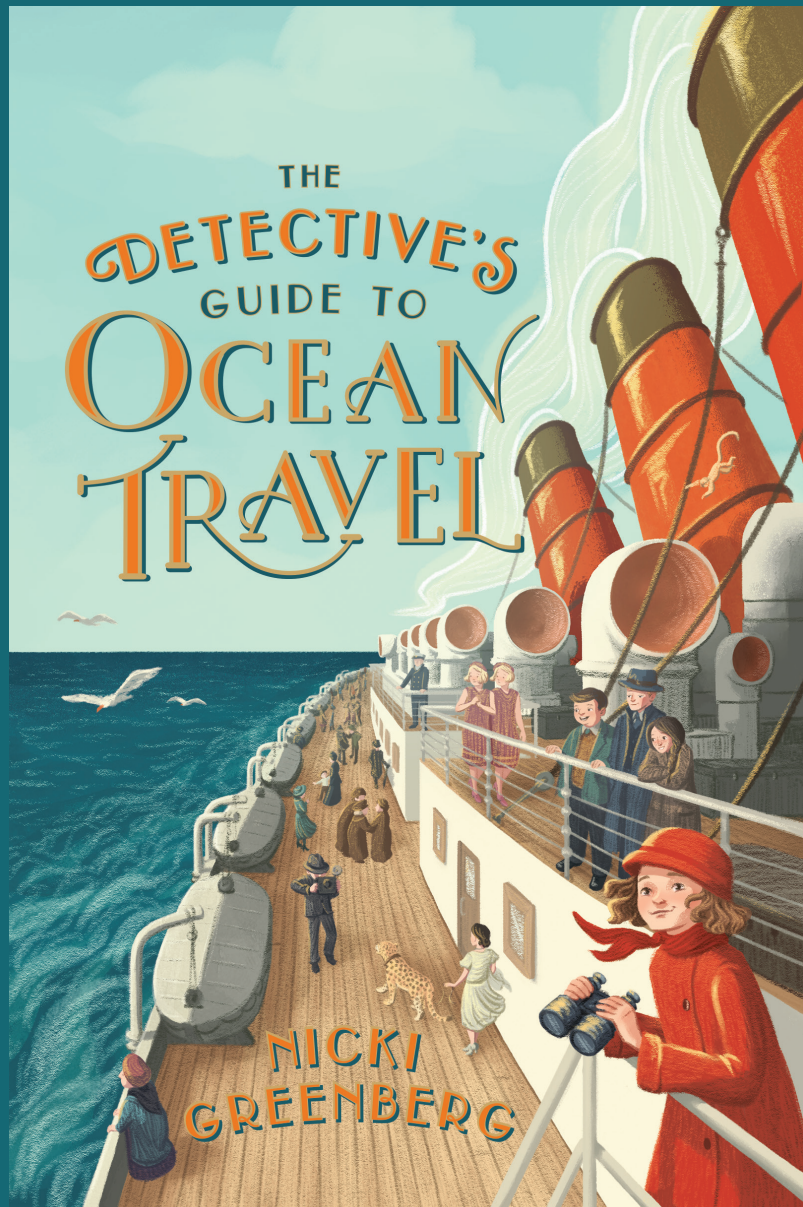


TEACHERS NOTES



WRITTEN BY

Nicki Greenberg

SUITABLE FOR

Ages 9-12

THEMES

- Social class and societal expectations
- Traditional gender roles
- Problem solving
- Dreams and aspirations
- Family relationships

CONTENTS OF THIS PACK

- Overview of *The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel* (this page)
- 'Before we begin reading' discussion and activities (page 3)
- Text study, organised thematically and containing activities (pages 4 to 12)
- 'After we've finished reading' activity (page 12)

DESCRIPTION

For as long as she can remember, Pepper Stark has wanted one thing: to join her father, the Captain, aboard the magnificent RMS *Aquitania* on a voyage to New York. She has never been allowed to set foot on her father's ship – until now.

From the decadent food to the star-studded passenger list, travelling First Class on *Aquitania* is every bit as glamorous as Pepper had imagined. And most dazzling of all is American stage sensation Perdita West, wearing the world-famous Saffron Diamond around her neck. When the priceless jewel disappears mid-voyage, Pepper unexpectedly finds herself entangled in the crime.

