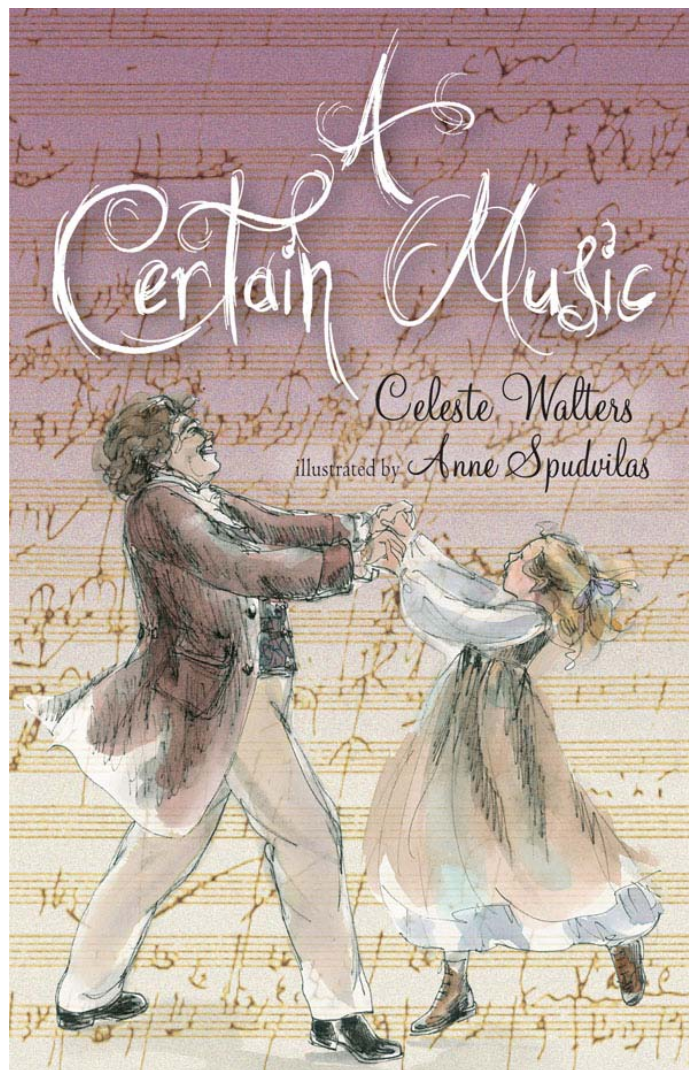


A CERTAIN MUSIC

CELESTE WALTERS
ILLUSTRATED BY ANNE SPUDVILAS



TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

by
Celeste Walters

A CERTAIN MUSIC
Teaching Support Kit

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OBJECTIVE

These teachers' notes aim to provide practical learning strategies that will excite children about their history, their language, and things of beauty that are there to be discovered.

A Certain Music is set in 1823. It tells the story of a man who cannot hear and a child considered strange. And of a song that will live for all time.

DESCRIPTION

It is 1823 and the child is a loner who spends her time hiding in the Vienna Woods until she spies an old man – a music maker. And so begins an odd friendship which develops through their mutual love of music.

The man is composing a new work. It will break new ground. He fears it will be ridiculed and is aware that he is thought mad. He confides in the child who sits for hours watching and listening as he revises and plays. She has a feeling for the music that he cannot fathom. And not only for the music, but for what he is. She knows his pain, his anger, his fear and also his gentleness. Together they give each other the courage to face their critics and dare to be different.

A tale of a song written by a man who couldn't hear for a child people thought strange. Yet the song will live forever in the heart and mind of every child where there's nurtured a love of music.

AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHIES

CELESTE WALTERS is the author of playscripts for children and adults, novels and picture story books for young readers, texts on developmental drama and the writing of eulogies, and three books of whimsical verse for all ages. She has also written five highly acclaimed novels for young adults. Celeste has been a teacher, an art gallery director, a children's theatre producer and a university lecturer. Currently she divides her time between Melbourne and country New South Wales where she writes, cares for newborns and entertains groups at the University of the Third Age.

ANNE SPUDVILAS is a multi-award-winning illustrator of children's books and an established portrait painter who also works as a courtroom artist for the Melbourne media. Her first picture book *The Race* was awarded the Crichton Award for Illustration and Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Honour Book. In 2000 she won CBCA Picture Book of the Year for *Jenny Angel* and her latest picture book *The Peasant Prince* has received the NSW and Queensland Premiers' Literary Awards, the Australian Book Industry Award and was a CBCA Honour Book. Anne lives and works in Melbourne.

THEMES

The overall theme is that of love. Love for family, for friendships, and for beautiful music.

Ancillary themes include things that are relevant to nineteenth century Europe:

- manners, customs, and dress
- poverty and illness
- schooling and the work force
- the penalties one pays for 'marching to the tune of a different drummer'
- the expression and effect of the sounds of music
- the expression and effect of cruelty and bullying
- the strength of family
- the loyalty of friends
- unexpected turns in life.

STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LEARNING FOR UPPER PRIMARY AND LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

1. Research (reading and writing)

1a. Research the book's setting

Find out about life in nineteenth century Germany/Austria. Appoint groups/individuals to research topics on the internet or in the library and report back to the class.

