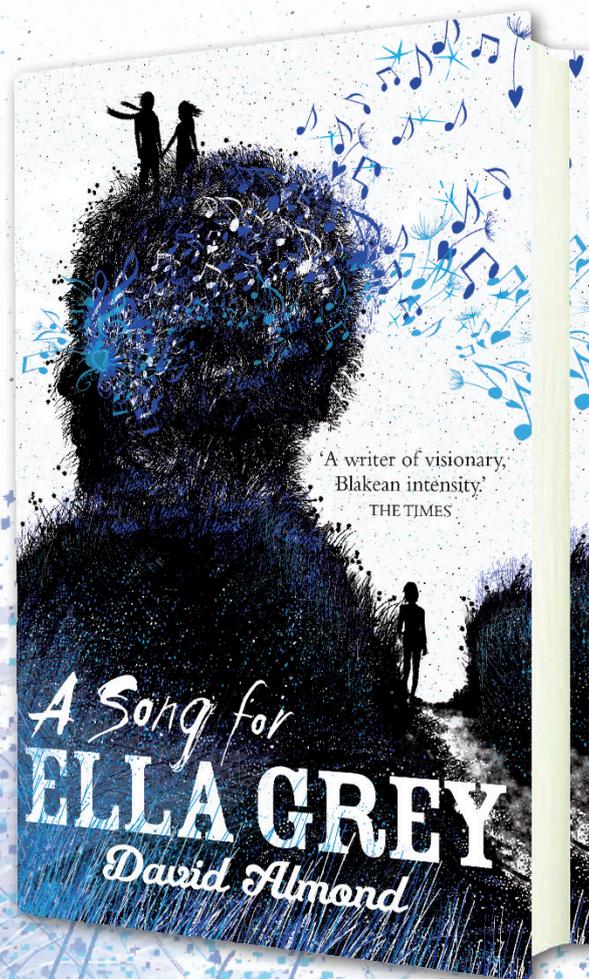
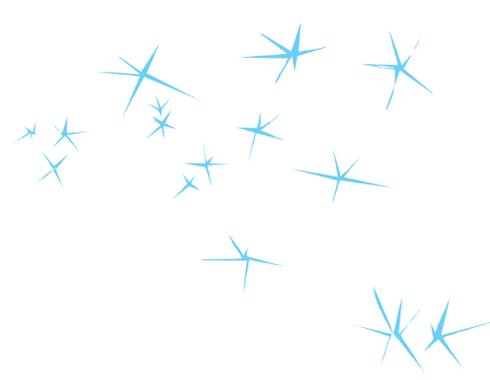


A Song for
ELLA GREY
David Almond



Resources for Teachers
of Key Stage 3

Resources for Teachers of Key Stage 3



A Song for Ella Grey is a new book from David Almond. It's a tale of modern teenagers, their joys and troubles and desires – set in Tyneside and on the beaches of Northumberland.

Here are teaching resources offering ideas and suggestions for discussion, activity and further reading suggestions, for people reading this book. They cover a number of themes including the power of music and poetry; myth and reality – and being young and in love.

A Song for Ella Grey is inspired by the story of Orpheus and Eurydice – at the end of these resources is a summary of this Greek myth, and also some notes about particular references and connections.

These resources can be used to support students' work with the KS3 National Curriculum subjects English and Art. They could also be used with KS4 students.



National Curriculum Key Learning Points

English programme of study KS3

OVERVIEW:

from Purpose of study

Through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Literature, especially, plays a key role in such development.

Reading also enables pupils both to acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know.

from Reading

Pupils should be taught to:

Develop an appreciation and love of reading, and read increasingly challenging material independently through reading a wide range of fiction and non-fiction ... The range will include high-quality works from English literature, both pre-1914 and contemporary.

