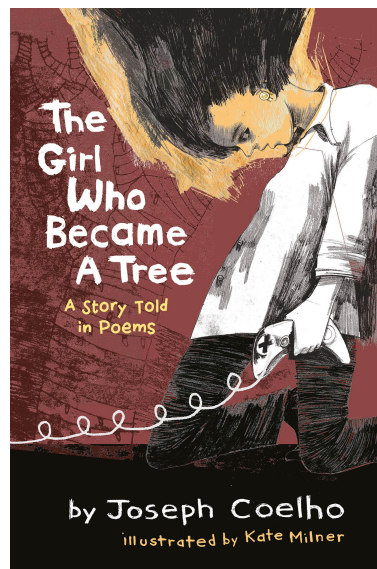


Teachers' Notes

for

**The Girl Who Became A Tree**

By Joseph Coelho  
Illustrated by Kate Milner



Benjamin Harris



# 1. Titles

*Joseph Coelho calls The Girl who Became a Tree a story in poems. There are other ways in which writers think of their longer story-poems too: narrative poetry/verse and verse novels.*

*The concept of a 'story in poems' may be up to this point be unfamiliar to the class. This activity is designed to help the class to understand how a story might be told through poem titles, rather as how chapter titles work in a novel. They also start to think about themes and even possible germs of stories that are 'hiding' in the titles.*

Type out fifteen to twenty of the titles from the book. Include a variety – those which are vague, those which are more precise, those explicitly mentioning characters, those that do not.

Give these out to the class – it will be easier to have each one printed on separate cards/slips of paper in advance.

Say to the class that these are all titles of poems from the book. As a collection, they tell a story.

- What do you think might be some of the themes of the book?
- Do any of the themes connect in some way?
- Do any of the titles connect in any way?
- Which stories might you identify already?

When feeding back as pairs or groups at the end, encourage the class to support their thinking with reference to the titles – how they connect/don't connect etc.

After this lesson, you might like to show the class the cover of the book and the title. Further discussion might include whether any of their thoughts relate to the book, now they have seen the cover image and the title of the whole story. Or they may not...!

## 2. What's the story about?

Joseph Coelho reads 'The Story of a Girl', the very first poem in the book, here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4NCSyk06QM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4NCSyk06QM)

*Before reading the rest of the book, take some time to read, listen to and explore this poem in some detail by drawing a visual map of the images, feelings and questions that this simple poem conjures up.*

Ask the class to draw a thought-map relating to each of the lines in this poem.

There will need to be a separate branch for any, or all of the following:

- 'a girl with a hurt'
- 'can't express'
- a creature
- deepest red
- journey
- library
- forest
- message
- 'stolen'
- fable
- growing hurt

What are your initial thoughts, questions and feelings when you hear these words? Add them to your thought-map coming off the relevant branch.

E.g. 'Library' – books, quiet, peace, tranquility, research, homework, community, 'what's a library got to do with a 'creature'?' etc.

Encourage the class not to think too hard about each one – there is no right or wrong answer and this is certainly not a test of 'what they know'! Rather, explain that these feelings and images that come into the mind when we hear these words will be important to how we feel and 'see' the story as it unfolds.

Say to the class that we will review this map at the end of the book and explore how the initial thoughts were changed or fitted with the story as it unfolded.

After reading the book and thinking about some of the other teacher notes and activities here, review this activity again...and add to or completely redraw your thought-map again. What has changed since you've read and thought about the whole book?

### 3. Joseph's Videos

Aidan Chambers in his book *Tell Me* draws attention to the importance of the reader's Likes, Dislikes, Questions and Connections to the text.

In this activity, the class watch more of the videos of Joseph Coelho reading poems from the story, and discuss them, focusing in particular on Chambers' four key aspects of Book Talk. It's advised to watch the videos in the order they appear in the book, as you read the book through together. There is time after having read the book to consider each video/poem again.

Make a large grid that looks like this out of four large sheets of A1 sugar paper or similar, and display on the wall:

Likes	Dislikes
Questions	Connections

Now give the children some sticky notes (or small slips of paper) and introduce them to the idea of the *Tell Me* grid. Say that when reading a text, the reader can shape their reading effectively by focusing their discussion on the four key areas shown in the grid. For some texts, the reader may have an opinion to offer about all four of the aspects; for others, they may only have one or two.