Suggested topics:

- schooling
- child labour (conditions in factories)
- health (sanitation)
- dress and social customs
- housing
- entertainment
- employment (men/women)
- government and politics.

1b. Research Beethoven's life

Find out about Beethoven, including when and where he was born. Describe his looks, his behaviour, his physical impairments. List his major works. Who else was writing music at the time? Report back to the class.

2. Language (reading)

You will note that *A Certain Music* is written in an 'old fashioned' way in that it doesn't use modern terms. Also, you'll find some German words in italics. Though the Normans (French) and the Danes (Vikings) brought their language to Britain, English is a Germanic language. One can recognise this in the following words:

- der Bruder = the brother (der = masculine die = feminine das = neuter; all nouns, proper and common are capitalised in German)
- die Musik = the music
- und = and
- die Strasse = the street
- die Kuh = the cow
- das Haus = the house
- die Mutter = the mother

In a German/English dictionary see how many more words you can find where the letters and sounds are similar to that of English. Perhaps you can compose a sentence – maybe even communicate something to a friend.

3. Discussion (speaking)

3a. Whole class discussion

'This tale for young readers concentrates on the themes of love, loss, faith and redemption. It is written in delicate and carefully considered prose, and demonstrates a perfect union between illustration and text.' *Australian Bookseller + Publisher*, March 2009

Do you agree with this review of *A Certain Music*? Consider particularly the words 'faith' and 'redemption'. What do you think the reviewer was referring to here?

3b. Small group discussion

Discuss the following as it relates to the book, and then share your findings with the whole class.

- Was the child intellectually impaired or simply 'a bit different'?
- What would be the greatest physical impediment for a musician?
- Was the child's father weak or a victim of his times?
- Discuss the role of loyalty in the book.
- Reread the 'dream sequence' (pp. 74–76) Discuss each image as the action unfolds and make suggestions as to its meaning.

4. Debate (speaking)

With two teams of three speakers, debate the follow issues with reference to the book:

- One learns more outside a school environment than within it.
- Cruelty and impoverishment breed strength.
- There was more beauty in the past than there is now.
- You have to suffer to be great.

5. Role-play (speaking)

Group 1

Three actors play the child, the mother, the father. The time and setting is today. The child has come in late. Her mother wants to know why. The child says she's been with a man listening to music. Compare this mother's reaction to how the mother in *A Certain Music* reacts.

Group 2

Beethoven is a time-traveller. His hearing is getting worse and he has arrived in a city of today for treatment. Remember he left in 1823. He won't know what a car is, or a tram . . . One student plays Beethoven. Two other students explain what he sees in and around the city.

Group 3

Outside the venue of the International Music Conference (where the topic is Music That Lasts) Beethoven and two other performers/music makers of your own choice have met by accident. Start with greetings, then argue whose music will last.

6. Music (listening)

Find CDs in the school library, the public library or at home of works by Beethoven and also, if possible of Mozart, Bach and Tchaikovsky. Play bits from each and compare feeling and mood. What do you think the composer intended?

For example:

- Beethoven – Symphony Number 5, First Movement
- Mozart – *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*
- Tchaikovsky – *The Nutcracker Suite*
- Bach - The Air on the G String

Is Beethoven's sound different to the other three? If so, why? Jot down words that express the sound you are hearing.

Share your favourite music/performer with the class.

- Hear the rhythm, the repetitive patterns in the sound.
- Find similarities with the music by Beethoven, Mozart, etc., which is called 'classical' music.

7. Poetry (writing)

Write a poem based on any piece of music that 'speaks' to you.

- List feelings/images after listening to something by Beethoven. Turn them into a poem.
- Write a short poem on the music (sounds) of nature.

8. Reviews (reading, writing)

Find newspapers with book reviews (Saturday/Sunday editions). Read samples. Take note of how the journalist describes the story, the mood, the language, the effect on the reader. Is it a 1-star review or 5-star? Write a review of *A Certain Music*.

9. Stories (writing)

Ideas for writing can come from other stories. *A Certain Music* is similar to Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and the fairy tale, *Cinderella*, in that the main character, though poor, is pure of heart and is rewarded; in the first case with a golden ticket, in the second, with going to the ball.

Try developing an incident based on a character (perhaps a real life one, as in *A Certain Music*) then add your own imagination. Beethoven, as you have read, is a wonderful subject. (Who knows, perhaps the story of *Mao's Last Dancer* was the inspiration for *Billy Elliot*.) Decide upon your character, place them somewhere, ask what if, and how to, and you're on your way . . .

Of course, the more you read, the more you learn how writing works, and the more you learn how it works, the easier it gets!

SUGGESTED READING

Beethoven, Ates Orga, Omnibus, 1983

Beethoven, Alan Blackwood, Weyland Publishing, 1987

Beethoven, Yann Walcker, Moonlight Publishing, 2001

Beethoven, Robin May, Hamlyn, 1990

Ludwig van Beethoven, Lene Mayer-Skumanz, NorthSouth, 2007

The story of Ludwig van Beethoven, Stewart Ross, Belitha, 2002

TEACHERS' RESOURCES

The adventure of English, Melvyn Bragg, Hodder & Stoughton, 2003

The story of English, Robert McCrum, Faber, 2002

Weeds in the garden of words; further observations on the tangled history of the English language, Kate Burridge, ABC Books, 2004