Read critically through:

- studying setting, plot, and characterisation, and the effects of these

from Spoken English

Pupils should be taught to speak confidently and effectively, including through:

- using Standard English confidently in a range of formal and informal contexts, including classroom discussion

from Writing

Pupils should be taught to write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, including:

- Well-structured formal expository and narrative essays
- Stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing
- Notes and polished scripts for talks and presentations
- A range of other narrative and non-narrative texts, including arguments, and personal and formal letters

Art programme of study KS3

Pupils should be taught to:

- Develop their creativity and ideas, and increase proficiency in their execution. They should develop a critical understanding of artists, architects and designers, expressing reasoned judgements that can inform their own work.

A Song for Ella Grey



Introducing and reading the book

Let everyone read and experience this book for themselves – with time to reflect on it and think about their responses to it.

Look at the blurb and read aloud the first page or so to introduce the book.

Talking about the book: some book-talk questions

Get everyone to share their first responses to this book. This could be with the whole class – or students could discuss in small groups, and then share key feelings and questions with everyone.

Ask lots of open questions to get people talking and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the writing.

Explain that there are no right or wrong answers – we will all respond in our own ways, about the things in the story which touch us the most.

- How did you feel when reading this book? And when you'd finished it?
- Which parts of the story do you remember most?
- Did you skip any parts? Which ones?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?
- Were there any parts you didn't make sense of?
- What was the thing you most liked finding out from the book?
- What kind of a book did you think it was going to be?
- If you gave up on this book can you say why?
- What would you say about this book if you were telling someone what you've just read?
- Does the story work for you? Could you follow it? What does the book say to you?
- Has reading the book changed or affected you? At the end of the story did you feel as if you'd shared a real experience?
- Did you stop and start, or did you want to read it all through in one go?
- Are there parts you want to read over again?

Discussion topics

Some of these themes could also be used for essay topics.

MAGICAL REALISM

I'll travel to the places where the ancient stories have their start (p275)

A myth is a traditional or legendary story told to explain a practice, belief, or natural occurrence – it may or may not be based on fact or a natural explanation. The ancient Greeks and Romans had a large body of myths about their deities and heroes, including the story of Orpheus, a musician and poet who could charm all living things, even stones, with his music, and how he loved and lost his wife Eurydice.

- *A Song for Ella Grey* is a modern telling of this story and has been described as 'a mix of contemporary and mythical'. Talk about this mix – do people think it works?

Maybe some of the things that seemed to happen, didn't really happen at all (p51)

It was like being in a dream but the dream was real (p100)

- Did the story seem real to you? Or a dream? Or both?



THE POWER OF MUSIC

Orpheus in *A Song for Ella Grey* plays the lyre (albeit a rough driftwood instrument) as in the original Greek myth – the power of his music to enchant runs through the story.

He played on and the song sweetened, intensified.

The sun rose and his face turned golden in its light. The song sweetened, intensified ...

Like something from dreams, like something from the soul's depths, like something from somewhere none of us believed in, none of us had ever been.

- Talk about what music does for you – any kind of music, be it modern, classical, rock; choral, pop, instrumental. Does it make you feel happy or sad? Does it console or inspire? Or stir up memories.
- Collect together a list of all the ways that people might be affected by music.
- Has listening to music ever changed your views on life?
- Think of other instances, in story or real life, where music is used to enchant, or to create a mood, for example: the Pied Piper, snake charmers – or the start of Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night!*

THE POWER OF WORDS

I'm going south, to university, to read the words that make the world (p273)

Read aloud the passage below from *A Song for Ella Grey*, then ask people to say how they felt as they listened to it, what it makes them think about. You could also choose to read out another piece from the book, which you especially respond to.

I sing the glow of gold above the city, the turning lighthouse light, the crackle and flames of the fire, the smell of sausages cooking, tomatoes simmering. I sing the taste of all these things, the taste of wine and of clear cool water and salt. I sing the taste of fruit as it fizzes to life on the tongue. And the feel of the air against the skin, the grains of sea salt on it. I sing murmuring, whispering, outbursts of laughter and affection. I sing young people loving by their fires and in their tents and in the soft folds of the dunes. I sing old people walking hand-in-hand. I sing the world. I sing the world. I sing the world. I sing.

