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THREADS BY SOPHIA BENNETT

SYNOPSIS

Fashionista Nonie is best friends with Edie, who wants to save the world, and actress Jenny, who has just finished filming her part in a Hollywood blockbuster. When these three teenage friends meet a young African refugee girl called Crow sketching a dress at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, they get the chance to pool their talents and do something truly wonderful, proving that fashion fairy tales really can happen.

Although struggling in school, Crow demonstrates an outstanding enthusiasm and ability for designing incredible clothes. Crow is given space to develop her marvelous talent when Nonie takes her under her wing and gives her a place to work in her basement. And, as Jenny's appearances at red carpet premieres become increasingly embarrassing due to her stylist's bad choices, Crow saves the day by designing her a knockout outfit. With media attention trained on Jenny, it is not long before Crow begins to create a stir in the fashion world.

At the same time, Edie, whose blog has gained in popularity due to her link with Jenny, starts to raise awareness of the situation in Crow's home country, Uganda; highlighting the plight of the Night Walker children who spend their lives trying to avoid the violence that plagues the northern part of the country. It later transpires that Crow's brother, himself a Night Walker, went missing at the time Crow came to London, and is now presumed dead.

After Crow garners further praise for her entry in a prestigious fashion design competition, she is given the chance to put on her own show at London Fashion Week. With pressure mounting ahead of the show, Nonie



takes hold of the organizational reins, and finds that this is work she is quite capable of doing. However, things do not go completely smoothly, with Crow becoming distracted by thoughts of her family back in Uganda, Jenny suffering heartache over her capricious male co-star, and Nonie absent-mindedly giving the show's centre-piece dress to an up-and-coming American starlet. Besides all this, the girls still have their schoolwork to do!

Even though they have their work cut out, the show manages to go ahead (with a little help from members of Nonie's family and a generous visiting supermodel!). It is a resounding success and, unbeknown to Crow, Edie has also been able to track down her missing brother, inviting him to the show. The two are reunited and settle down to life in London; Crow's designing future being assured after a certain starlet is spotted wearing Crow's creation to the Oscars ...

WHAT THE PUBLISHER SAYS ...

I still love dressing up. Funny old clothes, smart new ones and that old hat from a junk shop in Ireland that I adore. But in Sophia Bennett's prize-winning book, fashion is not only about feeling good – it's art, it's freedom, it means doing something that changes lives in all kinds of ways. Threads is brilliant, funny, heartwarming and creative. Like my old hat.

BARRY CUNNINGHAM, CHICKEN HOUSE

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Sophia Bennett was born in Yorkshire in 1966 and grew up travelling around the world as an army child. She wanted to be an author from a young age, but had various careers in business before taking the leap to write books.

In 2009, she won the Times/Chicken House Children's Fiction Competition with her debut novel *Threads*, set in the world of London fashion. This was followed by the two sequels in the *Threads* trilogy. *The Look*, a sensitive and wittily observed take on the modelling industry was published in 2012, with *You Don't Know Me* following in 2013.

Sophia lives in London with her husband and four children, and regularly presents at schools and book festivals.



AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Why do you write about fashion? Where do you get your ideas from?

I write about creativity, really, and teens with unusual talents. *Threads* happens to be about fashion because I've been fascinated by clothes and costume since I was very small. I adore the Oscars and all those red carpet moments. I write about things that obsess me a little bit, and that I'd like to know more about. Writing stories gives me the chance to live out some of my childhood fantasies.

Where did you get the idea for Threads?

It came to me suddenly one day when I was doing the laundry. A girl who was secretly very talented at design, and who was discovered and enabled to make beautiful clothes. This was a chance to use all the fashion and celebrity stories and anecdotes I had gathered together. The story kept telling itself to me for years, until I finally wrote it down.

How did you get the idea that Crow was from Uganda?

Originally, Crow was just a girl from London like all the others. But one day I was in the London Underground and saw a poster talking about the Night Walkers in northern Uganda. Then I read more about them. Their story made me so angry – because not enough people were helping them – that I wanted to write about it. The only way to do this seemed to be to make one of my characters a Night Walker. And so Crow's history was created. It made the book much harder to write, but much deeper and much more satisfying. It wouldn't have been the same book at all if I hadn't seen that poster.

