

Jacqueline Wilson



HETTY FEATHER

ILLUSTRATED BY
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Teaching Notes
by
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Teacher's Notes

Introduction

As a Thomas Coram Fellow of the Foundling Museum, Jacqueline Wilson was inspired to write her first historical novel based on what she saw and experienced at the Foundling Museum. *Hetty Feather* is the wonderfully original and exciting story of a young Victorian foundling girl in desperate search of her real mother and her adventure along the way. In the writing of this story Jacqueline Wilson took great care to ensure that her account of life at the Foundling Hospital and what happened to these children is as accurate as possible and you will note that several of the pupils' tasks require them to look at real historical sources from the Foundling Museum. Therefore, *Hetty Feather* is a perfect teaching resource in engaging and extending pupils' understanding of Victorian society and the lives of its impoverished children – it also encourages them to use key first and second hand source material as the basis for meeting the NC requirement for the local history and life during the Victorian era sections of the KS2 syllabus.

Hetty Feather can be used to meet the following NC requirements at KS2 for:

- Knowledge, Skills and Understanding
- Historical Interpretation

3. Pupils should be taught to recognise that the past is represented and interpreted in different ways and to give reasons for this.

- Historical enquiry

4. Pupils should be taught:

- a: How to find out about the events, people and changes studied from an appropriate range of sources of information, including ITC-based sources.
- b: To ask and answer questions and to select and record information relevant to the focus of the enquiry.

- Breadth of study
- Local history study

7. A study investigating how an aspect in the local area has changed over a long period of time, or how the locality was affected by a significant national or local event or development or by the work of a significant individual.

- Victorian Britain or Britain since 1930

11. Victorian Britain

- a: A study of the impact of significant individuals, events and changes in work and transport on the lives of men, women and children from different sections of society.

Before beginning to teach *Hetty Feather*, an awareness of your class and individual pupils is vital, as the book deals with issues of illegitimacy, abandonment, infant mortality, adoption and fostering, disability and poverty, which are still problems that some pupils will be facing today.

It goes without saying that great care and sensitivity must be taken when teaching from *Hetty Feather*. Due to the nature of the topics covered in *Hetty*, there are many cross-curricular links with citizenship, in particular themes of identity. The assumption here is that the use of *Hetty Feather* will be incorporated into a KS2 History scheme of work on the Victorians. In particular, London schools could use the *Hetty Feather* story as a starting point for a more in-depth study of their local area, with a focus on the Foundling Hospital and its role during the Victorian era.



Teacher's Notes

Suggested additional or extension tasks to coincide with tasks provided in the pupil notes

→ Pre-reading

The question star is a great way to get pupils thinking about key ideas; you can laminate the stars and use them like mini white boards that pupils can reuse over and over again.

The painting by Thomas Benjamin Kennington in question 2 is called 'The Pinch of Poverty'. The Foundling Museum has excellent art and artefacts to use as a starting point and you may want to look at more than just 'The Pinch of Poverty' painting.

Researching the Foundling Hospital online is a great way to cover the IT requirement of the KS2 syllabus and it will give pupils a good basis to begin.

→ During reading

As an extension to tasks 1&2 you could get pupils to think about what the painting of mothers waiting to give up their children reminds them of, for example, a doctor's waiting room, and why it may have looked like this.

There were a limited number of places at the hospital and not all mothers who went before the petition's board would be successful. You could get the pupils to come up with a list of criteria for acceptance into the hospital. Pupils could also come up with suggestions as to why mothers wanted to give their babies permanently to the hospital. What other alternatives did these women have if they were rejected by the hospital? (You could run a parallel project on Victorian work houses).

When these women gave their children to the hospital, some hoped that they would one day come back to claim them. As the babies' original names and the names of their mothers were wiped from the records, some women would leave a token item with the hospital so that they could later identify their child. You could show pupils pictures of tokens from the Foundling Museum's website:

www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk/hettyfeatherteachers.php

Get pupils to think about the importance of these tokens as symbols of hope.

The numbering and re-naming of foundlings is a great place to start to look at issues of identity for citizenship. When the hospital's governors re-named the foundlings they were influenced by places they had visited, the Bible and famous historical characters. Some poor foundlings ended up being called Julius Caesar! You could get pupils to think about their own names and how it forms part of their identity (look at Chapter 1 and Hetty's questioning of her name).

Middle- and upper-class Victorians would pay to come and watch the foundlings eating their meals on Sundays. Some would bring their own children. Some liked to watch when the mothers were petitioning the governors to take their babies (see illustration of *Sunday at the Foundling Hospital*, [weblink as above](#)). You could get pupils to consider why people might do this, and what benefits the pupils got from the Sunday visitors.