And here's Claire, in the story, describing her own writing:

... words that swooped across the pages like birds and flowed over them like water (p67)

- How would you describe the style of writing of this book?
- How well do you find it tells the story for you? What do you like best about the writing? Does it make pictures?
- Do you connect with the characters?
- Look at how repetition is used – for example on pp44,45: *The song sweetened, intensified.*

BEING YOUNG

We trembled with the weird joys and pains of being young and getting older (p113)

Maybe it was all because we were young, and because being young is like being mad (p51)

This book is very much about how it feels being young, with new experiences and new understandings. Find and talk about places in the story where this comes across very strongly to you.

There are descriptions in the book where you can feel the excitement of something new, something that feels good. Share with each other your own experiences like this.

And then the miles of dunes right by the road, and the Farnes stretching away across the sea, and then the great red castle on its rock above Bamburgh village, and the thrill of arrival, the thrill of hauling out rucksacks and bags from the bus, and walking in a happy crew down The Wynding to the beach, and the sound of the sea, and the scent of it, and gulls screaming above. (p132)



BEING IN LOVE

'It's like he understands me, like nobody ever has before.' (p99)

'I've only been with him for a little time but I know we'll be together always and we've always been together always.' (p123)

- Would you travel to the Underworld to rescue someone you love?
- Why do you think Orpheus was told not to look at Eurydice until they reached the upper world?
- Would you have turned around??
- Talk about Claire's love for Ella. Do you think Claire is in love with her?

I drew her to me and kissed her full on the lips. It was in just this place that I had done this first, those years ago when we were still those infants scared by dark. (p19)

THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

- Which characters in *A Song for Ella Grey* stand out for you? Why?
- Think of three or four key words to describe them. What actions or descriptions back up your description?

ANIMALS AND BIRDS

- Talk about some of the birds and animals in the story.
- Have you seen seals, dolphins and porpoises? Where? What did they do? How did you feel when you saw them?
- And adders? Do you know of anyone being bitten by an adder? How do you feel about snakes?

Beautiful. Such a privilege, to see such gorgeous things that spent so much of their existence in darkness, in the earth, unseen. (p36)

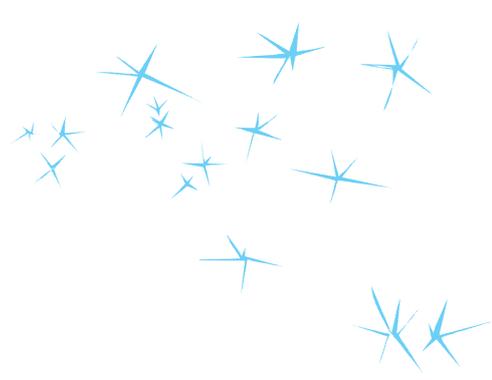
- What do you think? Do you agree?

*...we chanted chorus after rising chorus of 'The Magpie' into the deepening night.
'Devil, devil we defy thee...'*

- Why do you think the magpie is so significant in this story? – there's the song on the endpapers, the young people chanting it, the birds in the illustrations.
- Do you count magpies, or wave a greeting when you see one?

MAGPIE, THE by Dave Dodds
(Songbooks 2008)

*The magpie brings us tidings
Of news both fair and foul
She's more cunning than the raven
More wise than any owl
She brings us news of the harvest
Of the Barley, wheat and corn
She knows when we'll go to our graves
And when we will be born*



CHORUS

*One for sorrow, two for joy
Three for a girl and four for a boy
Five for silver, six for gold
Seven for a secret never told
Devil, devil, I defy thee
Devil, devil, I defy thee
Devil, devil, I defy thee*

Activity ideas

THE ORPHEUS MYTH: In poetry

Here is a passage from the Roman poet Virgil's version of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, describing the moment when Orpheus looks back – and loses Eurydice.