With the Captain's reputation at stake, Pepper and her new friends set out to solve the mystery. But finding a missing diamond isn't so easy on *Aquitania*, where everyone has something to hide ...

A thrilling adventure from award-winning author Nicki Greenberg, *The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel* is perfect for fans of *Murder Most Unladylike* and *The Good Thieves*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicki Greenberg is a writer and illustrator based in Melbourne, Australia. Her first books, The Digits series, were published when she was fifteen years old. She later spent ten years disguised as a lawyer, while maintaining a not-so-secret Other Life as a comics artist and children's book author. In 2008 Nicki's innovative graphic adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* was selected as a White Raven at the Bologna Book Fair. She then went on to tackle *Hamlet* in a lavish 425-page 'staging on the page'. *Hamlet* was joint winner of the 2011 Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year award. Inspired by her own young children, Nicki now dedicates most of her ink to books for younger readers. Her favourite activity is making books, but when she does manage to tear herself away from the desk Nicki loves to crochet bizarre sea creatures.



FIND THIS BOOK AT OUR WEBSITE

<https://affirmpress.com.au/publishing/the-detectives-guide-to-ocean-travel/>



BEFORE WE BEGIN READING

CIRCUMTEXTUALITY ACTIVITY: HOW THE TEXT IS PRESENTED

Curriculum areas:

- **English: Text structure and organisation; Literature and context; Responding to literature; Interpreting, analysing, evaluating**

Ask students to write a paragraph about their expectations of this book based on its cover illustration and title. Questions to consider:

- Can you guess which period of history this book will be set in?
- What are the characters doing? Which characters will have prominent roles?
- Why do you think the character in red (Pepper) has a pair of binoculars? What might that symbolise about her character traits and her role in the book?
- How would you describe the look and feel of the illustration and fonts?

INTERTEXTUALITY ACTIVITY: TEXT-TO-TEXT CONNECTIONS

Curriculum areas:

- **English: Responding to literature; Literature and context; Language for interaction**

When we pick up a book, we immediately judge it by its cover: from the cover art and design, we can guess what the book will be about and who it is for. The cover of *The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel* provides an excellent opportunity to discuss visual clues about novel genres.

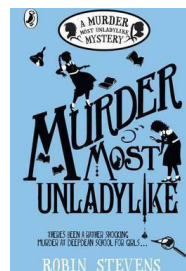
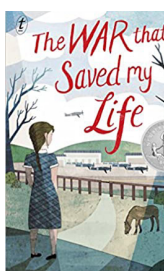
About the middle grade genre and where this book fits

The primary audience for middle grade novels is children aged 9 to 12. Middle grade novels are more complex than junior fiction novels in their plots, characterisation, character arcs, and language. Books in this genre typically have main characters who are aged within the range of their primary audience. Regardless of whether middle grade novels are set in a realistic or fantasy world, their characters are usually on a journey to discover their identity, and this often involves developing new friendships and navigating changes in relationships.

The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel is a historical middle grade novel with elements of mystery.

ACTIVITY: WHERE SHOULD WE SHELVE THIS BOOK?

Ask students to research books in the historical middle grade genre and see if they can find book covers that are similar (and/or different!) in style. What do these covers have in common and how are they different? Do Australian novels look different to novels from overseas? Here are three examples to start the discussion:



TEXT STUDY

INTRATEXTUALITY (TEXT-TO-SELF CONNECTIONS)

EXTRATEXTUALITY (TEXT-TO-WORLD CONNECTIONS)

THEME: SOCIAL CLASS AND SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS

Curriculum areas in this section:

- **English: Responding to literature; Interpreting, analysing, evaluating; Interacting with others; Expressing and developing ideas; Creating texts**
- **History: Historical sources as evidence; continuity and change**
- **Personal and Social Capability: Development of resilience; Relationships and diversity**

One of the joys of Pepper's time on *Aquitania* is that it introduces her to people from different backgrounds to her own, which helps to expand her world view and her ability to empathise. When we meet Pepper, her perspective is shaped by the people around her, and specifically her governess who instructs Pepper on how she is expected to behave. But Pepper's voyage offers her a chance to see beyond this, and we watch as Pepper and her friends bridge the social and cultural divides that appear among the adult passengers of the ship. Pepper befriends Sol, a Jewish American passenger in Second Class, and Norah, an Irish passenger in Third, and does not hesitate to spend time with them in whatever way she can. In stark contrast, adult passengers do not move beyond their decks, and their behaviour mirrors societal expectations, such as wearing particular clothes at particular times. And while Pepper does not think twice about befriending an American, we see Perdita West's American roots and her background as a waitress prompt some snobbery among the First Class passengers.

