

Teachers Notes

by Jean Yates

The Fury in the Fire

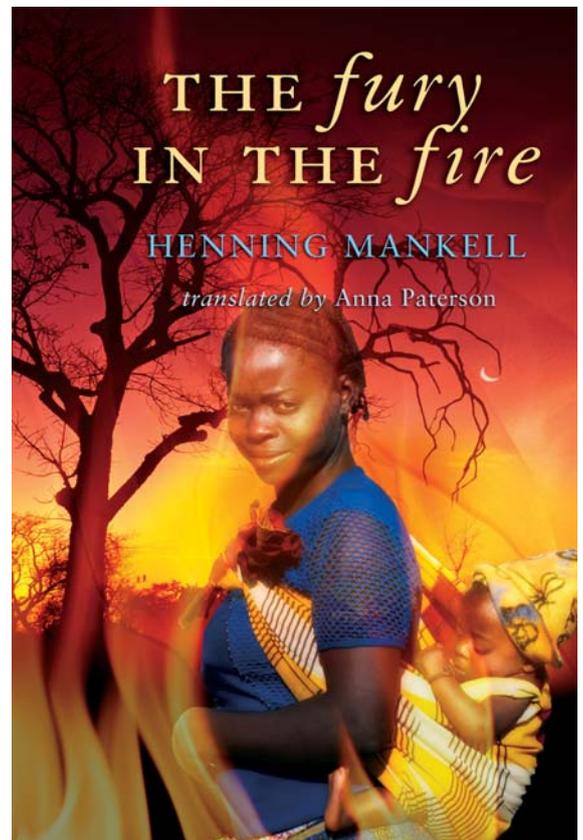
Henning Mankell

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Recommended for ages 14 – 16 yrs

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INTRODUCTION

PLOT SUMMARY

Sofia is a survivor. Growing up in war-torn Mozambique, she has encountered and overcome more obstacles in her twenty years of life than most people do in a lifetime. We first meet Sofia as a ten year old girl in the novel *Playing With Fire*, in which she loses both her legs and her sister when she accidentally stands on a landmine while playing a skipping game. Far from succumbing to her wounds, Sofia fights against all odds to survive her horrific injuries with limited medical resources. Fitted with artificial legs, she determines to live her life to the fullest, establishing a career for herself as a seamstress, a job which keeps her family afloat.

In the second book, *Secrets in the Fire*, Sofia is a teenager, trying to help her elder sister Rosa cope with the devastating diagnosis of AIDS – a common plight for young women in their country. Again, her intelligence, determination and courage help Sofia and her family come to terms with the illness and inevitable loss of yet another child. Despite her youth and infirmity, Sofia is the one who clearly holds her family together and they rely heavily upon her to ensure their survival.

Sofia is far from being an invalid and refuses to allow her disability to hold her back. Above all, she has the same dreams and desires as all young girls. While she would dearly love to be a doctor, above all else, she dreams of becoming a wife and mother. When 'Moonboy' appears in her life, Sofia falls readily and deeply in love.

In *The Fury in the Fire*, Sofia is now happily married to the man of her dreams. As a twenty-year-old, she is the mother to two healthy and happy infants and before long gives birth to a third. But just as Sofia begins to allow herself to believe that her life is all good, she discovers that her husband is cheating on her and her world comes crashing down around her. Although devastated by the discovery, Sofia meets the information head on in her characteristically pragmatic and determined manner. She confronts Armando, who denies the allegation, but Sofia soon confirms her suspicions for herself. Against her mother's advice that as the woman she must maintain her place, Sofia stands up for herself and throws her husband out. But further investigation reveals the secret and dangerous life that Armando has adopted and Sofia witnesses his horrific death.

IN THE CLASSROOM

The Fury in the Fire would be an ideal text for the English or SOSE classroom at year 7-9 levels.

Its simple yet eloquent language presents a poignant and moving account of life for a young girl in Mozambique. Sofia presents a wonderful role model for teenaged girls and her story is inspirational. This is a wonderful example of how history and factual information can be conveyed in a work of fiction.

It would lend itself particularly well to a study of themes such as:

- the resilience of the human spirit

- courage and survival
- life in underdeveloped countries
- similarities and differences of teens around the world
- human suffering and social issues

ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

Introductory Discussion

- As a teen you are faced with many challenges in your life.
- Make a list of the things that frustrate you or annoy you about your life.
- Describe your house and living conditions.
- What basic rights do you think girls of your age should be entitled to (eg housing, clothing, sufficient food, clothing, shelter etc)
- What are your long term goals/hopes/dreams?
- What will you need in life in order for these dreams to be fulfilled?

