

TEACHERS NOTES

AUTHOR: GLENDA MILLARD ILLUSTRATOR: STEPHEN MICHAEL KING

TITLE: THE TENDER MOMENTS OF SAFFRON SILK

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SYNOPSIS

The Tender Moments of Saffron Silk is the sixth book in Glenda Millard's enchanting *Kingdom of Silk* series illustrated in captivating style by Stephen Michael King.

The Silks are a very special family. Ben and Annie have had seven children, although the last – their beloved Tishkin – was sadly taken away from them as a baby. Griffin is the only boy, and is the youngest of the Silks, with five sisters known as the Rainbow Girls: Scarlet, Indigo, Violet, Amber and Saffron. They also share their home with a foster child, Perry Angel, who arrived at the Kingdom of Silk, with a suitcase inscribed with his name 'Perry Maxwell, God's Dearest Angel'. Ben, like Perry, was a foster child and came to live with Nell after she lost her adored family. Nell still lives with them all, and the children love her, especially because she is 'the world's leading authority on tender moments' (p 11).

In this latest instalment in the series, Saffron is the focus. Tender moments were Saffron Silk's pleasure from her very first day. She is also 'excellent at pretending to be other people' (p 19) which leads to her 'cult' following as 'Joan of Arc' at school. But when she begins to suffer from strange headaches and dizzy spells, the whole family is frightened. 'On the day of Saffron's naming no-one could tell what sort of moments would fill the pages of her book, but everyone hoped the tiny tender ones, those that make the soul tipsy with ordinary happiness, and the quiet comforting kind would far outweigh the others. This was their wish for her from the beginning, even before they learnt she had to go away.' (p 14)

Will Saffron survive her illness? And what will the family do, if yet another of them is taken away?

THEMES

The themes in this book include: **Imagination, Families, Grief, Reflection (Time to Dwell and Think on Things), Individual Choice and Responsibility, Fear, Curiosity, The Value of Reading, Love, Wishes, Cooking and Recipes as Shared Memories.** [See also **Thematic Activities** and **Discussion Points** in **Study Notes** below.]

WRITING STYLE

Interpretation and **Reading Comprehension** is also encouraged by this text which is enhanced by **drawings** which will stimulate both **Visual Literacy Skills** and **Creative Arts Activities.** [See also **Activities** and **Discussion Points** in **Study Notes** below.]

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Glenda Millard has written six books in *The Kingdom of Silk* Series:

1. *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*
2. *Layla, Queen of Hearts*
3. *Perry Angel's Suitcase*
4. *All the Colours of Paradise*
5. *Plum Puddings and Paper Moons*
6. *The Tender Moments of Saffron Silk.*

She has written about this book in the series that:

'What made me want to write about Saffron, you ask. On reflection it was probably for the same reason as I wrote books 2,3,4 and 5 in the Kingdom of Silk series.

You see, when I wrote *The Naming of Tishkin Silk* I had no intention of writing a series. However my heartstrings became entangled with the people I had imagined into being and, much to my surprise and delight, it seems many readers of that first book shared a similar experience. Thus I was encouraged to write a second book, *Layla Queen of Hearts*, motivated by a desire to uncover more about the individuals of the large and unusual Silk family. And this has been the pattern with every book I write about them. Commencing another book about the Silks is like walking into the home of good friends I haven't visited in a while. It only takes a short while to feel part of the family again. I notice what's new, who's grown and what has stayed the same.

Why Saffron in particular? I suppose because she was the one I felt I knew least about and also because her four sisters are each in their own way, strong, vibrant characters. Scarlet, the oldest, is outspoken, argumentative, at times rebellious and a leader. Violet is quiet, perhaps slightly shy or reserved but already has a career as a writer in mind and is diligent in moving towards her goal. Her twin, Indigo, is also creative, a visual artist like her mother, Annie, but more similar in temperament to her older sister Scarlet than to her twin. Amber also has a creative talent, that of cooking and is a very practical person. Griffin was created to be the odd one out; a boy, the youngest in a family of girls, a quiet worrier, happy, for the most part, in his own company.