Theme extract and discussion points

Along the warm, softly lit corridor, passengers were emerging from their staterooms and heading aft to the public rooms. The men wore dinner suits; the women, glittering gowns. Penguins and peacocks, Pepper thought with a grin as she and Miss Quacken joined the parade in a haze of brilliantine and jasmine perfume.

The First Class restaurant was an enormous room two decks high, with a mezzanine balcony running around all four sides. Slender marble pillars soared from the balcony to the ceiling, whose centrepiece was an immense oval fresco of cherubs cavorting among sunset-flushed clouds. At one end an orchestra was playing, their oboes and violins almost eclipsed by the din of five hundred-odd voices. [p.35]



The long, low-ceilinged room was packed with passengers of all ages brining in a soupy mix of damp wool, borax soap, tobacco and sweat. Squalling babies bounced on the hips of mothers and sisters: down here the women did not have nursemaids to spirit their children away. Men milled about or sat smoking in quartets of low wooden chairs, snapping their cards onto small round tables. The more grown-up girls and boys clustered in the corners, laughing together and swatting away



younger siblings who tried to worm their way in. [p.217]

- How do the words used in each extract make you feel about the places they describe?
- The second extract focuses more on the people, whereas the first extract describes both the people and the general look and feel of the setting. Why do you think this is?
- Remember that both extracts are following Pepper's point of view. How might this change how each setting is described? If we saw both places from Norah's perspective, do you think her interpretation of them would differ to Pepper's? How so?
- In the second extract, 'squalling babies' are mentioned. Why are babies absent in the first extract?
- The book refers to Second Class too, but not in the same detail as First and Third. Why do you think that is? How would you imagine Second Class to look?

Theme extract and discussion points

'What did she do, bring every bit of jewellery she owns?' Pepper heard one of them snap as they rejoined the crowd.

'And dress her cat in it,' sneered the other. Muffy was wearing the Saffron Diamond again, as well as a pair of diamond anklets around her front paws.

'Even for an American, it's just crass.'

'Well, what do you expect? She's still just a jumped-up little waitress underneath.' [pp.102-103]

- In this passage, Pepper overhears the Fou Fou twins gossiping about Perdita West. Which words specifically indicate that the Fou Fou twins are being unkind?
- What do you think the words 'jumped-up' mean? What does this passage indicate about that society's views on people who move 'up' in social class at that time? Do you think the Fou Fou twins and others like them would ever accept Perdita as 'one of them'? Why/why not?
- We see a cultural divide opening up here: the Fou Fou twins describe Perdita's behaviour as 'crass', *even for an American*. What does this tell you about some British views on Americans at the time? Why do you think this was? Why do you think Pepper has a different view of Sol, who is also American?

Theme extract and discussion points

Sol didn't seem like the sort of person who dined in fancy restaurants. In fact, if she was honest (although she felt like an awful snob for thinking it), well, he didn't seem like the sort who sailed First Class on Aquitania either. [p. 43-44]

- What assumptions is Pepper making when she concludes that Sol doesn't 'seem like the sort who sailed First Class'? Why does she make such assumptions?
- Can you find other points in the book where characters judge one another based on appearance? Which characters judge the most, and why do you think this is?

Theme extract and discussion points

'It's marvellous to see you, though,' he said. 'Is this your first crossing?'

'Yes. Well, the first I can remember, anyway. But you're an old hand, aren't you? Do you always sail



on *Aquitania*?’

Toby laughed. ‘Oh, no: I’ve been on loads of them.’