Research Activity

- Where is Mozambique? (Have class map on the wall.)
- What are the biggest concerns or issues facing the people who live here?
- Complete a KWL on Mozambique (Blackline Master One)
- Web quest: Complete the table comparing Australia and Mozambique (Blackline Master Two)

For Discussion

What would life be like for a teenager in Mozambique? Imagine that you live there and:

- Make a list of the challenges you face and the things that frustrate you or annoy you about your life.
- Describe your house and living conditions.
- What basic rights are denied you?
- What might be your long term goals/hope and dreams?
- What obstacles may prevent you from achieving these goals?
- Complete a venn diagram comparing life for a teen in Mozambique with that of a teen living in Australia. (Blackline Master Three)

ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING

THEMES

- poverty
- prejudice
- inequality
- determination
- hope
- desperation

How is each of these themes depicted in the novel?

Below are some quotations taken from the novel. For each one, explain what it tells us about life in Mozambique and decide which of the above themes it reinforces. (The first one has been done for you).

(a) What made the story of the car especially unlikely was the notion that a black man could own so much money. She had always thought that the whites who had come to live in the country were the wealthiest people around. And that most white people were at least well off, while most black people were poor. (p54)

WHAT IT REVEALS: *In Sofia's experience, white people in Mozambique have plenty of money and opportunity while the black people struggle to survive.*

THEME/S: *Poverty; Inequality*

(b)... poverty was like a prison. How come so many people were much better off? Then again, many people lived in much worse conditions than they did. In their village, there were people who sometimes had to go to bed hungry. (p51)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(c) She had held on to a dream of learning more and, in some wonderful, unfathomable future, studying to become a doctor. As time passed, she grew doubtful. If she were to study at the university she'd have to move to the city. How to find the courage? And the money? What about her legs? Maybe she should aim at becoming a teacher instead. (p22)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(d) There were always those who craved revenge, who didn't wait for the police, and couldn't get it into their heads that thieves should be put in prison. Among the very poor, fury and revenge are sometimes all that matters. To them, a bicycle can be worth a human life. (p158)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(e) Their most precious dream was that the children would go to school. (p22)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(f) ...how are you going to manage without a man? ... He'll petition the village chief and he'll make his own family come out against us. (pp 97-100)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(g) Because everyone in her village was poor, nobody was sure that there would be a doctor to help them, or enough money to pay for medicines. (p2)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(h) My life's first memory, Sofia thought. Seeing someone attacked by a wild animal and die. (p4)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(i) Lydia had lost four of her seven children: Maria, her older daughter Rosa, and two little sons, one from malaria and another from a stomach illness. (pp 6-7)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(j) Sofia and Lydia usually walked to the graves once a week. The village burial ground was on a slope above a small stream. Every time, more pits would have been dug and more dead bodies lowered into them. (p7)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

(k) ...they must carry on trying to find ways out of poverty (p52)

WHAT IT REVEALS:

THEME/S:

CHARACTERS

- What characteristics does Sofia display? Make a character profile of Sofia.

- Imagine that a dreadful accident had caused you to lose your legs. How do you think you would react? Would you give in and allow your disability to prevent you from doing things or would you fight against it and determine to make the most of your life? (Be honest!)
- In many ways Sofia is different from the other women in the village. Make a character profile of Sofia's mother, Lydia. In what ways are their behaviours and attitudes different from each other?
- What challenges does Sofia face in her life? As you read the novel make a list of all of the challenges and hardships Sofia and others in Mozambique face on a daily basis.
- What sort of person is Armando? Is he a bad man? What is his motivation for his behaviour?

Hot-seat activity:

- In turn, the students are to assume the character of Armando. Have other students ask him questions about what he did and why he did it. (The student playing 'Armando' must consider his life and his situation carefully when answering and provide answers that are applicable to his life and situation rather than their own.)

SYNTHESISING ACTIVITIES

This novel lends itself to a broad range of possible synthesising and assessment tasks, depending on the interests and abilities of the students and the requirements of the syllabus within which it is being studied. Some of these outcomes may include the following activities.

1. Sofia says a number of times that she keeps a diary.

- Write one of her diary entries shortly after the birth of Rosa.
- Write another entry after her journey to the city and her discovery of Armando's affair.
- Write a third entry after her witnessing of Armando's death.

2. On pages 71-72, Sofia describes life in the city:

The garage had been divided down the middle by a partition knocked together from a job lot of boards. The cement floor was covered with straw mats. Hortensia's room had only one small window and stank of oil and petrol. It was furnished with a couple of beds, a table, two chairs, a hand basin and a small gas cooker.....Sofia thought it dismal, but her friend was clearly proud of the place.

(p.71)

Besides, construction was going on all the time, old houses were being torn down and new ones built at what seemed to her reckless speed. Hoping to break free from the grip of poverty, people moved to the city from everywhere – from Sofia's village too.