*Retracing his steps he had avoided all danger, and his Eurydice, his again, was behind him,
as Proserpina had instructed, following him to the upper world.
And then a sudden madness caught him – surely forgivable. But the shades do not forgive.
He stopped – and, forgetting everything, he looked back.
All he had done now counted for nothing – he had broken Hades' conditions.*

*Three great crashes thundered through the Underworld.
Eurydice, poised on the edge of daylight, stretched out her hands – no longer his.
'What madness has destroyed us? The cruel Fates call to me, and I can hardly see for the tears in my eyes. The deep
night is pulling me back.
Goodbye my love!'*

(Virgil Georgics Book 4 – translated from Latin)

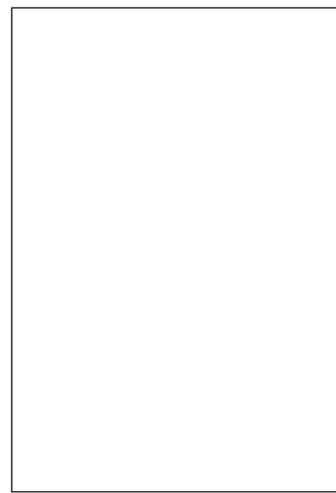
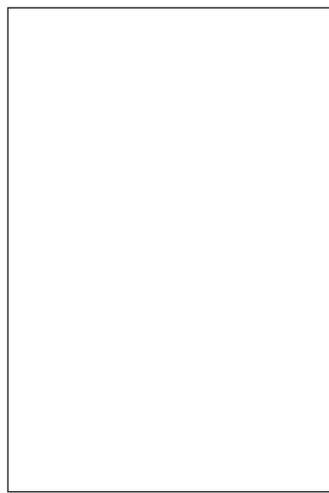
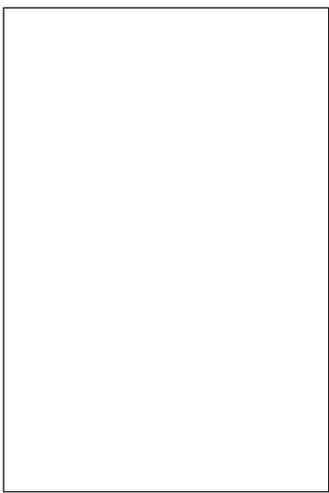
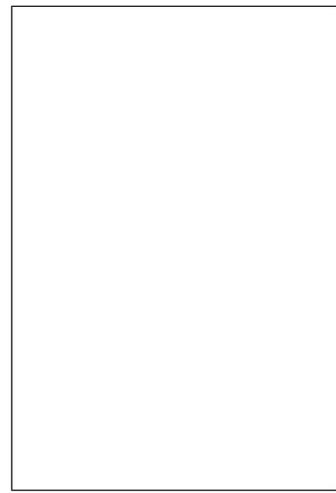
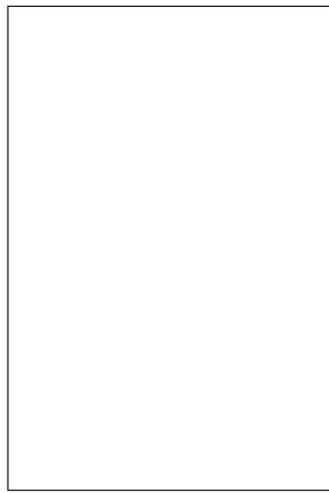
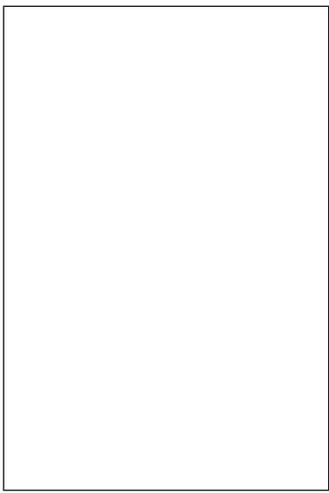
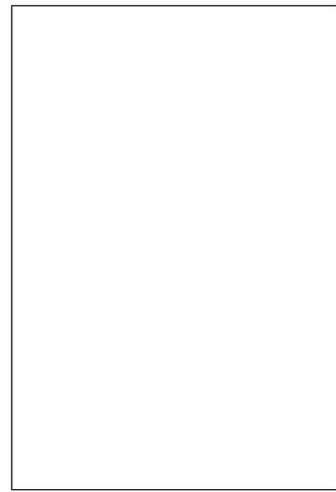
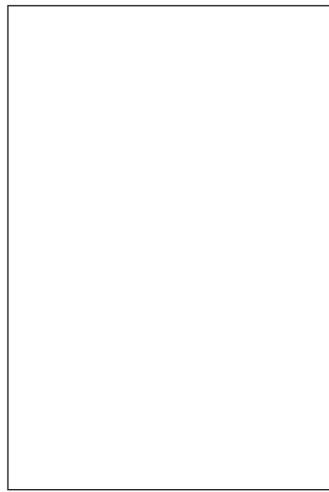
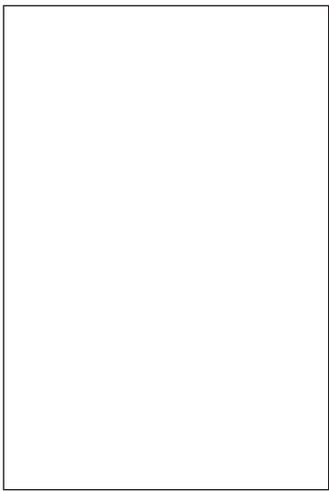
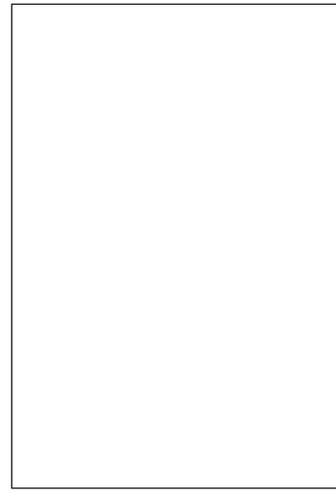
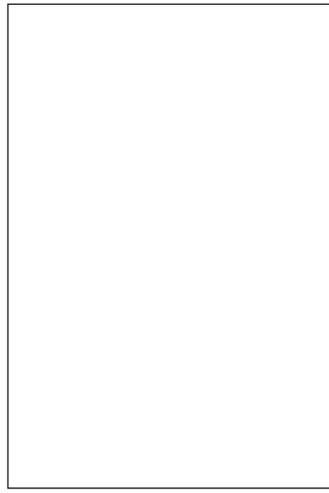
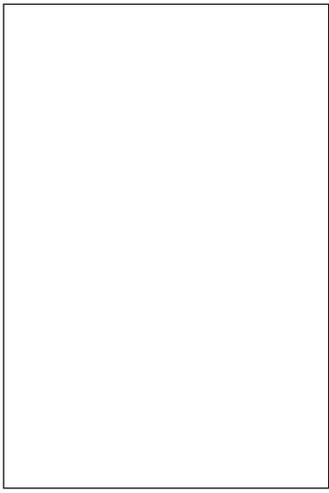
And here is how it happens in *A Song for Ella Grey*