He began to list off the ships on his fingers: ‘Mauretania, Berengaria, Carmania, Alaunia. Majestic, Homeric, Leviathan ... We tried the *Île de France* last year: very modern, very chic, and wonderful food. I don’t mind this old tub, though. Bit of an overdressed old girl, but she’s got her charms.’ [p.69]

- Why has Toby described *Aquitania* as ‘overdressed’? What does that imply about *Aquitania* compared to the other ships that Toby has been on?
- Compare Toby’s description of *Aquitania* here with Swindon Ogilvie’s description on pages 50 to 52. Ogilvie describes the ship as ‘sumptuously antique’. How do you think this phrase compares with Toby’s description of ‘overdressed’? Would you say that ‘sumptuously antique’ is a compliment? Does your opinion change when you read the entirety of Ogilvie’s article?
- How does Toby’s language reflect his social class? Which words in particular indicate his status?

Theme extract and discussion points

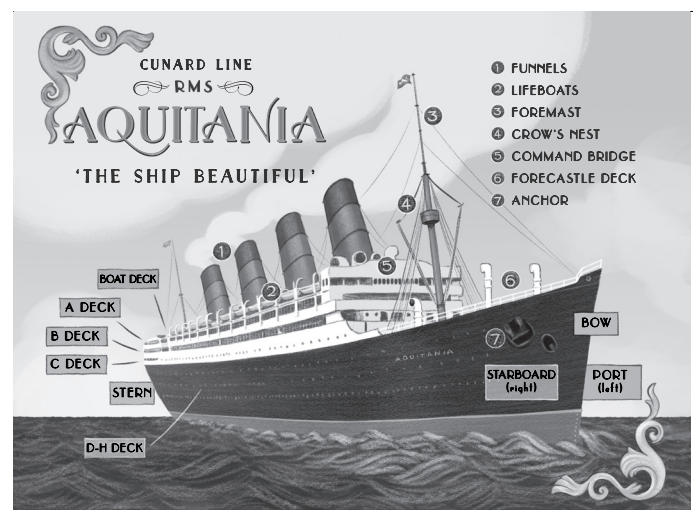
They made their way forward along the boat deck. The First Class section was busy with strolling passengers well wrapped against the brisk morning in fine coats and warmed from within by their eleven-o’clock bouillon. Pepper wondered what Norah would think of all this luxury on parade. But Norah hardly seemed to notice them. [p.86]

- In the last sentence of this passage, Pepper thinks that Norah hardly seems to notice the ‘luxury on parade’. From what you know about Norah after reading this book, do you think that Norah would or wouldn’t have noticed the ‘luxury’ on show on the deck?
- Do you think that Pepper would have noticed the ‘luxury on parade’ as keenly if Norah hadn’t been there? Does having Norah there help Pepper to view the First Class deck differently?

ACTIVITY: CREATIVE WRITING

Sol and Norah are in Second and Third class respectively. We get hints at what life is like for them, both on and off deck (and particularly for Norah). Write a journal entry as if you are either Sol or Norah, describing your first night on board *Aquitania*. Include the following:

- Your first impression of the ship, and whether or not it’s a new experience for you to be travelling on a ship like this.
- Your first impression of your cabin, and whether or not it met your expectations.
- Whether or not you share your cabin, and who with.
- Your impression of your first meal, and whether or not it met your expectations.
- If you’ve met other passengers, and how alike or different you and your family are to them.
- Whether or not you saw other passengers who were boarding a different deck to you.



THEME: TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

This story is set in 1927 and a lot has changed since then! Back in this period, restrictive gender norms controlled how people behaved, what they wore, and how they spent their time, both for work and for leisure. We see this world from Pepper's perspective, and we watch as she resists the gender ideals set out for her by her governess, Miss Quacken (who is informed by views set out in her book, *The Lady's Guide to Ocean Travel*). While on the voyage, Pepper learns that her mother was an engineer at heart, but that she could never have been an engineer at this time. But women were not the only ones constrained by gender norms in this period. Men, like women, had particular roles that they were expected to fill, including being the breadwinners for the family. For example, if Pepper's father had wanted to quit his job as a Captain and stay at home to look after Pepper when his wife died, it would have been quite out of the ordinary and frowned upon for him to do so. And while many of the passengers that we meet on Aquitania have jobs, they are all professions that fit the social narrative of what roles men and women should fill. For example, the only women who have jobs are a governess, a psychic, and an entertainer, while many more men have jobs in what would have been considered as typically 'men's work', including various important ship roles, from captain to engineer, as well as journalist, jockey, chef, and veterinarian.