Watch one of the poems/videos listed in the Resources section. After the first reading, ask the class to jot down on separate sticky notes any of their likes, dislikes, questions or any connections to their lives or reading that they have noticed. Model this process yourself as the teacher/reader if the class need a guide. Emphasise that there is no right or wrong answer.

Invite the class to stick their notes on the grid in the appropriate place. Encourage discussion about the sticky notes: do others agree/disagree with certain likes/dislikes for example; does anyone have a potential answer for the questions posed? How might those questions be answered? Do any of the class share similar connections?

When the grid for one of the poems/videos has been completed, take a photo of the grid that has been completed with all the added notes. Remove the notes, leaving the grid blank ready for discussion of the next video/poem. The full list and links is in the 'Resources' section at the end of these notes.

After the whole book has been read, return to the grid that was created about one or more of the poems and consider if any of the key questions, likes, dislikes have changed. If so, how?

## 4. Forms

The Girl who Became a Tree is a 'story told in poems' and on a video Joseph Coelho made for Book Trust ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNfXNcOs4Pg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNfXNcOs4Pg)), he says:

*"I was very conscious when writing this book of making sure that each part of the story was a poem. So there are pantoums in here, there are limericks, there are rondels, there are even concrete shape poems."*

*We explore here the variety of forms he mentions and identify different kinds as you read through the book.*

Watch the video mentioned in the introduction to this activity.

Ask the class:

- What poetic forms do you know? (They will have explored this in particular during Key Stage 2)
- What makes each form special?
- What are the forms that Joseph Coelho mentions here? Do you recognize any of them and can describe how they work?

Say that although this book has a lot of 'free verse' (you may need to review what this means to the class), there are poems which have a particular structure.

Now talk about how a pantoum works, and a rondel. The children will be most likely familiar with the concrete, shape poem and limerick idea.

As you read through the book, encourage the children to look out for any poems that seem to have been constructed in a way different to 'free verse'. They may need to be prompted to :

- look out for any repetitions or patterns in the words on the page
- listen for any patterns in the sound the poem makes
- listen or look for how rhyming is used (or not) in each poem.

As you go through the book, you might like to record in a table the names of poems which fit with particular forms:

Form	Title
Pantoum	
Rondel	
Limerick	
Shape poem	
Free verse	

Having explored the poems and forms that Joseph Coelho uses, have a go at writing one in a particular form yourself: choose a theme you know a lot about and have a lot to say about (computer games, netball, reading...). Great writing always comes from your own passions!

## 4. Myths

*The purpose of this activity is to help the readers to understand the original myth around which The Girl who Became a Tree is woven.*

Talk about who Apollo and Daphne were in Greek mythology: Apollo – god of music and the sun; Daphne, a nymph, nature spirit, daughter of the river god Peneus.

Show the children various artistic reimaginings of the myth:

This animated short film is a good place to start:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rRcG5I7UMg>

Then look at some of the paintings and sculptures that have been created. Bernini's sculpture (this is a good site for looking in detail at the sculpture)  
<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/19th-20th-century-sculpture-l17232/lot.6.html>

Tiepolo:  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/apollo-and-daphne-by-thomas-bulfinch-119892>

John William Waterhouse:  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apollo\\_and\\_Daphne\\_waterhouse.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apollo_and_Daphne_waterhouse.jpg)

Print out these and other versions of the story and give the children paper collections of the artwork.

Ask them to talk about the art in relation to the myth:

- which parts of the myth have the artists chosen to represent? Why?
- how do the artworks make you feel?
- what do you notice most strongly about each artwork?
- what emotions do you think the artist wants you to feel by looking at the artwork?

After looking at the artwork and becoming familiar with the story, consider:

- Which parts of the story does Joseph Coelho refer to in his version of the myth? Consider characters, moods, plot...
- Which parts does he change? What effect does this have on his own story?
- What is Coelho telling us about myths in the modern world? Do they have any relevance to us today? If so, what is the relevance/message that 'Daphne and Apollo' has for us?

## 6. Mood Boards

*The purpose of this activity is to help the readers to show visually how they imagine the characters, objects, settings, even emotions that The Girl Who Became a Tree evokes.*

*Mood boards are a great way to engage young people in discussion: How do they see the book? What are their interpretations? Creating a mood board also helps children to make natural use of evidence from the text: 'That image of the girl is too young...Daphne is allowed to walk home from school on her own so she must be older than that...'*

*Discussion and imagination go hand in hand in this sort of activity and can lead to some very deep connection between text and reader.*

Talk about and look at examples of what a mood board is. How are they used in real-life design contexts, such as film, make-up, costume, product...

