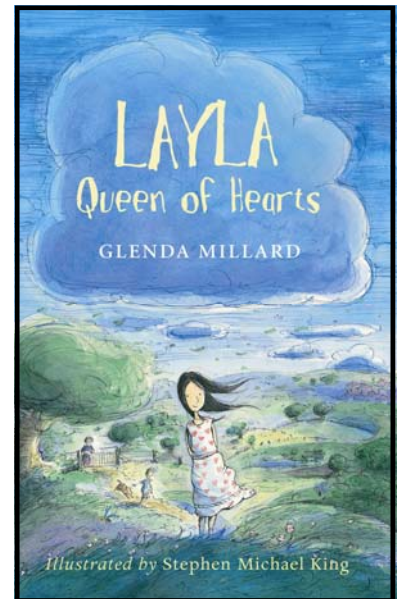


TEACHER'S BOOK NOTES

Layla, Queen of Hearts

Written by Glenda Millard

Illustrated by Stephen Michael King



Griffin's daddy used to say that Layla had been sent to comfort them after Tishkin went away; like an arm about their shoulders, a candle in the dark or like golden syrup dumplings for the soul.

Synopsis

When Senior Citizens Day is announced at school, Layla wishes for someone to take. Griffin says that Layla can share his grandma, Nell, but Layla really wants someone special of her own to take along. The whole Silk family, of which Layla is an honorary member, is involved in Layla's selection process, but it is Nell who introduces her to the intriguing Miss Amelie, who lives on her own and doesn't remember things very well. Through the special friendship that develops, Layla and Griffin learn the importance of memories, of generosity of spirit, and of small miracles that warm the heart.

A follow-up to *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*, *Layla Queen of Hearts* is just as touching. Layla and Griffin are delightful young characters and Miss Amelie's struggles with memory loss and aging tug at the reader's heartstrings. The story is tightly woven, with layers of laughter and tears which leave the reader thinking about the characters and their lives long after the cover is closed.

About the author

Glenda Millard is a writer of great talent who has the ability to write across all genres and age groups, from picture books to junior fiction to YA novels. Her first novel about the Silk family, *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*, was published in 2003 by ABC Books. It was shortlisted in the CBC Book of the Year Awards and for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. She has also had numerous picture books and children's novels published, including *Angel Breath* illustrated by Dee Huxley.

Layla, the Queen of Hearts 1

TEACHER'S BOOK NOTES

About the illustrator

Stephen Michael King has always drawn pictures. At primary school he was a misfit—isolated by a hearing problem that went undiagnosed for many years. Now he is a popular, award-winning illustrator who has been published around the world.

Activities

Rich and warm in its portrayal of life and relationships, this novel could be used to support PD education with students in Middle and Upper primary.

Memories

- What sorts of things can invoke memories? Discuss the place of sounds, smell and other sensory experiences as memory triggers. Refer to Miss Amelie's ability to remember things from long ago prompted by photographs and pictures in a book that evoked sensory experiences.
- Read and discuss another book about aging and memories: Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge by Mem Fox.
- Students might like to make 'memory boxes'—a collection of items special to them that might trigger memories for them as they grow older.

Friendship

A friend like Layla comes across once in a lifetime, and Griffin Silk knows this with all his heart.

- Discuss what students value in a friend. What makes them 'click' with some people and not others?
- Discuss what was so special about Layla's friendship with Griffin, his family and Miss Amelie.
- Friendship makes it possible to endure the most difficult things in life. Discuss how it helped the Silks deal with Tishkin's death and Layla to deal with Miss Amelie's death. If appropriate, you might also discuss other ways in which people deal with death, eg golden syrup dumplings for the soul.
- Use the recipe at the end of this book to make golden syrup dumplings with your class.

Relationships

- Explore the difference between Layla's relationship with her own family and that with the Silks.
- The story ends with:
That night, before she went to sleep, Layla Elliott invented a philosophy all of her own. She decided that a tender moment on her mother's lap was probably as good as golden syrup dumplings for the soul.

Discuss what the author is really saying here.

TEACHER'S BOOK NOTES

- Brainstorm: What is a family? What are some cultural variations around the world and in Australia? What are some variations from the past, the present and possible future?
- Investigate how families are portrayed in a selection of books, poems and videos. You might ask: 'How is this story about family?' 'What points are made about families?' 'Does someone need to be directly related to you to be considered "family"?'
- Ask children to write poems or short stories about what family means to them.

Springboards for discussions throughout the text

- 'What makes the Silks uncommon?'
- 'Why did Nell place Miss Amelie on her last resort list when Layla was looking for someone to take to Senior Citizens Day at school?'
- Why did Layla's nana and Miss Amelie refer to her as their Queen of Hearts?
- What made Miss Amelie's miracle happen?