

# TEACHERS' NOTES

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## THE KEY TO RONDO

Written by Emily Rodda  
Omnibus Books

*Important! Turn the key three times only. Never turn the key while the music is playing. Never pick up the box while the music is playing. Never close the lid until the music has stopped.*

The old music box has its rules, carefully handed down through the generations in Leo's family. And the music box has an astounding secret hidden beneath its gleaming black lid and the painted scenes of villages, mysterious forests, a castle on a hill, and a queen in a long blue gown that decorate its sides. Those who had owned it before Leo understood its powers well, and placed strict limits on its use. But now it is Leo's music box, and although he respects the rules, his least favourite cousin Mimi Langlander does not. When the rules are broken, Leo's ordered life is changed forever as he and Mimi face a ruthless enemy and plunge together into a thrilling quest in the fantastic world of Rondo.

### Question 1

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*The Key to Rondo* talks a lot about family traditions and family history. There are many ways to discuss and investigate the role of family stories and traditions. Some are listed below. Choose one to answer.

- a) Tell in three paragraphs the funniest family story you know. Say if you were actually present when this happened or have heard the story told.
- b) Are there any 'treasures' in your family that have been passed down from one person to another over many years? Describe the treasure and say why it is valuable. (Remember, something can be valuable for many reasons, not just because it is worth money.)
- c) Make your own family tree. On this mark the people you actually met and put a star next to any who told good stories or else had good stories told about them.

### Question 2

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In the novel Bethany says Leo looks like her Uncle Henry. Leo also shares Uncle Henry's love of working with wood. Sometimes in families we talk about people having either inherited looks or talent from a person who may already have passed away such as a great grandfather or a great



aunt.

- a) Do you look like any other members of your family? Who is this person and what other ways might you be like them? Tell how you know this.
- b) Have you inherited talents that other people listed on your family tree had or have? What are these talents?
- c) Is there any problem or difficulty that you feel you might have inherited from your family? Perhaps you can't whistle or ride a bike and someone else in the family was also known to be unable to do these things. Write a short piece telling how you feel about this.

### Question 3

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Rondo is painted on all four sides of the music box. Look for the descriptions in the book of each side and using these:

- a) Draw a rough map of Rondo, combining the four sides of the music box.
- b) Say which part of Rondo you think might be the safest and which might be the most dangerous.

#### Question 4

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Mimi and Leo are very different. To begin with they are equally unhappy about being forced to spend time together. Look at the following adjectives and phrases that describe each of them. Now make a list headed 'Mimi'

and 'Leo' and write the	happy
adjectives underneath that	kind
you feel suit each character	secure
best.	valuable
practical	altruistic
scientific	talented
logical	imaginative
popular	prickly
good at sport	impulsive
cautious	unpopular
unhappy	
suspicious	
paranoid	

#### Question 5

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You might think that the author invented the name of the world where these adventures take place. Use a dictionary to look up the word Rondo. Write the definition. Now say why you think the author chose this name for the world.

#### Question 6

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Many of the people in Rondo have names that suit their personalities or occupations (e.g. Posy the flower seller and Crumbles the pie-man). How many can you find?

- What other names could Posy have been called? (e.g. Flora, Daisy, Blossom, Rose, Lily, Bunch)
- What other names could Crumbles have been called? (e.g. Grumbles, Flakey, Yum, Meaty, Cooky)
- Think of some other good names for people of various types and who do various jobs, e.g. Chop the butcher, Spark the firefighter, Candy Sweet the lolly shop owner, Sneak the thief, Ms Know the teacher, and Patty and Bun the bakers.

#### Question 7

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Authors often use people they either knew or know now to base their characters on when they are writing. Emily Rodda had a great aunt who was rather like Aunt Bethany.

- Do you have any older relatives whose lives are very different from yours? Write a description of such a person. Make sure to say *how* they are different and *why* this might be so.
- If you were to choose a relative as a character in a book you were writing, who would you choose and why? How might you disguise them so they did not know you had based your character on them?

#### Question 8

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The artist who painted the music box put many fairytale and other fantasy characters into the picture.

- How many references to well-known fairytales and nursery rhymes can you find in *The Key to Rondo*?
- Choose one fairytale or nursery rhyme that you particularly love. Write it out, draw a picture of your favourite scene and say which character in the rhyme would make a great character in a book.

#### Question 9

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If you had a magic paint brush, what would you paint on your music box? Describe your world, remembering that you can visit it if you want to. Draw a picture if you can.

#### Question 10

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The world of Rondo is a metaphor for the imagination.

- Discuss in class what a metaphor is.
- Can the imagination be dangerous as well as exciting?

#### Question 11

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Discussion: Would you have tried to save your dog if he or she had been abducted by the Blue Queen and taken into the music box? If so, why? If not, why? The answer will tell you if you're more like Leo, or more like Mimi, or if you're somewhere in between.

#### Question 12

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Discussion: At the end of the book, Uncle Henry says to Leo '... while the music box is wound up, whether it's playing aloud or not, life here goes on. But when the music runs down, life here simply – stops – until the box is wound up again.'

How *do* we know for certain that our world does not stop? Could *our* world be like the world inside the music box?