There are two ways in which the activity can begin:

a)  
create a collection of images that focus on ONE aspect of the book; a character (such as Daphne), an object (such as her phone), a setting (such as the library). Discuss as a group how they see each of the images: 'Is this picture of a girl how you see Daphne? Are there any clues in the original text that support what you are seeing? Could any of the images NOT be Daphne? Why?' etc.

Continue the discussion with other collections focusing on ONE aspect (a page of images about the phone, or images of libraries for example).

Finally collect together the individual images and display these as one mood board that reflects the general discussion.

...OR...

b)

Give the class or group a challenge to create their own mood boards. Each reader could work individually or in a small group to create a mood-board which includes their own choice of individual images for a range of aspects (e.g. their board should contain their chosen images of Daphne, her dad, her mum, the librarian, the forest, the phone, the library etc.

After making the boards, encourage the class to keep adding to them with other images that could be included, but maybe are from a less 'surface' level: Daphne's clothes... Hoc's eyes... Mum's place of work... what do these look like?



## 7. Kate's Illustrations

*In an interview with Nikki Gamble, Joseph says about Kate Milner's illustrations:*

*She's illustrating the poems. She's illustrating the feelings behind the poems [...] She's created visual poems that work alongside the poems, I feel.*

*In this activity, the class consider a range of pictures of Daphne from different points in the story, think about what emotions Kate Milner creates through those illustrations, and compare and contrast these to the accompanying poems.*

Give out the resource sheet with a range of pictures of Daphne, taken from *The Girl Who Became a Tree* (see sample resource sheets at the end of these notes).

Talk with the class about the mood of each picture – is it frightening, soft, calm, angry...? How does the illustrator create those kinds of feeling through art?

Display a range of words related to emotions (these are only a selection, you can create your own, of course!)

anger	joy	excitement	sadness
tiredness	despair	grief	warmth

Which pictures relate to some of the words displayed? How does the picture give you this feeling?

Now compare the feeling given by the picture to the accompanying poems. The children can find the picture in their copy to identify where in the story it has come from too. Choose one or two of the pictures from the Resource Sheet to annotate.

- Does the emotion shown in the picture illustrate something from the poem too?
- Which phrase from the poem best matches the feeling shown in the picture?

At the end of the activity, display a selection of the pictures with added annotations from the whole class. Discuss how the interpretations have differed across the group of readers.

## 8. Reading Group Questions

The following are a selection of questions that will work best in small group discussion. Making reference to the work that has been carried out in Activities 2, 3, 6 and 7 in particular may help to draw deeper thinking from the group.

### *The Title*

- The title is deliberately prosaic: what effect does it have by referring to the abstract 'girl' and 'tree'?
- Why didn't Joseph Coelho call the book 'Daphne'?
- Does the title engage you to read the story within? How? How not?

### *The Cover*

- What's the difference in your view between a verse-novel and a 'story told in poems'?
- Describe the images on the cover. What feelings does it evoke?
- Talk about the use of colours on the cover. Why has the illustrator/designer used these colours?

### *The Form*

- Review the kinds of poetic structure that are used in 'The Girl Who Became a Tree' (see Activity 4 'Forms' above)
- How do the different poetic forms affect your reading of the book?
- Can you read the poems as separate texts or do they rely on being part of the whole sequence?

### *Daphne*

- What is ordinary about Daphne? What is extraordinary?
- How does Daphne conquer her anger and anxieties?
- What is the turning point in the story for Daphne?

### *Mum and Dad*

- How do Coelho and Milner represent these two figures in Daphne's life?
- How do you feel about the character of Mum? And Dad? Do your feelings match or echo Daphne's?

### *Hoc*

- What words would you use to describe Hoc?
- What do you notice about Hoc's throne and surroundings? What do they tell us about Hoc? How do they relate to Daphne?
- Hoc is an original creation but who are his 'relatives' from other stories? How are they 'related'?
- Hoc is an unusual word and name. In Latin it means 'this' or 'that' -we hear it in the phrase *ad hoc*, meaning 'for this purpose'. Do you think the phrase is connected to the creature in any way?
- Is Hoc good or bad?

