

## **World Words**

### **The Chain**

Keith Gray

# Teacher's Notes

### **The Text**

This extract is taken from Keith Gray's novel, *The Chain*. The extract deals with a young girl who gets engrossed in reading from a book to her father, who is dying in hospital. She is discovering the inner joy and power of books. When her father dies she wonders what to do with the book that bound them so closely together in his last days.

### **Method**

It is important that the students do some creative thinking before they engage with the text, either by listening or by reading. Use the Pre-listening 1 activity first. As the text will be heard as part of a longer broadcast, prepare students for the interview part as well before they listen to it – Pre-Listening Activity 2.

When they have had the opportunity to explore the theme of the text and have contributed some of their own ideas, then they are ready to listen. There is no 'best' way to do this, but the authors would suggest the following method:

1. Students listen to the whole broadcast, checking their activity 2 charts while doing so. Ask them to recall, orally, any words or phrases from the extract after the listening has finished. Write these on the board.
2. Use the words on the board to orally reconstruct the story, as a class activity.
3. Hand out the text and read through. Interrupt with questions if appropriate.
4. Allow the students to listen again, this time with the text in front of them.

Now the students are ready to move onto the final part of the activities. These consist of following through ideas or themes.

## Pre-Listening Activity

Picture prompt. Ask students to identify the way in which stories are being enjoyed.

(left to right) reading;  
watching/listening to a  
play/storyteller etc;  
listening to audio book;  
watching film/play.

Prompt for more - e.g.  
TV or radio



### 1. Think about .....

The students reflect on their own enjoyment of stories. These stories can have been accessed in any way - reading, listening, watching - and could take any form (a true story, a legend, a history, fiction etc)

Students are being asked to think about what would make an appropriate story for a sick child and elderly relative. They can add their own filters to this - boy/girl, man/woman, how sick etc

2. Students are asked to read a small extract from the story. Explain that what they will hear are two chapters (2 and 3) of a longer story, but that the section they are going to hear is a complete story in itself. They are asked to identify what the two main characters are doing and where they are. Kate, the daughter, is reading a book to her father, who is ill in hospital.

3. Students should work in small groups to share their replies to questions 1 and 2 above, and to suggest what the story they are about to hear might be about. The purpose of the activity is for them to invent their own story, not to try and replicate a story they haven't yet heard! One way to get them to focus on a narrative is to decide what happens at the end of their story regarding both characters. Once they have decided the outline of their story (they don't need to write this down) they can tell other groups about their ideas and listen to other story outlines.

## Pre-listening Activity 2

Give students the second pre-listening activity. Ask them to read through the quotations from the radio broadcast and decide who is saying what - writer or student. Then they must choose which category the quotation comes from and to write the appropriate letter in the appropriate square (see answer key below). They then listen to the broadcast to check their answers. The listening activity will have been made easier by this process of identification first.

- a. "This extract comes at the very end of the book I wrote, but the book that Kate leaves on the bench is at the very beginning of the chain of people who will eventually read Kate's book."
- b. "The story basically is one of losing a parent, and that's OK.... the world won't end."
- c. "I think I'm writing for me when I was younger. I'm writing for that person who doesn't believe how good books are."
- d. "The book is called 'The Chain' because it's about a chain of people - four different people who read the same book."
- e. "The use of such simple language actually makes the whole piece seem bare and just out there with emotions."
- f. "I've never found a book on a bench unfortunately, but I do admit I have left one or two books on benches."
- g. "It really showed the bond between Kate and her father. I thought it was really touching."
- h. "I noticed throughout the excerpt the writer uses short sentences and it's not very descriptive. So it's, like, the image you create in your mind is not a clear one."
- i. "I think in the next decade or two, more people will start buying new things and I think books will be rarer because people won't be printing books as much."
- j. "I think when she looks at the book one last time she is almost saying goodbye to her father."
- k. "There's not enough technology in the world to make books die out."
- l. "I thought that if I explained too much about how Kate was feeling, if I explained too much about the atmosphere of the room then I'm almost telling the reader how to read this piece."