And Saffron? From the first book, I knew she had a penchant for history, so in *The Tender Moments of Saffron Silk* I have expanded on that. Unlike some of her sisters Saffron's talent is not immediately obvious. Her great strength is her imagination. Perhaps it is this which has allowed her to completely immerse herself in the lives of her heroes, one of whom is her father, Ben. Although she has yet to realise it, Saffron is a little like her father, a thoughtful person with the ability to see what others cannot. Imagination can sometimes alleviate worry when we find ourselves in stressful circumstances. This and drawing on the qualities of her heroes is something that stands Saffron in good stead when she faces the worry of an undiagnosed illness.'

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Glenda Millard says that she 'has loved reading and being read to from early age.' As a child, her more robust pursuits included billy-cart racing, tree-climbing and attempting to fly. She used to dream that she could fly and on windy days she could be found at the football oval with her arms outstretched, poised to be whisked away, or sometimes balanced precariously on the roof of her Nana's shed. Neither of these techniques worked. Even an impressive bandage around her wrist, a day home from school and a ride in the council grader was poor compensation for the spectacular failure of her launch attempt from the high-up swing at school. Glenda left school at 15 and didn't discover the joy of writing until nearly thirty years later!

Glenda was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award 2004 as well as receiving the Honour Book Award for the CBCA awards that same year for her book *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*. Her picture book *Kaito's Cloth* was shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Award 2005, and *Layla, Queen of Hearts* was shortlisted for the Younger Readers CBCA Award in 2007, and winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award in 2007. Her most recent novel *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark* is for lower secondary readers and was winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for YA Fiction in 2009 and has been included in the prestigious international IBBY Honour Book List in 2011. Her picture book *Isabella's Garden* illustrated by Rebecca Cool was a CBCA Honour Award Book and was shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Award 2010. *All the Colours of Paradise* was also shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Award 2010. *Mbobo Tree* illustrated by Annie White is another of her latest picture books.

Glenda has written picture books for very young readers as well as novels for lower secondary readers. Her books are beautifully written, and are an inventive mixture of whimsy and reality which will entrance both children and the adults who read her books with them.

ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Stephen Michael King says that he can remember drawing all of his life. Growing up in suburban Sydney in an environment where his imagination and creativity were nurtured, he wrote stories, dreamed of illustrating a book and of one day working with Walt Disney Studios. When he was nine, Stephen went partially deaf but his hearing loss was unnoticed for a number of years. During this time he began to immerse himself in art where he could communicate without words. Due to his deafness he found school a traumatic experience which failed to prepare him for the future. However, he was eventually employed as a children's library assistant and this job made use of his natural affinity with children and helped pave the way to future opportunities. In 1990 he was employed by the Walt Disney Studios in Surry Hills and he subsequently worked as a book designer and illustrator for Scholastic Australia.

Watercolours, black ink, oil painting and sculpture are Stephen's favourite media, and he has now produced a number of successful books. His first picture book, *The Man Who Loved Boxes*, won the Family Therapy Association Award and was shortlisted for the Crichton Award in 1996. It has since been published around the world and translated into a number of languages. In 1997 Stephen collaborated with Robin Morrow over *Beetle Soup - Australian Stories and Poems for Children*, which was shortlisted for the 1997 CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers. *Patricia* was released in 1998 and in 1999 both *The Little Blue Parcel* and *Henry and Amy* were shortlisted by the CBC for the Picture Book of the Year Award.

Some of Stephen's most recent books are *The Pocket Dogs* and *Pocket Dogs Go on Holiday* (with Margaret Wild), *Emily Loves to Bounce*, *Millie, Jack and the Dancing Cat*, *Mutt Dog!*, *You!* and *Never Ever Before*. *Applesauce and the Christmas Miracle* (text Glenda Millard) and *Leaf* were both shortlisted for the 2009 CBCA Early Childhood Book of the Year Award. He has an excellent website where you can find out all about his work. <http://stephenmichaelking.com/bio.html>

STUDY NOTES

The following activities and discussion points relate to the themes, writing style and to other curriculum areas such as Interpretation and Reading Comprehension, Visual Literacy and Creative Arts.

A. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Imagination**

Discussion Point and Activity: Each of the books in the series celebrate the joy of the imagination. Discuss the imagination with your students. Encourage them to talk about their favourite 'imaginings'. Have them write a brief description of something they've imagined or dreamed which was particularly memorable for them. They might then like to draw it as well.

- **Families**

Discussion Point: Griffin confesses to himself that he was jealous of the new baby Tishkin, since he had been the youngest, but then felt guilty when she died. Every member of a family is conscious of where they are placed in a family and how that has affected their relationships. How do you feel about your family? Or are you an only child? Discuss families with your students.

