

***Coming Home to Roost* by Mary-anne Scott**
Teacher Notes

Before Reading:

1. What does the cover picture indicate about the book's content?
2. What does the title suggest to you?
3. Read the author's dedication (p. 5). If you wrote a book, to whom would you dedicate it and what would the dedication say?

Themes:

1. Discuss the following themes and find examples from the book which illustrate each:
 - a. family relationships and friendships
 - b. secrets, intrigue and scandals
 - c. romantic love
 - d. teenage sexuality and attraction
 - e. trust and loyalty
 - f. prejudices and misconceptions
 - g. sacrifice and loyalty
 - h. courage and strength
 - i. humour and humanity
 - j. fortitude and perseverance in adversity
 - k. the search for personal identity and one's place in the world
2. What do you think is the main theme of the novel? Write an essay on your choice.

Setting:

This book is set in present-day New Zealand.

Language:

1. What do you think the genre of this book is? List the aspects that are indicative of this genre.
2. The story is told in the third person. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Is it effective? Choose a passage in the book and rewrite it in first person narrative.
3. Figurative language is used to convey ideas that might otherwise be difficult to express. An example of figurative language is a simile, such as, 'he was built like a tank' (p. 26), 'Mum worked up a good head of steam like the kettle in Dad's workroom' (p. 31) and 'She looks like a dandelion' (p. 35). Find more examples from the book.
4. The author uses animal imagery. For example, 'Lena had plucked him out of

his safe nest and pushed him off the top of a cliff to fly' (p. 26), 'feeling like a trapped fly buzzing against the window' (p. 57), 'Don't run like a scared rabbit' (p. 67). Find other examples from the book.

5. Elliot and Arnie make puns about their electrician work, such as 'it's called tapping the wire. It makes you the tap connector' (p. 34). Think of three examples of puns and a context in which they could be used.
6. Arnie tells Elliot that 'Hating is like offering someone poison but drinking it yourself' (p. 19) and 'Burying your head in the sand would be the least clever thing you could do' (p. 67). Is there a difference between a saying and a proverb? What do these sayings or proverbs mean? Where do they come from? Think of five other common sayings or proverbs and research them using questions above.
7. What figure of speech are 'Boarding-school Barb' (p. 26), 'Rooting Rooster' (p. 103) and 'Royal Rick' (p. 218) examples of? Think of examples for ten other letters of the alphabet.
8. What figure of speech are the following words examples of: 'guffawed' (p. 103) and 'beeps and whirrs' (p. 179). Think of five more examples. Write a poem or descriptive paragraph which includes the words about one of the characters or events in the book.
9. There is a lot of colloquial, informal language and idioms in the book. Define the following words and phrases from the book:
 - a. 'Hell's teeth' (p. 16)
 - b. 'Popped my clogs' (p. 118)
 - c. 'You're just a wolf in sheep's clothing' (p. 125)
 - d. 'Let's just roll with the punches' (p. 125)
 - e. 'Chickens coming home to roost' (p. 133)
10. Describe in a paragraph how the tension builds and falls away during the book. Find a passage in the novel that is high intensity, and another which is low intensity. Copy both out and compare the language used (choice of words, length of sentences, the pace at which details are revealed). How is language used to create intensity?
11. Find definitions for the following words from the novel and write one sentence for each:
 - a. myriad (p. 21)
 - b. skulk (p. 24)
 - c. dilapidated (p. 33)
 - d. perverse (p. 41)
 - e. vindicated (p. 53)
 - f. paraphernalia (p. 70)
 - g. surreptitious (p. 73)
 - h. livid (p. 73)
 - i. drivel (p. 82)
 - j. precariously (p. 83)
 - k. ominous (p. 147)

- l. skeletal (p. 154)
- m. prodigious (p. 167)
- n. avaricious (p. 203)

Characters:

1. What are your impressions of Elliot from the first chapter of the novel?
2. Think of three adjectives to describe each of the following characters: Elliot, Rick, Lena, Deeks, Zeya, Mum and Arnie.
3. List the qualities of Elliot's personality and find examples of when he displays each of these qualities.
4. Choose an important event from the novel and describe Elliot's reaction to it.
5. What do you think Elliot learns in this book? How do you think he has changed by the end of the book? How do you think his view of himself has changed?
6. Do you think Elliot is a strong protagonist? Why or why not? Which other characters do you feel display strength or weakness? In pairs, write character studies on the main characters. Begin by making a chart to list the strengths and weaknesses of each. How do their particular strengths and weaknesses affect the part they play in the novel?
7. How does the relationship between Elliot and Arnie develop through the book? What are the main events that contribute to the development?
8. What are the different pressures on Elliot through the novel? What factors lead to the decisions he makes and how does he cope with the situations he finds himself in?
9. What does the novel say about friendships and/or family and their importance during difficult times? List examples of episodes when friends and/or family are either a help or a hindrance to Elliot.
10. The book explores the relationship between Elliot and the other members of his immediate family. In groups, discuss the following: Do you like Elliot and the other members of his family as characters? What do you think of their reactions to different situations and what do their reactions tell us about them and their personalities? Do you think they have a realistic familial relationship? Why or why not? What conflicts and resolutions are evident for the family within the novel? Do you believe that their relationships develop and change through the book? If so, how, and what are the main events which contribute to the development and change?
11. Do you think Elliot and Lena are realistic characters? Why or why not?
12. Draw a picture of one of the characters based on their physical descriptions. For example, Arnie (pp. 16–17), Lena (p. 46) or Zeya (p. 121).

13. Write a character summary of one of the following characters: Mum, Dad, Zeya, Lena, Rick or Arnie.
14. Which character do you particularly like or dislike? Why?
15. Which character do you most identify with? Why?

Setting:

The book is set in the North Island of New Zealand.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Elliot's father tells him that 'every choice has a consequence' (p. 9). What is this in relation to?
2. What statement does Arnie tell Elliot his tattoo makes (p. 18)?
3. What might Lena's 'immaculate and stark room' (p. 21) tell the reader about her as a character?
4. Why does Zeya thank Elliot when he knew about The Shwedagon Pagoda (p. 65)?
5. When Deeks visits, why does Arnie 'make surreptitious glances' (p. 73) in Elliot's direction?
6. Why does Zeya change the coffee cup (p. 81)?
7. Why does Arnie think putting Nana down was illegal (p. 90)?
8. Why does Elliot believe something must have happened to his Dad during his brief stint in the navy (p. 92)?
9. What does Elliot mean when he thinks Nana 'was light compared to the load he felt he was carrying' (p. 94)?
10. What is Elliot referring to when he calls himself a real 'lost boy' (p. 106)?
11. In what way does Zeya want to 'prove to her father' (p. 116) that she's the same girl?
12. What does Elliot think reflects Zeya's personality (p. 119)?
13. How does Zeya deal with the two drunk girls at the dance and why (pp. 122–23)?
14. Why does Arnie call Elliot an 'expert on racial tension'. (p. 131)?
15. Which Buddhist principles does Arnie encourage Elliot to live by and why (p.

132)?

16. Why does Elliot feel 'older than eighteen' (p. 136) as he locks up Deek's house?
17. Why does the doctor show Elliot his personal photograph and does it help Elliot (pp. 143–44)?
18. What is Elliot referring to when he tells Zeya he thinks her father's actions are 'barbaric' (p. 147)?
19. What happens to Katie's attitude when Arnie asks her to remove her jacket (p. 153)?
20. Why does Arnie feel that Elliot's approach to his problem is 'cowardly' (p. 155)?
21. What are the consequences of Elliot taking the phone call at work and how does he feel about it (pp. 160–68)?
22. How does Zeya's father react to the phone call and is it in keeping with his character (pp. 171–72)?
23. How does Elliot react to his short conversation with Lena and why (p. 183)?
24. What is Dad's reaction to the news about Lena and the baby (p. 185)?
25. What does Arnie mean when he tells Elliot he had a 'peep in Davy Jones' Locker' (p. 196)?
26. What is Mum's reaction to the news about Lena and the baby (p. 203)?
27. As he drives to Palmerston North, Elliot muses over the accident and the baby. What thoughts does he have and are they in keeping with his character (p. 210)?
28. Why is Lena so keen for the baby to have Barnard as a surname (p. 220)?
29. What is Elliot's reaction when Arnie suggests that he could marry Lena (p. 222)?
30. Why does Elliot say he is 'thinking of a fresh start in Auckland' (p. 251)?

