

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

THE SPANISH LETTERS by Mollie Hunter



Themes/issues addressed in this book

Sixteenth-century politics and culture; medieval Edinburgh

Book Summary

Jamie is 15 and lives in sixteenth-century Edinburgh. He is a 'caddie' – a porter, a messenger, and a guide, who modestly states 'There is not much I do not know about Edinburgh.' If he doesn't work, he doesn't eat. The arrival of an English stranger in the Scottish city causes Jamie to follow clues to a mystery involving spies and a Spanish plan to invade England and Scotland.

This is an exciting adventure story in the best tradition of Mollie Hunter's stories. She shows great attention to historical detail and children will learn new concepts and vocabulary easily.

BEFORE READING

Individual Work

- Imagine there are no cars and no buses, and you had to travel on a horse. Where would you keep your horse and how would you look after it? What route would you take to school?
- Imagine that you can only eat food which is grown or made in Scotland. What favourite foods would you miss most? What would be your new favourite food?

Group Activities

- Discussion (if the children live in Edinburgh): How old is Edinburgh? How can you tell? What old things do you know that still exist here?
- Discussion: (if the children don't live in Edinburgh): Have you been to Edinburgh? What is it like? How can you tell how old it is? What old things still exist there?

AFTER READING

Individual Work

- List five different customs from the sixteenth century that are mentioned in the book and, for each one, say how it is different to contemporary practices.

Group Activities

- Discussion: what was the role of women in the family in the sixteenth century? Compare the life of Marie Forbes, who is only 16, and a modern-day 16-year-old woman.
- Investigation: what had happened between England and Scotland that Jamie should consider England his enemy? What had happened between Spain and England? In groups, draw up a timeline of key national events leading up to the story.
- Get a copy of a large-scale modern-day map of Edinburgh and, using clues from the story, mark on it the location of four events in the book:
 - The place where Jamie first meets Macey (p. 9)
 - The location of Forbes' house (p. 11)
 - The place where Norton's dead body is found (p. 24-26)
 - The location of Huntly House (p. 78)

Vocabulary

- Check you know what the following words mean:

exclamation	myriad
cunning	traversed
valise	cautious
admiration	dispelled
tuition	envoy
pursuit	

Kelpies Series Summary

The award-winning Kelpies series is Scotland's favourite collection of children's fiction. Floris Books took over publication of these books in 2001. The series includes such classic novels as Kathleen Fidler's The Desperate Journey, Mollie Hunter's The Thirteenth Member, and Theresa Breslin's Simon's Challenge. Genres included in the series range from historical and folklore to detective and adventure stories.

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS COVERED

5-14 Curriculum (Scotland)

Years: P6-P7, S1-S3

Reading:

Reading for Information

Reading to Reflect

Awareness of Genre

Talking:

Talking in groups

Talking about texts

Talking about experiences, feeling and opinions

Writing:

Functional

Imaginative

National Curriculum (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

Key Stages 2 and 3

English: Reading

Reading Strategies

Response to Texts, inc analysing and evaluating

Reading for Information

National Literacy Strategy:

Text-Level Reading

Text-Level Writing

Vocabulary