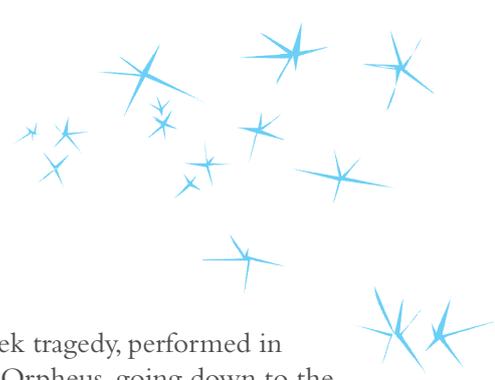
*And Oh! She touches me.
It's just
the
gentlest
of gentle
touches on my shoulder.
And how could anybody not turn at that?...
Oh bliddy stupid Orpheus.
Of course Ella Grey was bliddy there.*

- Write your own poem describing the moment when Orpheus looks back.

THE ORPHEUS MYTH: In film

- In small working groups, choose *A Song for Ella Grey* or the original Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and create a storyboard for a film.
- First of all list the main scenes which you will include – you may wish to change the order of events, or add in flashbacks, or new scenes.
- Then show the scenes as annotated sketches on the storyboard template that follows. You could choose a new title for your film; and decide on the cast – who might you have to play your Orpheus and Ella characters?





GREEK DRAMA

Some of the key events in *A Song for Ella Grey* are told as they might be in a Greek tragedy, performed in ancient Greek theatre – for example Claire makes a mask and speaks through it as Orpheus, going down to the Underworld; and Bianca is the messenger who brings the news of the horrific death of Orpheus – in Greek drama action such as this would always happen off-stage and was then reported by a messenger.

- Why do you think Greek plays had this messenger device?
- Find out more about the conventions of Greek drama: eg. the use of masks; the number of main players; the chorus.
- The main role of the chorus was to comment on and respond to the action of the play. Do you think that when the parents meet after Ella's death they seem to be a chorus?
- Choose a character to play – it could be someone from *A Song for Ella Grey*, or another book or play, or a person you know or imagine.
- Write a short speech for your character, describing who they are, what they are like, their story, just as Claire and Ella did when they were children.

We'd speak through our masks and put on costumes and say, I'm not me. I've gone. I've turned into Dracula, or Cinderella... (p15)

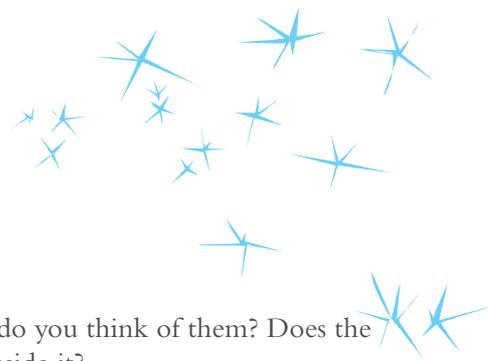
- Make a mask of that person, as Claire does – Draw the outline of a head on the card. Cut it out. (Part 4, chapter 2)
- Then wear the mask and speak through it as your character.
- How does it feel to be doing this?
- If you are the audience, how does it come across to you?

TYNESIDE AND THE NORTHUMBERLAND COAST

...I led her the short distance through the brilliant Northern light across the soft sand of this lovely beach in the far-flung North of England (p154)

- Make lists together of the places mentioned in this book and then draw sketch maps of Tyneside and Northumberland, writing in the names of the places – e.g.. Bamburgh, the Farne Islands – and adding pictures linking to the story – e.g.. seals, sand dunes; old coalfields, the bridges, the entrance to the Underworld.
- Find out more about Seven Stories – [the children's book place](#) (p15)
- Throughout her story there are beautiful and lyrical descriptions of place, showing Claire's love for where she is living.
- Read out loud the piece below; look for descriptions in the book which especially appeal to you.
- Then think of your own special place – jot down notes about it. Write about it very simply: as a picture in words, a poem, a song.

We left Tyneside behind, we crossed the ancient, healed, coalfield, we saw the sea shining. At Amble, bright boats danced their way to Coquet Island. Beyond here, the road followed the coast, and the beautiful places started, the places of dunes and castles and long white beaches. Sparkling rivers danced to the surging sea. There were stone built harbours, and little natural harbours called havens. Fishing boats rested on shingle and lobster pots were stacked up by black timber sheds. Orange nets were stretched out across the rocks to dry. (p131)



A SONG FOR ELLA GREY: COVER, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND DESIGN

- Talk about the cover illustration, and the illustrations through the book. What do you think of them? Does the cover attract you to read the book? Does it give you a feel of what might be inside it?
- How do the illustrations link with the story? Do they add to it, make you think more about it?

When Orpheus goes through the Ouseburn gates and through darkness down to Death, the book's pages are black with white text – and the words of Death and the Shades are in different and jagged typefaces. One reviewer has called this 'visual poetry'.

