriorating - in Ruby's case she does not belong to the human tribe because she has no friends. What does this mean? Do you think it is true?
- Everyone at Ruby's school thinks romantic poetry is old fashioned and boring. Did you find that any of the poems had any special meaning for you?
- What are the real threats that coal mining pose to the environment?
- Would you want to try any of the meditations that the Oracle teaches the animals? Which one would you want to try?