

# The Colourful Life of Calum McCall

## Teachers' Notes and Key

NOTE 1: This small kit is intended for selective use in a single 90 session. Adapt the material as you wish to suit the time you have available BUT DO NOT EXCLUDE ANYTHING FROM PRE-READING. The material is not sequential so by missing out one section you will not impede another. Use project work as home work. If you choose to use every activity suggested this is likely to take around three hours of class time. To reduce the working time to a 90 minute class plus homework, exclude one or more activities from the **Context** section.

NOTE 2: Check the website <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/download/britlit/butlin/butlin.shtml> for further information on the author, Ron Butlin, and extracts from other stories and poetry.

### SUGGESTED LESSON MAP

1. Write the title 'The Colourful Life of Calum McCall' on the board and ask students to speculate on what the story they are going to read might be about.
2. Hand out the Pre-reading activities. 1. During the 'colour' activities allow any personal identity with colours to emerge, for example favourite colours (and why, apart from football team association!) or colours that students detest. 2. This is a free ranging activity, culminating in creating a mini-narrative by answering questions on the story they haven't yet read. Students' own experiences of how stories work will allow them to construct a brief narrative by imagining the answers to the questions. This should feed their appetite to compare their story with the one by Butlin. 3. The vocabulary exercise is straightforward, but – if there is time – the number of negative words in the list may prompt some students to rethink what the story might be about.
3. READING THE STORY. 1. Give the students the text, and give them enough time to read without rushing. This is their time and you must respect it. Find an alternative activity for very quick readers. 2. When everyone has had a chance to read the story, do not elicit responses (though allow any spontaneous comments). Tell them they are now going to listen to the author himself reading the story. Explain that the author is Scots and thus speaks with a Scottish accent. They may like to hear it twice; the first time they should follow the story from the text. On the second hearing they should listen with the text put away.
4. The Context section allows you to explore issues from the story in more depth. There are five sections: A picture prompt, a section on colours, which follows on from pre-reading activities but which introduces a devilish twist, then a section entitled 'loss of innocence' 'rat race' section and a final section looking at what can go wrong between childhood dreams and hard reality of the job market. Unless you have either a double lesson on your hands or an especially quick class you will need to be selective about which materials you want to use. We can't be prescriptive and you will need to choose which activities best fit your class. The final questions are really asking for a summary of the students understanding of the story, so these shouldn't be omitted. The final web-quest is simply a piece of reinforcement which many students might enjoy and involves them finding a U-tube recording of a singer; the lyrics are provided in the kit.
5. The Word Work section is probably best done as home work. Our advice is that you don't finish the lesson with this activity; it will not leave the students in the right spirit. If you do plan to incorporate it into the lesson itself, then we suggest it comes before the **Context** section.

## Pre-reading

1.

The text is the preamble from an advertising company document pointing out the benefits of using people's reaction to colours to improve sales.

<b>D</b>	Colour A symbolizes energy, passion, strength, courage, physical activity, creativity, warmth, and security. It is also associated with aggression. In healing, use red to bring warmth and burn out disease. It is a powerful colour and should be used in moderation. It signifies materialism, materialistic ambition, a focus on sensual pleasures and a quick temper
<b>E</b>	Colour B symbolizes the individual's relationship to the external world, the needs and wants of the physical body and the ways in which these are satisfied, the world of work. In healing it may increase immunity and sexual energy. It signifies thoughtfulness and creativity.
<b>F</b>	Colour C symbolizes intellect, creativity, happiness and the power of persuasion. It is also associated with cowardice. In healing use it to promote clarity of thought. In some cultures it is the colour for weddings. It keeps evil away. This colour signifies intellectual development, for either material or spiritual ends.
<b>H</b>	Colour D symbolizes money, luck, prosperity, vitality and fertility. It is also associated with envy. It is the colour of healing; it is beneficial in all healing situations. It signifies balance and peace
<b>I</b>	Colour E is the colour of spirituality, intuition, inspiration and inner peace. It is also associated with sadness and depression. In healing it is used for cooling and calming, both physically and mentally. It indicates serenity, contentment and spiritual development.
<b>B</b>	Colour F is associated with truth, purity, tranquillity, cleansing, healing and protection. It is a good general healing colour for the removal of pain and suffering. In some cultures it is associated with death and rebirth.
<b>C</b>	Colour G represents unconditional love, love requiring nothing in return. It is also the colour of friendship and conviviality.
<b>G</b>	Colour H is the colour of the earth and represents practicality, material success, concentration and study. It indicates "down to earth-ness" and common sense.
<b>A</b>	Colour I is the absence of colour. It represents the unconscious and mystery. Its visualization can help promote deep meditation.

2. The answers the students give to the questions will be a product of their (collective?) imaginations. Allow the story creating process to run free; this will stimulate their desire to know what the 'real' story actually says and compare 'their' version with that of the author. Remember, there is no such thing as a right or wrong answer here.