Which is your favourite character?

I love them all. Even Sigrid Santorini. My favourite character changes from time to time, but I'll always love Nonie because of her bright, enthusiastic spirit and kookiness. Crow, of course, is special and unusual. And I have a secret soft spot for Harry. Many people do!



What would you say are the messages of your books?

Find out what your talent is and make the most of it. Work hard and have fun. We only have one life and we all deserve to sparkle. The world is full of imbalance and injustice. It's up to each of us, individually, to do what we can to make it right. Friendship, loyalty and integrity will get you a very long way – even when it seems the world is against you. Stick together with the people you love and amazing things will happen. My books are realistic – they're not fantasy or science fiction. But they're funny and optimistic. They show what can happen on a very good day, if you're the best you can be and your dreams come just a little bit true.

How long have you wanted to be a writer?

I can't remember not wanting to be a writer. I've seriously wanted to do it since I was twelve. Not wanting so much as deeply, deeply needing to be able to call myself a writer. It was a massive relief when I finally got a publishing contract. It was as if I could finally be myself.

Would you like to see your books made into films?

Yes, of course. Any writer who tells you otherwise is either weird, or not being entirely honest. Having imagined *Threads* so vividly in my head while I was writing it, I would love, love, love to see it on screen. Ideally with Alex Pettyfer as Harry and Joanna Lumley as Granny. Other parts are up for grabs! Oh, wait – I need a deal first. I'm free, Disney. Call me.

THEMES

- Fashion
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Trust
- Living your dreams
- War



- Being different
- Doing the right thing

WRITING STYLE

Threads is a fast-paced teen fashion-themed story, set against the backdrop of modern day London. The writing is descriptive and comic, and depicts a group of teenage girls and their extraordinary lives. There is a strong emphasis on the development of friendships, loyalty and trust, with the main characters experiencing emotionally taut situations. There are also some descriptions of life in war-ravaged Uganda. 41 chapters, 254 pages, age 10+.

PUPIL ACTIVITIES

1: Philanthropy in Fashion

In *Threads*, Edie has the idea of using Crow's show to focus attention on the plight of people in Northern Uganda. The fashion world has long supported various causes, and worked to raise awareness (and money) on behalf of a range of issues around the world. This provides an impetus for pupils to undertake some research into the causes the fashion industry has highlighted over the years. Pupils could work in groups to investigate the charitable work that different fashion houses have been involved in. Each group could select a cause, researching the way in which this cause has been promoted through fashion. The groups could come up with a display, or perhaps give a presentation to the rest of their class. In the same way that the friends in *Threads* all have an important role to play in the success of Crow's show, this activity would require the pupils to show they can each bring something to their group; whether this be a particular area of research, or an important role in the delivery of the presentation.

2: London Fashion Week Triumph

Crow's success at London Fashion Week comes after a great deal of hype in the fashion press. However, the



reaction to her final show creates a ripple in the mainstream media as well. Pupils could be tasked with writing an account of the show – perhaps a review, a blog, or a mainstream newspaper report. Pupils will need to decide on who they will be writing as, in order to know what they should be writing about in their piece. For example, a journalist, writing for a respectable newspaper, may pay particular attention to the political element of the show; namely the ‘Invisible Children’ campaign set up by Edie. This journalist may also mention the clothes (what they looked like, what the overall theme was etc.), but this may be a secondary concern. On the other hand, a writer for a dedicated fashion magazine may well focus specifically on the design of the clothes, giving slightly less space to the cause. A celebrity blogger may also write about the event, but depending on their own personal interests (and those of the people who read the blog) they may choose to draw attention to other elements of the show – which famous people attended the event, for instance. Once pupils have decided what sort of publication they are writing for and have thought carefully about the content, they can start drafting their piece of writing, which will later be made available for peer review.