Creative Responses:

1. What is Elliot's nickname? Do you think it is ironic in the context of the events of the novel? Why or why not? Talk about the nicknames of your

classmates and the origins of those nicknames.

2. As Elliot travels to Wellington the movement of the bus ‘... lurched him awake to relive the events of the weekend, like clips from a movie’ (p. 111). Choose a main event from the novel to present in a movie storyboard format.
3. Elliot’s bus pulls into Wellington where he is living with Arnie (p. 112). Locate Wellington and any other places mentioned in the novel on a map of the relevant city and/or New Zealand.
4. Elliot’s artistic friend, Ratty, gives Elliot one of his ink-dot creations (p. 102). Choose your favourite character or scene from the book and create your own artistic interpretation of it. Use, for example, drawing, painting, models, poem, cartoon strip, etc.
5. The author includes a description of the exterior and interior of Arnie’s house (pp. 12–13). Find other examples of descriptions of exterior and interior spaces. Draw one of these based on the descriptions, then describe and draw an exterior and interior space of your choice.
6. Deeks and Elliot look up information about maintenance payments on the social welfare website (p. 112). What is this organisation? Where is it based? What does it do? What is their mission? Investigate and write an information report or create a PowerPoint demonstration of your findings.
7. The doctor asks Elliot if he had called ‘Pregnancy Help’ (p. 144). Find out what you can about this organisation and then design a marketing campaign aimed at your age group to help draw attention to the work they do. The campaign could include elements such as pamphlets, scripts for school talks, radio jingles, posters, slogans, etc.
8. Elliot becomes interested in finding out information about Burma after he meets Zeya. Research Burma/Myanmar to create and design an entry for a travel book for Myanmar as it is today. Include information such as population size, geography, history, things of interest, weather, etc.
9. Zeya tells Elliot about her uncle in Burma who ‘lost his fingers fighting for the right to vote’ (p. 128). Research other countries and their citizens who have suffered as victims of abuse of their human rights. How are they being helped? What agencies have been set up? How can you help? Set up and design a charity campaign to help. Think, for example, about marketing techniques, etc.
10. Zeya introduces Elliot to the notion of karma (p. 81). How much control do you think people have and/or should have over their own destinies? How much should religious beliefs/school/society/family/social groups have? Discuss as a class.
11. Dorice gives Elliot a letter from Zeya (p. 247). Write a letter of reply from Elliot.

12. Use these quotes from the book as either a topic for a class debate or as an essay starter:
- 'New Zealanders are racist' (p. 123)
 - 'You can change things better by keeping your dignity' (p. 123)
 - 'You're a man at eighteen — old enough to vote and fight for your country' (p. 105).
13. Design your own cover for the novel, including the blurb.
14. Do you think there is the possibility for a sequel to this book? What do you think could or should happen in it? Write a one-page outline of the plot for the sequel you would write. Choose a title.
15. In pairs, create a timeline that shows the main events of the novel. Then choose one event at or near the end of the book that is important, and describe how it helped you understand a key idea of the novel.
16. The novel is narrated from Elliot's perspective. Choose a passage relating to one of the main events of the novel and rewrite the passage as a monologue in another character's voice, for example Rick's point of view after he discovers that Elliot is not the father of Lena's baby. Think about the kind of vocabulary your chosen character would use, and how their opinion of the event might differ from Elliot's. Present your monologue to your class.
17. Choose an event from the book and write a personal diary entry about it from one of the following character's point of view. Think about how you would describe the physical scene, any other characters who were involved and your feelings about the incident.
- Lena
 - Deek
 - Rick
 - Zeya
18. Rewrite one of the climactic scenes as a film script. (If your school has filming equipment, produce your scene.)
19. Imagine you are a film producer attempting to gain financial backing to turn *Coming Home to Roost* into a feature film. Write up your proposal, include one or two scenes from the novel turned into a film script, your choices for the soundtrack, casting, location, etc. Or imagine the novel is going to be turned into a stage play. Design a suitable set, programme notes and advertising poster for the play.
20. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine, newspaper or website. Consider the following questions:
- a. What situations had a ring of truth for you?
 - b. Which characters appealed to you the most? The least?
 - c. How did the story make you feel as it unfolded?
 - d. What ideas in the book awakened your interest?
 - e. What did you dislike, or find boring?
 - f. Did the ending surprise you?