- **Grief**

Discussion Point: Everyone in the Silk family has had sadness or loss to recover from. Nell has lost her Johnny and her two daughters Kate and Ella in a car accident. Ben and Annie and their children have lost Tishkin and for awhile Annie was so sad she had to go to hospital. Saffron being the youngest girl, was bereft when her mother went away too. And Nell gives her the bluebird ring so that she might understand sadness. 'Saffron, I want you to understand that it's all right to cry and it's all right to feel sad. It's normal and it helps the hurt in us heal.' (p 17) Discuss with students the times when they have felt sad, and how they have dealt with grief. (This discussion requires sensitivity, as students may have experienced recent loss or bereavement.)

- **Reflection (Time to Dwell and Think on Things)**

Discussion Point: 'And the teachers didn't encourage cogitation. There was no time for thinking deeply. They wanted Saffron, like all the other students, to answer their questions quickly.' (p 18) Is reflection time an important thing in our lives? Do you like to make decisions immediately or do you prefer to ponder and think about things before coming to a decision?

- **Individual Choice and Responsibility**

Discussion Point: 'There was another reason why Perry liked Choose-days. They reminded him of chosen. Chosen is good, Nell says. Chosen is when you get to say yes or no.' (p 32) How important is free choice? Discuss this with your students.

- **Fear**

Discussion Point: 'Now he had learned to read hearts, Perry Angel knew Saffron was frightened.' (p 33) In fact everyone in the family is frightened although they might not have said so. Discuss.

- **Curiosity**

Discussion Point: 'Questions are tools for discovering truth. They can be used like a sledgehammer to smash things open, or like a candle to lighten the dark.' (p 45) Discuss this statement with your students. How important is it to questions things?

- **The Value of Reading**

Discussion Point: 'From the moment her daughters were born, Nell read to them. It didn't matter that they didn't understand the words. Books are many things: lullabies for the weary, ointment for the wounded, armour for the fearful and nests for those in need of a home.' (p 39) Ask your students what reading means to them. Have them describe it in their own words, as Nell does in this lovely description.

- **Love**

Discussion Point: 'Love had made a lion of Griffin. It gave him courage and made him roar.' (p 74) Ask your students whether love has ever made them feel strong or invincible like Griffin.

- **Wishes**

Discussion Point: 'We, Griffin William Silk and Layla Elliott, wish that if anyone has to leave the Kingdom of Silk, it will not be forever.' (p 48) Layla and Griffin think about the wish they made before Saffron started having headaches, and hope that they made the wish in the right way. Should wishes be kept secret or can we share them? Do you believe in wishes? Discuss.

- **Cooking and Recipes as Shared Memories**

Activity: Hilde makes the lussekatter because of the story Dr Larsson tells the Silks about Sty Lucy coming to visit their sick daughter Pia in hospital carrying a lussekatter. Can food have symbolic power? Encourage your students to write down a favourite recipe and why it means so much to them. Discuss how place, time, and the people we are with can influence how we feel about a particular food. Discuss the significance of certain foods in various cultures. Create a Class Recipe Book of everyone's favourite recipes, including each personal note, illustrated by each student, and then copy it to share.

B. WRITING STYLE ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Metaphor**

Activity: 'He gazed at her starfish fingers, seashell ears, pearly nails and rockpool eyes. He watched her salty lashes sweep slowly open and shut like sea anemones and tried to imagine what sort of person his tiny girl might grow up to be.' (p 8) This is an example of an 'extended' metaphor in which the author uses nautical metaphors to describe how Saffron looked as a baby. Practise creating interesting extended metaphors in descriptions like this one.

- **Simile**

Activity: 'Often she spun a web like a fairy's hammock between the veranda posts.' (p 31) Sometimes would-be writers use clichéd similes such as 'as cold as ice.' Instead, try to create interesting similes like the one in this example, and make the expression relate to the tone and theme of the longer work you are creating.

- **Poem**

Discussion Point: 'Lost' (pp 94-6) is a poem Saffron writes about her feelings as they arrive in the city to have her tests. Have your class write poems about themselves and their feelings like this one. Then have a class reading of the various poems.