Theme extract and discussion points

*Miss Quacken was buttoned into one of the two new ensembles she had bought especially for the voyage, both of which were in tweedy brown. 'One must dress as well as one can on board a ship,' she had told Pepper grimly when they were packing their cabin trunk at home. 'It is just as Mrs Ledoux says,' she intoned, opening *The Lady's Guide to Ocean Travel* at a folded page.*

'Accidents and loss of life are possible at sea, and I have always felt that a body washed ashore clad in good clothes would receive more respect and kinder care than if dressed in those fit only for the rag bag.' [pp.35-36]

- Miss Quacken's book of social etiquette instructs that a person who drowns while at sea would receive better care if they were well-dressed than if they weren't. Do you think Miss Quacken's views are exaggerated, or would people really have believed this in the 1920s? (**Hint:** this passage is a direct quote from *Ocean Notes and Foreign Travel for Ladies* by Kate Reid Ledoux, published in New York in 1878!)
- Miss Quacken only brought two 'tweedy brown' outfits with her for the voyage. Miss Quacken boarded First Class, so why do you think she dresses quite differently to the glamorous women in First Class? Does this have any relation to her job as a governess?

Theme extracts and discussion points

'She was curious, always curious,' the Captain had said. 'She'd have made a fine ship's engineer herself, if she'd been a man.' [p. 71]

- Why do you think Pepper's mother, Beatrice Stark, couldn't have been a ship's engineer? How does this compare to the present day?
- The Captain describes his late wife as 'curious, always curious'. Do you think many women were described as 'curious' at this time? How might women have been defined instead?

Find the activity for this theme overleaf...



ACTIVITY: CAMPAIGN POSTER

Imagine you are a young woman travelling on the ship. You desperately want to do something that would be frowned upon at this time, like wear trousers to dinner, or work as a bell boy, or play poker with the men after dinner. Create a poster, a newspaper advertisement, or a written article that argues for your case. Use real facts to help you as well as some persuasive language/art!

THEME: PROBLEM SOLVING

Curriculum areas in this section:

- **English: Examining literature; Responding to literature; Creating literature; Language for interaction**
- **Critical and Creative Thinking: Reasoning**
- **Personal and Social Capability: Development of resilience; Relationships and diversity**

Pepper is determined to solve the mystery of the Saffron Diamond's disappearance so that she can restore her father's reputation. Throughout her 'investigation', we see Pepper strengthening her friendship with Norah, Sol and Toby (until he becomes accused, that is!), and working with them as a team. We learn that the mystery can only be solved by the friends as a group: together, they pool their skills to follow leads, investigate hunches, and eliminate their suspects. There are tensions along the way, particularly between Norah and Pepper, and Pepper and Toby, but they overcome these challenges by focusing on the bigger task at hand. And while the missing diamond is the biggest problem for the group to solve, there are other, smaller, problems that they solve during their time together. For example, Norah is able to overcome the First/Third Class divide and perform her song for the ship because Toby writes her name down for the performance; and the group can attend the fancy-dress party because Norah and Toby 'find' them some outfits. Through all of this problem-solving, Pepper and her friends demonstrate qualities like resourcefulness, curiosity, courage and teamwork.

Theme extract and discussion points

Her thoughts churned. What was the mummy doing, though, creeping about the ship like a burglar? It didn't make sense. Unless ... [p.212]

- Red herrings in detective novels are 'false clues' that divert the reader's attention away from the real culprits and lead them to believe that someone else is responsible. This novel plants a few red herrings in our midst.
- Did you believe that the red-haired 'mummy' could really be the culprit?
- Can you list other red herrings in this novel? Which of these did you think was most likely to have stolen the diamond?
- If you were in Pepper's position, would you have conducted the investigation in the same way? Who else might you have investigated?