### *Libraries and librarians*

- What role do libraries play in your life? What importance to they have to Daphne? Will the library still have the same role for her after the end of this story?
- What is the importance of having a library as a major part of the story?
- Could the character of the librarian be omitted from the story or not?

### *The Forest*

- What role do forests have in stories? What are some of the most memorable forests you know from real life and from story? What bearing do these have on your reading *The Girl who Became a Tree*?
- Why is it relevant that Daphne finds herself in a forest?
- Why is it important that Daphne discovers another 'tree' like herself?

### *Other texts*

- Read and talk about the relationship of the following poems and stories to *The Girl Who Became a Tree*:
  - William Blake - *A Poison Tree*
  - *Red Riding Hood*
  - Philip Larkin - *The Trees*
- Are there other texts or films which come to your mind while reading? What is the connection?

### *Out-of-the box thinking...*

- Could you read the story backwards, starting with the last poem and working back to the first? How would this structure change/develop your perception of the story?
- If you were to add a poem to the book what would it be about and what form would it take?
- As Daphne's phone is a central part of the story, could you imagine *The Girl Who Became a Tree* as a phone app or game? How would it translate to this medium?
- If you were making a film of this book, how would you represent Hoc? How would you show Daphne's transformation? How would the original myth be part of the film?

# Resources

All of Joseph's videos are here, for use as part of Activities 2 and 3:

Joseph's Introduction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnDFXHzTV80>

'The Story of a Girl':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4NCSyk06QM>

'Daphne':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRvpqLVE97o>

'Daft Knee': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7-q0LadetE>

'Daphne and her Father Peneus':

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wy\\_KFsJ-lWw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wy_KFsJ-lWw)

'Mum': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWlmechegX4>

'The Librarian's Task':

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPsYgM\\_\\_OPo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPsYgM__OPo)

'Hairy': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJ23evsCUGI>

'Tree Monster':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPINMVukHNw>

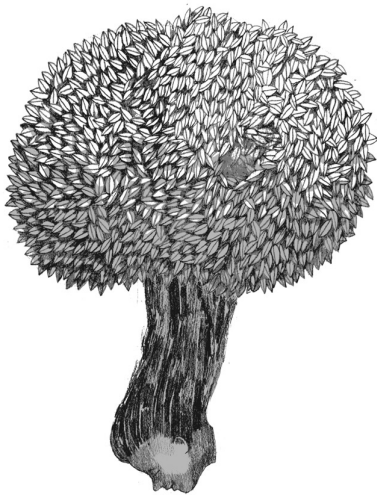
You may find it of interest to listen to the fascinating interview between Joseph Coelho and Nikki Gamble on the following podcast: <https://justimagine.co.uk/podcast/joseph-coelho/>

Resource Sheet A (Activity 7)

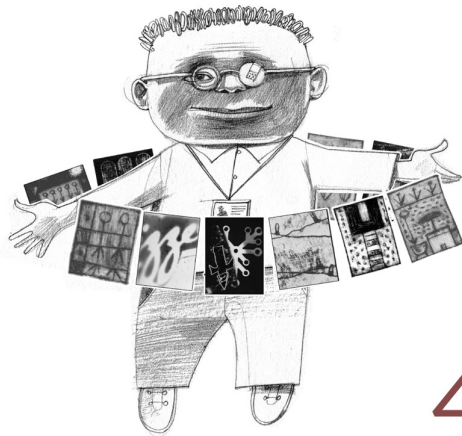


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## Resource Sheet B (Activity 7)

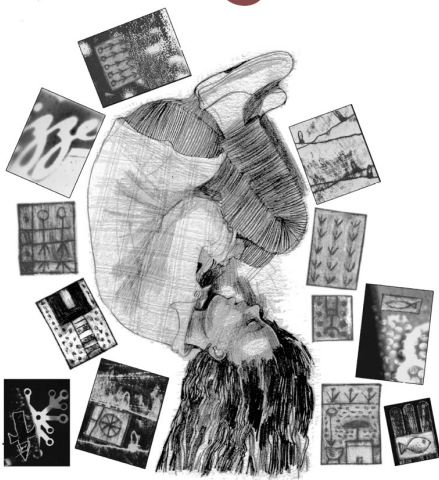
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