- How does this work for you? What did you think when the pages returned to white again?
- And did you notice that this section of the book has no page numbers?
- Design your version of a book jacket for either *A Song for Ella Grey* or for the original Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.
- Include a short blurb for the inside cover.

WRITE A REVIEW

Have a look at some examples of book reviews on websites such as Books for Keeps <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/reviews> and The Bookbag http://www.thebookbag.co.uk/reviews/index.php?title=The_Bookbag

Then write your own review of *A Song for Ella Grey* – make it at least 100 words in length.

- Give the essential information about the book: Title, author, publisher, ISBN
- Give a brief summary of the story – the setting, the main themes
- Describe how the story is told
- Say something about the look and design of the book – does this work for you?
- Most important of all! – What are your feelings and thoughts about the book? What did you enjoy? Could anything have been better? Do you recommend it to other readers?

A summary of the story

PART ONE: Claire introduces the story: *I'll bring my friend into the world for one last night then let her go for ever*. She recalls the meeting of Orpheus and Ella.

PART TWO: Newcastle, friendship, and camping on the dunes at Bamburgh. Orpheus charms with his music. He comes for Ella.

PART THREE: School, then half-term and the wedding of Ella and Orpheus. She is bitten by snakes and dies. Her funeral. Orpheus is mad with grief – he searches for Ella and finds Death's entrance.

PART FOUR: Claire makes a mask; she puts it on and becomes Orpheus, telling his story. He sings his way through the Underworld and charms Hades and Persephone. They let Ella follow him back up to earth – but he looks back and loses her. He talks with Claire, and goes.

PART FIVE: School again. Bianca and Claire walk out. Bianca returns, blood-stained. She describes the death of Orpheus.

PART SIX: Moving on. Was it all true? *I hear him, his song is everywhere...He comes, singing his way to my mouth, and there. Just behind him, is beautiful beloved Ella, coming out from Death.*

Orpheus and Eurydice: the Greek myth



Orpheus was a legendary musician and poet, whose music had the power to charm all living things – and even stones – with his music.

He was said to be the son of a Thracian king and Calliope, the ‘beautiful-voiced’ muse of epic poetry and daughter of Zeus, the king of the gods.

Orpheus fell in love with Eurydice, a nymph or the daughter of Apollo. On their wedding day he played joyful songs as she danced through the meadow.

But she was pursued by a satyr (a follower of Dionysus, god of wine) and fell into a nest of vipers (adders), was bitten, and died instantly.

Orpheus was distraught and travelled to the Underworld to try to get her back. The power and beauty of his music charmed both Cerberus, the dog who guarded the entrance, and the shades of the dead, and won over Hades and Persephone, the king and queen of the Underworld.

They allowed him to take her back to the world of the living, on the condition that she followed behind him and he did not look back at her until they had both reached the upper world.

But he doubted she was there, turned and looked back too soon – and lost her, as she vanished back to the Underworld.

He is said to have gone mad with grief, scorning the company of women, and worship of the gods, and met a bloody and gruesome death, his body torn apart by Maenads, the female worshippers of Dionysus. His soul returned to the Underworld, where he was reunited with Eurydice.



Suggestions for further reading

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	ISBN
David Almond	Skellig	Hodder	978-0340997048
	Clay	Hodder	978-0340969953
	Counting Stars	Hodder	978-0340945001
	Heaven Eyes	Hodder	978-0340944974
	Jackdaw Summer	Hodder	978-0340881996
	Kit's Wilderness	Hodder	978-0340944967
	My Name is Mina	Hodder	978-0340997260
	Secret Heart	Hodder	978-0340944981
	The Fire-Eaters	Hodder	978-0340944998

The power of music

Tim Bowler	Starseeker	OUP	978-0192755919
K M Peyton	The Beethoven Medal	Red Fox	978-1782951100

Love and loss

Gayle Forman	If I Stay	Viking Definitions	978-0451474643
	Where She Went	Viking Definitions	978-1849414289
John Green	The Fault in Our Stars	Penguin	978-0141345659
Katherine Paterson	Bridge to Terabithia	Harper Festival	978-0061227288
Marcus Sedgwick	Midwinterblood	Indigo	978-1780620206