	<b>structure</b>	<b>message</b>	<b>style</b>	<b>readers &amp; books</b>
<b>The author</b>	a, d		l	c, f
<b>The students</b>		b, g, j	e, h	i, k

## While listening

Listen to the broadcast. While doing so students should check their chart from Pre-listening activity 2.

## After listening

1. List from the extract:

Books could make you laugh

make you cry

could be thrilling

romantic

scare you

could take you all around the world, and beyond

could make you see things from someone else's point of view

could challenge you

could help you understand

could bring you comfort

should be shared.

Students should be encouraged to add their own positive comments about books.

2. Kate leaves the book on a park bench in the hope that someone else will pick it up and enjoy it as much as she did. Students are shown 3 ways in which books that have been read might have a new life. Ask:

Which charity is mentioned? (Oxfam). How can books help organisations like Oxfam? (the books are sold and the money used for the charity to help other people)

Which passage is a explanation about the practice of sharing books? (Book swapping)

Which text most closely describes the action that Kate took? (BookCrossing - she left the book in a public place)

3. Students should be encouraged to speculate about what happens next to the book. Does it find a sympathetic new owner, for example? If not, what? This might be a suitable homework assignment, or group work in class.

4. Using the discussion that is heard on the broadcast, encourage students to debate what reading habits people might have in 50 years time. Will books still exist? If so, who will read them and why? What alternatives will there be?

## The Chain

Keith Gray

### Link 4: Kate's Courage: Chapter 2

And that's what she did. The next day, and the next. Every day while Kate was alone with her dad, before her mum arrived, she would read aloud to him while he lay and listened. He would often have his eyes shut but he promised he wasn't asleep and could hear every word.

Kate began to look forward to being with him now. She enjoyed that hour or so while she read to him. She started to hurry to the hospital from school. Her dad seemed as eager as she was to find out what happened next. He would say he was desperate for the next chapter and ask her to get settled and get reading!

Now and again a nurse might rush in to give her father an injection or check the machines. But Kate's dad just told her to keep reading. Maybe he really was enjoying the book as much as he said. Maybe it wasn't only to please her. They were sharing something, weren't they? Just the two of them. She had never felt so close to her father as she did when she was sitting reading to him.

After about a week, Kate could see they were getting near to the end of the book. She began to think about which book she would choose next. Could she find one they would both enjoy as much?

When she did at last come to the end of the book, she promised her father she'd be back with another one the next day. She had a choice of three or four, but she hadn't picked exactly which one yet.

But she never did get to read another book for him. Because that was the night he died.

### Chapter 3

After the funeral her mum told her about what the nurses in the hospital had said. They'd all thought her dad would die sooner. They said they thought he'd hung on for those last few days because he wanted to know how the book was going to end.

Kate hoped that it was true. It would have felt much worse if he had died without knowing how the book ended.

The nurses also talked about how brave Kate had been when she had been reading to him. But it hadn't felt like being brave at all. She'd wanted to be there, with him.

'You should keep that book,' her mother said. 'So you don't forget.'

But Kate knew she would never forget. And somehow it didn't feel right to keep the book.

The next day she went for a walk and took the book in her bag. She walked to the park in the town centre. It was a beautiful sunny day, but the world felt horribly lonely without her dad. She sat in the shade of an old oak tree, thinking about him and the book they'd shared.

Kate thought about the book. She knew that books could make you laugh, or make you cry. They could be thrilling, or romantic, or scare you. They could take you all around the world, and beyond. They could make you see things from someone else's point of view. They could challenge you. They could help you understand. They could bring you comfort. So much. So very much.

Kate thought books should be shared.

She took the book out of her bag and put it beside her on the park bench. Then she stood up and walked away. She left the book there.

She turned to look at its cover and title one last time as she went. She hoped whoever read it next enjoyed it as much as she had.