### 3. Vocabulary

<b>tenements 3</b>	1	completely, totally
<b>railings 6</b>	2	noise, usually of contentment; associated with babies
<b>pitiless 7</b>	3	house containing many apartments
<b>trailed after 5</b>	4	OK; sure (perhaps ironically)
<b>Aye right 4</b>	5	followed
<b>gurgled 2</b>	6	fence made of metal posts
<b>dishevelled 8</b>	7	without mercy
<b>utterly 1</b>	8	untidy (clothes) disordered (hair)

## Reading

Once the pre-reading activities have been completed, hand out the story (text). Allow students time to read at their own speed, silently. When all have finished play the audio recording of the author, Ron Butlin, reading the story himself. Explain that the author is a Scot and thus speaks with a Scottish accent. Allow the students to read the text while listening. You might wish to play the recording a second time. If so, ask the students to put the text away so they can listen without reading.

A key question to ask to test comprehension would be to refer to line 21: 'That night he slept badly'. Ask why he slept badly. The answer should speculate on his state of mind and possibly some kind of hidden memory of the colours he once saw but which his baby son clearly could still see.

## Context

### Colour of Evil

What is the colour of evil I asked of **Yellow**  
 who led me past Wordsworth's daffodils and Van Gog  
 sunflowers  
 till we came to flashbacks of Vietnam  
 where the sun's rays were **yellow** robes of mourning

What is the colour of evil I asked of **Green**  
 who showed me the springtime hills that held a child  
 scream  
 and the grass lost its innocence  
 to the god of forensic evidence.

What is the colour of evil I asked of **Brown**  
 who spoke of the romance of autumn leaves  
 but I saw baked earth writing its own epitaph  
 and empty bowls reaching for the world's charity.

What is the colour of evil I asked of **Red**  
 who said blood speaks your language as well as mine  
 but take comfort from the rose  
 and the anonymous heart of a Valentine.

What is the colour of evil I asked of **Blue**  
 who led me through the archives of the skies  
 where birds of death fashioned by the hands of men  
 circled in the dazzling air.

What is the colour of evil I asked of **Black**  
 who guided me through galleries and museums  
 where the dark was equated with the beast of fear.  
 Then stepping through doorways of ancient lore I found  
 darkest

chaos was a mothering force that sat upon a brood of  
 stars.

What is the colour of evil I asked of **White**  
 who walked with me across the fugitive snow  
 that covered a city's scars  
 under an angelic apron. So I walked on in the light.

And grinned to see the pureness of a page reflecting  
 my own chameleon grin.

**Question:** Chameleon taking all colours: the devil subverts everything to his own purpose.

### 3. Loss of Innocence

Both poems look back on some kind of ruralised, idyllic childhood and regret the passing of time which means that returning is impossible. The regret is perhaps tinged with the wisdom that the naivety of childhood meant that this was a false view of the world – an impossible dream. The story of Calum McCall is the story of loss and the dying memories of a more optimistic world glimpsed in childhood; it is more extreme in its narrative than either of the poems for the protagonist, Calum, eventually forgets while the poets still remember.

A quick glossary of the Wordsworth poem:

THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, The earth, and every common sight, To me did seem <i>Apparell'd</i> in celestial light, The glory and the freshness of a dream. It is not now as it <i>hath been of yore</i> ;— Turn <i>wheresoe'er</i> I may, By night or day, The things which I have seen I now can see no more.	<i>apparelled/clothed</i>  <i>has been/was/ before</i> <i>wherever</i>
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The rainbow comes and goes, And lovely is the rose; The moon <i>doth</i> with delight Look round her when the heavens are bare; Waters on a starry night Are beautiful and fair; The sunshine is a glorious birth; But yet I know, <i>where'er</i> I go, That there <i>hath pass'd</i> away a glory from the earth	<i>does</i>       <i>wherever</i> <i>has passed</i>
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### 4. The Rat Race

The list given is the complete list to be found on the website linked from the page. This implies that all the items are contributing factors to the rat race and the students are being asked to respond to items that they do not agree are contributing factors and explaining their reasons. Additional task could be to ask students which items they think are missing from the list or, alternatively, which items on the list they think their family and/or friends submit to.

### 5. Looking to the future

Students should choose 3 or 4 kids, match them to a possible dream and then write a reason why the dream was not attained, and put the resulting job or action in the final column.

### 6. Final questions

The answers to the final questions are likely to follow along the lines that the author was being ironic in choosing that title, and that Calum's child is probably doomed to the same fate, and thus forgetting 'the colours' that he can see. The 'Unless' prompt might lead to a discussion on how the dreamless waking and sleeping life of Calum might be changed – what needs to change in society for this to occur?

### Web-quest

A suggested spare time activity, where students access the song via the hyperlink. The lyrics are provided. No activity required though a discussion might ensue.

### Word Work

Anger  
Jealousy  
Rage  
Surprise  
Cowardice

Fear  
Cold  
Shame  
Inexperience

1. red 2. green 3. yellow 4. green 5. blue 6. white 7. black 8. blue 9. red

#### SPECIAL NOTE:

We are very grateful to the publishers, Serpent's Tail, for their kind permission in allowing us to use this story, which they published in the collection of Ron Butlin stories 'No More Angels', 2007  
[www serpentstail.com](http://www.serpentstail.com)

To read the other 20 stories in this collection go to

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/No-More-Angels-Ron-Butlin/dp/1852429542/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1198412771&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.co.uk/No-More-Angels-Ron-Butlin/dp/1852429542/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1198412771&sr=1-1)

For further classroom activities based on stories by Ron Butlin, go to  
[www.britlitworld.com](http://www.britlitworld.com)