



Good Night, Mr. Tom
by Michelle Magorian

Good Night, Mr. Tom by Michelle Magorian is an excellent historical fiction novel set in World War II England. The text won the IRA Children's Book Award. In 2003 the book was listed as one of the top five best sellers by Barnes & Noble along with *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *The Great Good Thing*, *Yo! Yes?*, and *The Giver*. The book is included as part of the "Focus Unit, A Study of World War II" (pp. 319 - 324) in Chapter 8 - "Reading, Writing, and Literature in the Content Areas: Fourth Through Eighth Grades."

The author develops the historical fiction novel about a lonely and abused boy who, because of the bombings, is evacuated from London to live with a lonely and often unhappy older man. I chose this book because teachers may focus on characterization and on the authentic setting that reflects the wartime setting in England. When emphasizing characterization, the discussion may focus on either or both the characterization of eight-year-old Willie as he changes from a frightened, malnourished, and physically abused boy to a happy and confident youngster who responds to the love given by Mr. Tom. The characterization of Mr. Tom also reveals the importance of love as he changes from a lonely older man with a rigid routine to one who cares about the young boy.

As a World War II setting, the author describes everyday actions such as putting black curtains over the windows so that German pilots can not see where to drop bombs, listening to the wireless to discover the invasion of Poland, queues (lines) of men reporting for duty, and the Prime Minister of England declaring war against Germany. By telling the story through the eyes of common people who experienced the war, readers are presented with strong feelings associated with the consequences of war.

Michael Foreman's autobiographies, *War Boy: A Country Childhood and After the War Was Over* provide excellent accompaniment to *Good Night, Mr. Tom* because Foreman includes numerous illustrations that depict his experiences growing up in England during the 1940s.

Good Night, Mr. Tom may also accompany modern fantasies such as C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. When children read Lewis's book they may not understand the reasons why Lewis's characters live in the country with a stranger.

IDEAS FOR SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Good Night, Mr. Tom. I enjoyed this book and this one is my favorite. I would have the students do a story retell as I did a read aloud of this book daily. I would have the students write in their journals about their favorite character and why they selected the character they did.

I would also discuss with the class the hardships of William who came from such an abusive home and would see what they would have done differently were they in William's shoes.

I would have the students do a compare and contrast of William from the beginning when he first arrived at Mr. Tom's home and how he was at the end of the book. These are some questions I would ask to get each of them thinking: How was William at the beginning of this book? How did he change and why? What was so special about his relationship with Mr. Tom, who later became his father?

I would have the students describe the great friendship between William and Zach. I would have them write about their friendships and describe what made the friendship so special. I would also have them describe a good friend and how that friend was special to each of them. I would have them share aloud what they had written.

I would ask students to tell me why they liked the book. I would also have each student talk about their favorite part of the book and why it was their favorite part.

I would have the students do a Reader's Theatre about any part of the book they wished to dramatize.

I would also share with them why this was my favorite book and why.

I loved this book. There are many great ideas that you can do with this book. I would certainly use this book in the classroom to talk about the war and the impact that it had on everyone's life. As Donna suggested in her text, this would be a great book to pair up with a nonfiction text, and teach using the Twin Text method. As far as an activity, I think that having students develop Book Boxes in response to the text would be helpful. It would allow the students to personalize the text. As students read the text, they make a list of important objects mentioned throughout. The choice of a "box" would allow the students to choose a shoebox, basket, bag, empty cans, or any other containers that would hold the objects that they have selected. Students are to decorate the "box" as they desire, putting the title of the book and related words and/or pictures. As students fill the "box" they should prepare a brief narrative as to what is in the box and why it was placed there. Once the Book Box is completed, students may share with the rest of the class. I

really believe that students at the 5-8 grades would enjoy this rather than a book report. It allows them to be creative and personal in their responses.

This was a wonderful story with historical references but could be applied to current issues. My ideas are as follows:

1. Students could write from the perspective of Mr. Tom or Willie or even Sammy the dog.
 2. Students could do a historical study of World War II.
 3. Comparing what went on in England or with the Jews and the Holocaust or the Japanese camps in the US would make an interesting research project.
 4. Students could role play any of the situations in the story.
 5. The issue of abuse could be discussed, written about, role played or researched.
 6. Students could read other literature or view movies about children who had to be sent away during wartime.
 7. Students could write letters to any older person who influenced their lives. If the person is living the letters could be sent and responses shared.
-

Because this book was told from an omniscient point of view, the thoughts and feelings of many characters are known. I would have my students keep a journal while reading this novel, writing in it from the point of view of one of the characters (a simulated journal entry). This would allow for the students to analyze a character in another means. By the way, I also enjoyed this book and have told my colleague about it. (She teaches the SS part of our integrated course.) A couple of semesters ago, we had two students from England in our course, and one of them chose to do a thematic unit on the evacuation of children from London. I wish I could have referred her to this novel.

IDEAS FOR COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

One of the first things I would do with this book is use it for genre evaluation, historical fiction. Some of the questions the college students would respond to are:

Is the story well-developed and believable?

Are characters well-developed and believable?

Does the past come alive with details and historical events?

Are multiple historical perspectives presented, giving the reader a better sense of the times?

Are the times portrayed accurately, without too much sugar-coating or preaching?

Are cultures portrayed, showing a wide range of individual diversity?

I would have the students to create an integrated lesson plan using this book with ELA, probably at the 5th grade level.

I would also have the students keep a diary, either as Willie or Mr. Tom.