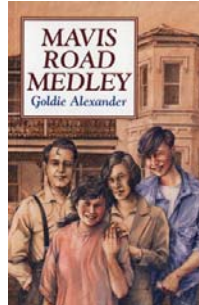


Teachers Notes for 'Mavis Road Medley'

By Goldie Alexander



SUMMARY:

Didi (actually named Eurydice) is miserable and unsettled because her father's work has forced her to leave her friends and school in Sydney. Jamie, older sister Kate's boyfriend, is also unsettled because of his parents' divorce and his recent move to Melbourne. Kate resents Jamie's absorption in music and his need to earn money.

While Didi and Jamie happen to be watching an old film, 'On our Selection' they are inexplicably transported back to 1933. Though initially terrified, Jamie and Didi are quickly befriended by the lively argumentative Sam and his fiancée Selma and taken into the Finkelsteins' welcoming boarding house.

Once the shock of finding themselves in a totally strange environment wears off, Didi and Jamie decide to make the most of their unusual circumstances. They don't even like each other, and now they must learn to live together. Against a backdrop of Depression Melbourne, early European migration and the excitement of Wirth's Circus on the site of the present Victorian Arts Centre, they must find a way home or stay in 1933 forever.

Why does all this happen? Important clues are the trunkful of old clothes Didi finds in the cellar and Jamie's harmonica.

GROUP DISCUSSION.

1. Discuss the meaning of the cover illustration. What does it reveal about the story, the relationship of each character to the others and the house which forms the backdrop?
2. How would you feel if you were suddenly forced to leave your friends, school and city? What problems might you have?
3. What is the significance of the young Didi's love of adventure? How does it relate to the rest of the story?
4. What obvious differences are there between the Mavis Road house in the present and in 1933?

5. What relevance does the buying of the harmonica have for the rest of the story?
6. At first Jamie views the people of 1933 as 'alien' 'the oddest looking people he had ever seen in his life'. Why does his view change?
7. How has the city of Melbourne and Australian cities in general, changed? Make some comparisons between 1933 and the 1990's.
8. Make notes on changing attitudes under the following headings: Migrants, working women, sexuality and modesty, circus animals.
9. Do you think Mavis Road Medley might make a good film? Why or why not?
10. Think about the title. Can you suggest any other possibilities?

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES:

1. Imagine that Didi and Jamie remain in 1933 and are now quite elderly. You have decided to interview them. Write down what takes place.
2. You are in charge of a time machine that takes tourists back to 1933, Devise a set of rules that the tourists must observe based on information included in this novel.
3. Write an editorial for the Melbourne 'Argus' of 1933 which comments on life in the 1990's.
4. Write an extra chapter to the novel which explores Didi and Jamie's relationship in the future.
5. Find out as much as you can about your own town, suburb or house in 1933, Where should you go to find relevant material?
6. What is the relevance of music to this novel? How does it reflect the plot?
7. You are designing a mini-series about 1933, Using this novel, and any other information you can find draw up appropriate costumes for both men and women.
8. Imagine you are interviewing a member of Wirth's Circus, Who would you pick and why?
9. You have taken a job in 1933, Describe your experiences.

GROUP ACTIVITIES:

1. Use the material in this novel, and any other sources you can find, to prepare a radio feature: Melbourne in the thirties.
2. Find out more about other migrant groups. Particularly non-English speaking migrants e.g. Italians, Greeks, Dutch, Yugoslavs, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and record some of their early experiences in Australia.
3. What is considered to be non-acceptable language? Can you find any instances in Mavis Road Medley where the acceptability of certain words has changed?
4. Imagine that your group has just completed a mini-series of Mavis Road Medley. Prepare some Publicity material (e.g. posters, press releases, selections for television to advertise its release.
5. Draw a poster advertising Wirth's Circus in 1933.

6. Visit an older person or People (either in their own home or in an Hostel) and tape their personal memories of the Depression.

THEMES TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU READ

1. Other cultures
2. Divorce and single parent families
3. Fantasy and time slip
4. Friendship
5. Gender and sex roles
6. Growing up
7. Australian history
8. Relationships
9. Work and careers

FOR YOU TO THINK ABOUT:

'Time is the element in which we all live, like fish in water and yet the realisation that time flows on and on and never flows backward is one of the most stunning of childhood discoveries.

If timelessness is the taste of early childhood the rush and spin of time is the dizzying revelation of later years. Therefore it is not surprising that time-slip fantasies, where the heroes travel backwards and forwards in time, are so enthralling. From Reading for the love of it by Michelle Landsberg.

SOME RELATED READING:

- Mtryll of the Stones - Brian Caswell
- Strange Objects - Gary Crew
- Weevils in the Flour - Wendy Lowenstein
- Mandoraga - David McRobbie
- Placing Beattie Bow - Ruth Park
- Can you keep a secret? - Jenny Pausacker
- The House that was Eureka - Nadia Wheatley