Theme extract and discussion points

'We've got to help!' Pepper cried out over the din. She had a powerful urge to do something, to throw



her own body into the chain.' [P.281]

- Re-read from page 281, beginning with the extract above, through to page 283. Here, the problem is the fire that has broken below decks on the ship. How do Norah and Pepper help to solve this problem? What was the outcome of their efforts?
- Did your reading pace change while you were reading these pages? At what point did you start reading faster? Did you notice if you held your breath, or felt differently while you read these pages? Why do you think that was?
- On page 281, we read many repeated words. What is the effect of these repeated words? Why do you think the words are written like this instead of a more descriptive sentence?

'Full pail – heave, pivot, pass. Empty pail – grab, swing, pass. Full – heave, pivot, pass. Empty – grab, swing, pass –'

ACTIVITY: CREATIVE WRITING

Write a new red herring for this story!

This is your chance to create a new character and plant them as a red herring in the plot.

First, start by writing about (and/or drawing!) your character. Which Class are they boarding in? What is their name? How do they dress? Who are they travelling with? What do they look like? Do they have any defining features that Pepper might recognise them by?

Second, think of a reason for your character to be involved in the Saffron Diamond mystery. Were they at the fancy dress party? Have you seen them sneaking around the ship in areas they shouldn't be? Do they wear expensive jewels? Do they work for someone who wears expensive jewels? What might their motive be? Are they hiding something?

Next, you could write a short script to show Pepper and friends ruling your character in (or out) of the disappearance. Be as inventive as you like! The script might involve dialogue between your character and Pepper, Sol, Norah and Toby, or it could be a scene in which the group discuss the likelihood of your character being a thief!

THEME: DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS

Curriculum areas in this section:

- **English: Phonics and word knowledge; language variation and change; examining literature**
- **Personal and Social Capability: Development of resilience; Relationships and diversity**

The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel begins with Pepper's dream (and attempts) to finally board *Aquitania* and travel to New York. But Pepper is not the only one with an ambition that involves New York: the novel is full of characters who have dreams of achieving big things in their lives, and who have the determination needed to make their ambitions a reality, and they are each hoping that New York will be the place to set their dreams in place. Pepper's new friends Sol and Norah are excellent examples of this: both have lofty goals, and both display the passion and determination required to achieve their dreams, regardless of their respective social classes and any other obstacles that might be in their way. Among the adults, we can identify several characters who have had big aspirations.



For example, Perdita West, Chef Robard, and the Captain have achieved their respective ambitions in life, and with great success. Unlike the children, however, the adults have become defined by their jobs and are viewed by others in terms of their professions rather than by their personalities, which means their reputation is tied into their roles.

Theme extracts and discussion points

'Do you miss Ireland?' Pepper asked [Norah].

I did. But I'd give up anything to live in New York. This is my dream come true. A skip and a jump to Broadway! And when I heard that Perdita West was on the ship –'

She beamed rapturously. 'Well, I never thought my lucky break would come up this fast! Now I've just got to make sure I don't miss my chance. I need to fix it so she hears me sing. If I do it right – impress her, you know – she could launch my career. But I'll have to find her first.' [p.60]



Sol's face lit up like Christmas. 'Mr Lyons, you're a wonder!' he said with passionate sincerity. 'I can't thank you enough for this. One day, when I'm head pastry chef at some fancy place, I'm gonna name a gateau for you!' [p.171]

- It's clear from the extracts above that Norah and Sol have big dreams. Do you think Pepper has the same amount of ambition as they do?
- Norah's extract refers to a 'lucky break'. What does this phrase mean? Why would Norah need 'luck' on her side, despite being such an amazing singer? Why does she think that Perdita could help her 'break' into the entertainment industry?
- Do dreams always need to revolve around a career aspiration? Can you dream of other things?
- How much can Norah and Sol rely on their natural talents as a singer and chef respectively? Is talent enough to make your dreams come true, or do you need other attributes too? What else are Norah and Sol doing to make their dreams a reality?
- Read the letters at the back of the book. What do they tell you about Norah and Sol progressing towards their life goals?

ACTIVITY: PARTNER WORK

Ask the class to partner up for a 15 minute activity. Then, bring the class together for quick presentations.

Pair up with someone in class and tell them about an ambition or a goal that you have. It can be a big goal, like becoming an international superstar, or somewhat smaller goal, like being able to beat your own personal best on a 500 metre race. Tell your partner why this dream is important to you and how you think you can achieve it.