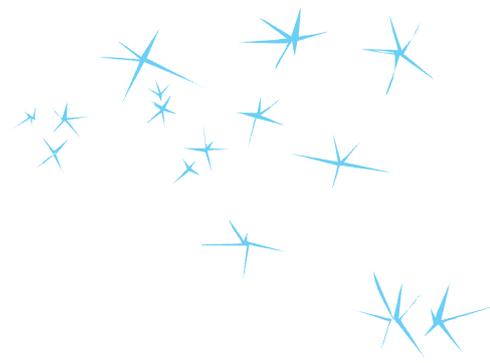
Northumberland

Robert Westall	The Kingdom by the Sea	HarperCollins	978-0007301416
	The Wind Eye	Catnip	978-1846470288

REFERENCES TO POETS

John Donne	1572-1631	Air and Angels	p23
		The Holy Sonnets	pp70,82
Robert Herrick	1591-1674	('Gather ye rosebuds while ye may')	p125
John Milton	1608-1674	Paradise Lost	pp8,116,253

Notes



P3: *Follow me...Don't look back*

A reference to the Orpheus and Eurydice story and a recurring refrain.

P8: *Krakatoa*. Teacher's nickname – speaks for itself! *Was this to be an eruption day?* (p24)

P16: *We'd sip wine, listen to the river, stare up at the stars, share our dreams of being artists, musicians, poets, wanderers, anything different, anything new.*

Drinking wine is enjoyed by young people through the story and there is a link here with Greek mythology and the Orpheus story. Dionysus was the god of wine and his followers were the Maenads.

Orpheus is said to have been killed by Maenads, female followers of Dionysus. The Maenads were often described in a state of ecstatic frenzy, through a combination of dancing and wine. They would weave ivy-wreaths round their heads, and often handle or wear snakes.

See p141 *Bianca whirled the snakes in the air, then wrapped them round her throat and danced in the sand with the terror and the thrill of it*

P31: *'Devil, devil we defy thee...'* from 'The Magpie' by Dave Dodds. This song is reproduced on the endpapers at the back of the book.

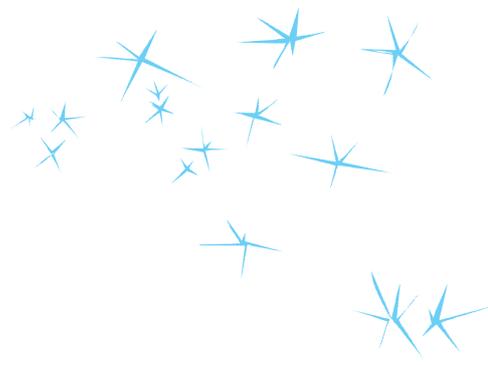
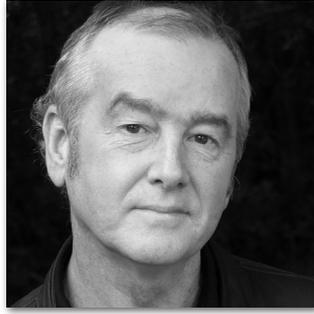
P172: *No birds sang*. An echo of the line 'And no birds sing' in poem La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats.

Part Four Chapter 3 (NB the pages between 182 and 235 have no page numbers):

A woman's whisper sweet and soft. Persephone, queen of the Underworld

It's a snarl, a growl, close by. Cerberus, guard dog at the entrance to the Underworld.

It's another voice, a man's. Hades, king of the Underworld, Death.



About David Almond

David Almond is the author of *Skellig*, *My Name is Mina*, and many other novels, stories and plays. His work is translated into over 40 languages, and is widely adapted for stage and screen. His major awards include The Carnegie Medal, two Whitbread and The Eleanor Farjeon Award.

In 2010 he received The Hans Christian Andersen Award, the world's most prestigious prize for children's authors. He was born in Newcastle, grew up in Felling-on-Tyne and now lives in Northumberland.

Also by David Almond