(p.72)

- Write a descriptive paragraph of your own city. Consider your language choices carefully. What are the differences between her description and yours?
3. A eulogy is a speech delivered at a funeral to commemorate and celebrate the person who has died. It is designed to honour the dead and to tell the people at the funeral what sort of person s/he was.
- Write the eulogy that Sofia may have delivered at Armando's funeral (assuming that she was happy for everyone to know how he died).
4. Imagine that the men who killed Armando were actually brought to trial.
- Prepare a summation on behalf of the defence and the prosecution explaining and justifying or condemning their actions.
5. What do you think will happen to Sofia? If we were to visit her again in another five years time, what would she be doing?
- Imagine that you are Henning Mankell, preparing to write the next story in the series of Sofia's life. Create the plot outline for your story, explaining what has happened to her in the intervening five years.
6. This novel is as much a story of hope and courage as one of loss and hardship.
- On two separate pages, write the words LOSS and HARDSHIP in the centre of one page and around them write all the examples of loss and hardship you learn about in the novel.
 - On a second page, write the words HOPE AND COURAGE and list any examples of these from the novel.
7. Research the "In My Name" campaign that was started by Will.i.am and others in response to the United Nations' 2000 Millennium Summit and the Millennium Development Goals. (Google: 'Will.i.am + In My Name' for YouTube clips of the song and summit opening and links to related Oxfam sites.)
- Have each student in the class make their own pledge about what they hope to achieve in their own name to end world suffering and hardship.

FURTHER READING

AIDS IN AFRICA

Deborah Ellis, *The Heaven Shop*

Allan Stratton, *Chanda's Secrets*

REFUGEE CHILDREN

Deborah Ellis, *Parvana, Parvana's Journey* and *Shauzia*

Libby Gleeson, *Mahtab's Story*

CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF POVERTY AND OPPRESSION

Deborah Ellis, *Diego Run!* and *Diego's Pride*

Patricia McCormick, *Sold* (for older students only – story of a young girl sold into the sex trade)
Doris Pilkington, *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence* (available as both a book and a film)
Kirsty Murray, *Tough Stuff* (non-fiction)

ABOUT THE WRITERS

HENNING MANKELL

Henning Mankell is one of Sweden's best-selling authors. His books for children and young adults are poetic, intimate stories with strong narrative appeal, and these have won him several awards, including the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Prize. He has lived in Africa on and off for more than 30 years and since 1986 has spent half of each year in Mozambique, where he is closely associated with a theatre company.

The Fury in the Fire is the third book in a trilogy set in Mozambique. Sofia, the heroine of the books, is a real person, a friend of Henning Mankell's. In *Secrets in the Fire* she is a young girl living in war-torn Mozambique. In *Playing with Fire* she is fifteen and must help her sister face the reality of AIDS. In *The Fury in the Fire* she is nearly twenty and has little children of her own. Henning says: *Sofia is one of my closest and dearest friends. No one has taught me as much as she about the conditions of being human. Nor has anyone taught me more about poor people's unprecedented power of resistance: those who are forced to survive at the bottom of society in a world we all share and inhabit – so unjust, brutal and unnecessary.*

The books about Sofia have been a great success all over the world, and her moving story has been adapted for film.

Secrets in the Fire was the winner of the International Reading Association's Notable Books for Global Society Award and the Sankei Children's Publishing Culture Award.

Anna Paterson is an award-winning literary translator from Scandinavian languages and German into English. In *Playing with Fire* (shortlisted for the Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation in 2005) and *The Fury in the Fire*, she has been true to Henning Mankell's unblinking, sensitive approach to the realities of life in Mozambique. Anna lives in Scotland.

JEAN YATES

Jean Yates is a secondary teacher of English and History who has taught in Queensland and the UK. For five years she was the Director of the Somerset Celebration of Literature, Writers Festival. Jean now works as a literary consultant for a number of organisations, including the Queensland Government, encouraging and promoting the use of literature in the classroom.

BLACKLINE MASTER ONE: KWL CHART

What I KNOW	What I WANT to Know	What I have LEARNED

**BLACKLINE MASTER TWO: COMPARATIVE STATISTICS:
AUSTRALIA AND MOZAMBIQUE**

	AUSTRALIA	MOZAMBIQUE
LAND AREA		
POPULATION		
CAPITAL CITY		
RELIGION		
LITERACY		
LANGUAGE/S SPOKEN		
LIFE EXPECTANCY		
INFANT MORTALITY		
UNDER 5 MORTALITY RATE		
MATERNAL MORTALITY		
FOREIGN DEBT		
ACCESS TO SAFE WATER		
ADEQUATE SANITATION		
ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY		

BLACKLINE MASTER THREE:

VENN DIAGRAM

On the diagram below, make a list of facts about Sofia's life and your own life. In the overlapping parts of the circle, list any similarities.

