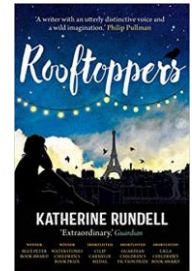


Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Rooftoppers by Katherine Rundell (Faber & Faber)



1. Explore it

Read this story opening. You might want to hear it read aloud as well as reading it for yourself.

On the morning of its first birthday, a baby was found floating in a cello case in the middle of the English Channel.

It was the only living thing for miles. Just the baby and some dining-room chairs, and the tip of a ship disappearing into the ocean. There had been music in the dining hall, and it was music so loud and so good that nobody had noticed the water flooding in over the carpet. The violins went on sawing for some time after the screaming had begun. Sometimes the shriek of a passenger would duet with a high C.

The baby was found wrapped for warmth in a Beethoven symphony. It had drifted almost a mile from the ship, and was the last to be rescued. The man who lifted it into the rescue boat was a fellow passenger, and a scholar. It is a scholar's job to notice things. He noticed that it was a girl, with hair the colour of lightning and the smile of a shy person.

Think of night-time with a speaking voice. Or think of how moonlight might talk, or think of ink, if ink had

vocal chords. Give those things a narrow, aristocratic face with hooked eyebrows, and long arms and legs, and that is what the baby saw as she was lifted out of her cello case and up into safety. His name was Charles Maxim, and he determined, as he held her in his large hands – at arm's length as he would a leaky flowerpot – that he would keep her.

The baby was almost certainly one year old. They knew this because of the red rosette pinned to her front, which read '1!'

'Or rather,' said Charles Maxim, 'the child is either one year old, or she has come first in a competition. I believe babies are rarely keen participants in competitive sport. Shall we therefore assume it is the former?' The girl held on to his earlobe with a grubby finger and thumb. 'Happy Birthday, my child,' he said.

Charles did not only give the baby a birthday. He also gave her a name. He chose Sophie, on that first day, on the grounds that nobody could possibly object to it.

Talk about how this story opening makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you have read about in stories or know from real life? How?

What is happening in this extract? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences? How do you think the baby might have ended up in the water? Who do you think they may belong to? What events do you think might have led up to this point? Who are the central characters? What do you learn about the relationship between them from this opening section? What words and phrases give you clues about this?

Think about how the story is written. When do you think it might have taken place? What makes you think this? What parts of this really stick in your mind? Which words and phrases do you like the best? What do you like about them? What do you think might happen in the rest of this story?

2. Illustrate it

Re-read the extract a few times, or get someone else to read it to you. Concentrate on what you see in your imagination as the words are read. What stands out for you the most? Is it the baby floating in the cello case,

Charles lifting the baby into the boat, the wreckage strewn in the ocean, the birthday rosette or a combination of these things?

Take a pencil and paper and try to capture your most vivid image in a drawing. If you have coloured pencils, crayons or felt tips, you may wish to use colour to enhance the mood or the details in your drawing. Think carefully about the unseen details; for example, what do you imagine the weather to be like? Look back at the extract and consider which words and phrases you think helped you make your picture. Share what you have drawn with someone else. What questions do they have about the scene you have pictured?

3. Talk about it

- Think about how the baby is described; ***a girl, with hair the colour of lightning and the smile of a shy person.*** What do you think this means? What does it make you think about her as a character?
- Consider the way in which Charles Maxim is described in the text. We are told he is a scholar – what does this mean and what does this suggest about him? Think of the ways in which the author paints a picture of him; ***Think of night-time with a speaking voice. Or think of how moonlight might talk, or think of ink, if ink had vocal chords.*** What do you imagine when you hear these phrases? How does this compare with the rest of the description; What sort of man do you think he might be?
- Do you think it is right for him to just decide he is going to keep the baby? What repercussions might this decision provoke?

4. Imagine it

Think of a person that is very dear to you. If you were to describe them, how might you do this? What phrases might you use that would allow someone else not just to picture them, but to gain real insights into their character, in the way Katherine Rundell does with the baby and Charles Maxim? What could you compare their hair to? How might you describe their voice? Are they more like daytime or night-time? Why? It might help to get a photograph of this person, or to draw them, to help you think about them more deeply.

5. Create it

These events take place on Sophie's first birthday. Think about the most memorable birthday you have ever had. What made it memorable for you? Try to picture the day as vividly as possible, who was involved, what you did, the smells, sights and feelings associated with the day.

Write about this day for someone else to read. How will you draw your reader in with specific details about the day and the people involved, as Katherine Rundell did when she talked about the event in the dining hall, before the water started flooding in? How will you pace your writing to build up the excitement and anticipation? How will you talk about the people around you on the day so that people gain a picture of their character as you did with Charles Maxim?

Make notes about your memories of this day, perhaps you have some photographs which can support your recollections. Then turn these into a piece of writing about this memorable day. Give this to someone else who was there on the day to read. Do they remember this in the same way? What are their memories of this event?