Then, when the class gathers back together, tell the class about your partner's dream, and they can tell the class about yours.

Have fun learning about everyone's ambitions, and think of ways that you can support each other!



THEME: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Curriculum areas in this section:

- **English:** Expressing and developing ideas; Language for interaction; Interpreting, analysing, evaluating
- **Personal and Social Capability:** Development of resilience; Relationships and diversity

This novel is as much about Pepper and the Captain's relationship as it is about the mystery of the Saffron Diamond. Pepper's father has been distant from her for much of her life, and she is desperate for his affection and approval, while also feeling sad that he doesn't share his memories of Pepper's mother. Sailing on *Aquitania* helps Pepper to understand her father a little more, and the drama that occurs on board ultimately brings them closer together. Throughout the book, we see Pepper pondering her mother, and the loss of a mother figure for Pepper is accentuated by the lack of love shared between her and Miss Quacken. In fact, no-one has filled a loving parental role for Pepper in her life as yet, although Mr Lyons does act as a sort-of kind uncle. We see other family relationships, too: Toby and 'Merton' Standish work together and also do not have a traditional parent-and-child relationship. Meanwhile, Norah has a close-knit family, but one that is large enough for Norah to disappear for hours at a time without it being noticed, and Sol's parents are not seen in the book but we know that they are very supportive of his aspirations and let him roam the ship independently.

Theme extract and discussion points

The Captain had kept all of it from her, like a jealous giant hoarding his treasure. This was all his fault. She'd never have done it if he hadn't excluded her so thoroughly from his world. If he hadn't locked every memory of her mother inside himself, and left her with nothing. [p. 12]

- How would you describe Pepper's feeling in this extract? Which words help us to feel the distance between Pepper and the Captain?
- Why do you think the Captain doesn't tell Pepper about her mother?
- Do you think the Captain's social status affects his relationship with Pepper? How might the Captain be 'expected' to act towards Pepper?
- How might having governesses have changed Pepper's relationship with the Captain? Would their connection have been different if Pepper didn't have a governess, or if the Captain didn't have a job that took him away from several weeks at a time?

Theme extract and discussion points

And then she, Pepper, would be off on the greatest adventure of her life! She'd cross the Atlantic at last. She'd plunge into the fairyland of New York – her mother's city – where the skyscrapers cascaded like waterfalls, and the mighty statue of Lady Liberty gleamed over the harbour. Pepper almost dared to imagine that she might glimpse some lost scrap of her mother there, a scent or a voice that would bring her memory rushing back. [p. 9]

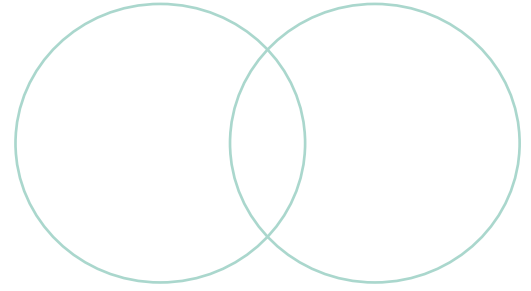
- What does this extract tell you about Pepper's motivation for wanting to visit New York?
- Compare this extract to the one overleaf, which features much later in the book. Has Pepper's view of what New York could be like changed when compared with the earlier extract? Why does the Captain feature in the extract below, but not in the earlier extract?



What she wanted with all her heart was for the Captain to open his own store of memories and share them with her. She wanted him to show her the New York streets where he and her mother had walked together, and the secret parts of Aquitania that Beatrice Stark had loved. [p.195]

ACTIVITY: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Create a Venn diagram with one circle representing you and the other representing a member of your family, or your caregiver. Consider how do you differ from this person and what you share with them. Do you have more similarities or more differences? How do you think your venn diagram compares with Pepper and her father?



POST-READING ACTIVITY

What did you think of *The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel*? Write a book review containing your thoughts on the novel. Don't forget to include:

- The author's name.
- The publisher's name.
- What the book is about.
- What you liked about it.
- What you didn't like about it.
- If it was similar to other novels that you've read.
- If you'd recommend it to your friends.