3: Casting Agents

In her interview in the ‘Author Motivation’ section, Sophia Bennett talks a little bit about who she imagines playing the parts of Harry and Granny if ever *Threads* was turned into a movie. Effectively, Sophia is performing the job of a casting agent here, thinking about which actor has the qualities best suited to the characters in her book. In *Threads*, the characters are all quite different, and we learn a great deal about their appearance and behaviour from the author’s depiction. Pupils could be asked to act in the role of casting agent, devising a cast list for a potential movie version of *Threads*. They would need to pick an actor for each of the main characters in the novel, fully explaining how they arrived with these choices. A short profile could be drawn up for each character (detailing their appearance and main characteristics), and the appropriate actor named alongside. As with the work casting agents do, it would be interesting for pupils to create a cast ‘board’ on which they include pictures of the actors they have selected; this would encourage pupils to think about whether their cast would work together in terms of their overall look. These casting boards could also be used to help pupils present their dream cast to the rest of the class.



4: Red Carpet Confidence

Jenny's various appearances at red carpet events are intriguing to readers of *Threads* because she approaches each one with a seemingly different mind-set and level of confidence. Arguably, this confidence stems from her attitude to her own appearance, and after Crow begins to design her dresses, Jenny becomes recognisable as a bit of a fashion icon. In addition, Jenny's obsession with the on/off relationship she has with her co-star, Joe, affects her demeanour at these events. As such, Jenny's experiences in the public eye provide pupils with an opportunity to explore what it is that engenders confidence, and also how we learn to tell if a person is a confident one or not. Pupils could develop short scripts for each of Jenny's public appearances, in which she gets interviewed by a television journalist. Pupils could act out these scenarios, with the objective being that pupils disclose Jenny's level of confidence, be it through verbal or physical means. The other pupils, watching these scenes unfold, would need to comment on whether they thought Jenny was acting in a confident or non-confident manner (and all points in between), stating what it was exactly that gave them this impression.

5: Sliding Doors

It is Nonie and Jenny's chance meeting with Crow in the V & A museum that leads to Crow being discovered for her creative talent, which in turn leads to her having her own show at London Fashion Week. Undeniably, the story would have been different had Crow not been discovered, and subsequently helped, by the three friends (Nonie, Jenny and Edie) and their families. That said, had Crow not entered the lives of the people who help her achieve her fashion dreams, things probably would not have worked out as favourably for them either. In this way, the meeting at the V & A is a pivotal moment for all concerned. But what if this meeting had never taken place? How would things have turned out for the characters in the book? Would they still have achieved their dreams? Pupils could debate this by constructing an alternative reality for the main characters, one in which the meeting never happened. They could question if their lives might have turned out completely differently were they not acquainted, or perhaps they would still have realised their ambitions, albeit through a different route? In any event, this activity would



encourage pupils to think about the potential impact of seemingly inconsequential or chance events.

6: From the V & A Archives

For Nonie, Jenny and Crow, the V & A museum in London is a favoured destination – providing a rich source of inspiration for fashion lovers. Pupils could work in groups to research some of the areas of design detailed in the museum, using the website as source material (www.vam.ac.uk). Their findings could perhaps be relayed to the rest of the class as a wall display, or incorporated into a class presentation.

WRITING PROMPTS/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Nonie and Jenny's first impression of Crow, and do their thoughts about her change after this first encounter? Do you think first impressions are usually right or wrong? Has your first impression of someone ever turned out to be completely different to the way you thought about that person after you got to know them?
2. Crow experiences a crisis of conscience during her preparations for the London Fashion Week show, questioning whether the money being spent on materials wouldn't be better spent helping the people of Uganda. Considering the show will raise awareness of the plight of children in northern Uganda, do you think Crow is right to question this?
3. How does Crow react to the judges' final decision in the school design competition? Why might she react this way?
4. After Jenny attends the first awards ceremony for her movie, the press reveals stories about her dad's relationships. What do you think about the way these stories are covered by the press? Do you enjoy reading about celebrities' private lives in magazines and newspapers? Do you think there should be more laws to protect celebrities (and others) from intrusion by the press?