- **Story Pyramid**

Activity: Create a story pyramid based on how this story is constructed. For an example of how to go about this activity, see 'Story Pyramid' http://www.tooter4kids.com/classroom/worksheet_story_pyramid.htm

- **Author Study**

Activity: Study Glenda Millard's other works, and discuss and compare her writing style.

C. INTERPRETATION AND READING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Series Writing**

Discussion Point: When Glenda Millard begins each book in the series, how much does she need to tell the reader about what has gone before, in case they haven't read the rest of the series? Did you spot anything she told the reader about what had happened in previous books?

Activity: Write a brief story outline for a sequel to this latest book in the *Kingdom of Silk* books. In this one, Saffron is the central character and her mysterious illness is the focus of the family's concern. Who could be the main character in the seventh book? Make up your own title for the sequel too.

- **Series Illustration**

Discussion Point: How important is the continuity provided by the illustrator who has illustrated the series? Why do you think Stephen Michael King's illustrations work so well with Glenda Millard's text? How might it have changed if, for example, someone else had illustrated the series in a different style?

- **Characters**

Activity: There are several things which happen in the book which are lovely examples of the influence which the Silks have on other characters whom they encounter. Who else is influenced by the Silks, in this book, or in the rest of the series, either to change their habits, or to become happier?

Discussion Point: This novel begins with a heartfelt tribute to Saffron's father Ben, and his unique abilities: 'But one of the most interesting living people Saffron knew was her daddy, because of his ability to see things that other people could not. Extraordinary and unexpected things like mermaidly ladies in driftwood branches, wild horses rearing from red gum fenceposts, wings in wire coathangers and angels in the cabbage patch. The gift of seeing, like all special talents, takes practice and practice takes time.' (p 3) Do you know any creative people like Ben?

- **Chapter Headings**

Discussion Point: Discuss the titles of these chapters eg Science and Technology vs Tender Moments. How do they relate to the action in each chapter?

Activity: After reading the story, imagine another event or character development which might have been included in it, and create a new short chapter to be included in the story. Make up a title for the chapter as well.

D. VISUAL LITERACY AND ILLUSTRATION ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Drawing**

Discussion Point: Ben is an artist and Perry loves to draw as well. Look at some of the drawings in this book. The artist Stephen Michael King uses watercolour overlaid on very fluid suggestive drawings. How does the artist create a sense of movement and what is the central focus of the drawing?

Activity: Invite your students to interpret one of the images in the book in a new way, by changing the perspective, focus, foregrounding or some other aspect of the image.

- **Colours**

Discussion Point: Colours are very closely aligned to feelings, for example, black or dark blue often denote sombre or gloomy feelings. Red is the colour of blood, of passion, and of royalty. Green reminds us all of nature and of growing things. What colour is saffron? And what does that colour make you feel like?

- **Book Cover**

Activity: Covers need to convey a lot about a book's contents. Examine Stephen Michael King's cover image carefully and then design a new cover for this book.

- **Illustrator Study**

Activity: Study Stephen Michael's King's other works, and discuss and compare his illustration style.

E. CREATIVE ARTS ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

Activity: **Do some Knitting** (such as a scarf), and include cotton reel knitting (which is Griffin's favourite type of knitting). Make the patterns as colourful and as interesting as you can. Display the finished products in your classroom.

Activity: **Add to this Classroom Display some of the stories and pictures you've created**, inspired by the *Kingdom of Silk* series.

Activity: **Make a lussekatter** together and then enjoy eating it.

Activity: When Saffron gets to the city her parents give her all the things her siblings have made for her, as messages of love and comfort. They include some really charming things such as a necklace of paper birds by Indigo (pp 101-2). **Design a large 'Get Well Soon Card'** for Saffron as if it was created by her family and friends. What would they each be likely to include in such a card? Make it a card which can be hung or displayed, and use techniques such as collage, pop-ups, origami, or anything which you are inspired to create.

CONCLUSION

The Silks are an enticingly different and magical family. Saffron is unique amongst her very unique siblings in being capable of dreaming her way into other people's lives. She is also a person who enjoys tender moments and can spot them anywhere. But, when she becomes ill, she is frightened that dreaming or tenderness may not be nearly enough to save her.

This is another heart-warming and joyous story in the multi-award-winning *Kingdom of Silk* series. Like the earlier books, it is a skilful blend of the imagination and of reality; of whimsical charm and old-fashioned common sense; of family loyalty; of fear, grief, loss – and most of all it's a celebration of love.