You could mention that prominent figures like Charles Dickens paid for a pew in the Foundling Hospital's chapel and attended Sunday services there to listen to the foundling choir. He also used the hospital as a source of inspiration for several characters in his novels, including Tattycoram from *Little Dorrit* and possibly Mr Brownlow in *Oliver Twist*. (For John Brownlow's story, see [weblink as above](#).)

Teacher's Notes

→ After reading

Get pupils to re-visit their petition letters from Hetty's mother and see if their reasons match Jacqueline Wilson's ending.

Pupils could go on to study social attitudes towards being a foundling or coming from the workhouse during the Victorian era. They could look at attitudes towards disability using Hetty's brother Saul and her sister Martha and the way they were treated as a basis for comparing how attitudes have changed today.

Pupils could also explore the impact of the foster family on the foundlings and why they were not allowed to have contact with their foster brothers or sisters and family. What influence might this have had on their sense of belonging? Who did they belong to? Where did they belong in Victorian society?

Hetty Feather may be set during the Victorian era, but it has relevance in today's society and Jacqueline Wilson has provided such a rich text as a basis for so many issues that children and adults face now that it has been impossible to unpack them all in these notes, so please feel free to go wherever you want with the content of the book.

→ Supporting resources

The Foundling Museum provides additional information and online resources that you may want to use during and after reading the book. A class visit to the museum is highly recommended and details about its KS2 Victorian Foundlings session (which inspired Jacqueline Wilson to write *Hetty Feather*) can also be found on its website. Go to www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk/hettyfeather.php

About the Foundling Hospital



The **Foundling Museum** tells the story of the **Foundling Hospital**, Britain's first official home for abandoned and illegitimate children, and stands adjacent to the hospital's original site in central London.

Between 1739-1953 more than 27,000 babies were given up by desperate and often destitute women to the hospital, where they would be fed, clothed and educated. Virtually all would otherwise have died of starvation or disease, been deliberately killed or abandoned to die.

The price of survival was no further contact between mother and child. The foundlings were trained to be humble, grateful, hard-working members of society, going into domestic service, the military or the navy when they left the hospital at around 13 years of age.

The children were never told their parents' identities – their birth names were changed to allow their unmarried mothers to start life afresh, the existence of their illegitimate child a shameful secret often taken to the grave.

Find out more at www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk.

Pupil's Notes

Pre-reading tasks

1. Based on what you know already about the Victorians, in pairs write down on a post-it note four words that describe the general life of an everyday person during that time.



Painting by Thomas Benjamin Kennington (1856-1915)
Oil on canvas, 1891
© Coram in the care of the Foundling Museum

- Think about things like money, housing, food, clothes etc.
- You will need these words later so keep them somewhere safe.

2. Look at the painting by Thomas Benjamin Kennington.

- What questions does it raise?
- Write them down around the question star below.
- Think about what is happening in the painting.
- Once you have completed your question star see if you can guess the title of the painting.
- Finally ask your teacher to tell you the title.
- Does knowing the title help to answer some of your questions?



3. Either at home or during an IT lesson find out about the Foundling Hospital.

- Try going to www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk
- When was it built and what was it used for?
- Do you think the Foundling Hospital was a real hospital?

4. Based on what you now know about the Foundling Hospital and the Victorians, take a look at the front cover of *Hetty Feather* and see if you can guess what the story is about.

- You could complete another question star and then when you are finished reading the book see if you can answer all your questions and if your guess about *Hetty Feather* was right.

Pupil's Notes

During reading

1. Look at the image of mothers waiting to give up their babies. Your post-it words may come in handy here as they could provide some reasons, so take another look.



Mothers leaving their babies at the Foundling Hospital, taken from the *Illustrated London News*

- What reasons do you think these women had?
- Do they look happy about having to leave their babies at the Foundling Hospital?

2. Re-read Chapter 1, pages 3 & 4.

- Do you think Hetty's mother wanted to give up her baby?
- What reason do you think she had?

Did you know that before these women went to the Foundling Hospital they had to write a 'petition', which is a type of letter asking the hospital to take their child and the reason why? On the Foundling Museum's website there are some examples of 'petition' letters:

www.foundingmuseum.org.uk/hettyfeatherpupils.php

- Have a look at some of these letters. In groups see if you can write the 'petition' letter from Hetty's mother to the hospital

3. 'When Matron Pigface consulted her punishment book to check how many times I had been in trouble . . .'

Little Hetty Feather seems to have a knack for getting into trouble. Matron Peter's books must have been full of her misadventures.

- See if you can remember some of the things Hetty got into trouble for (see Chapter 15, p250-261 for answers).

The punishment books from Jacqueline Wilson's story are based on real books, some of which are still kept at the Foundling Museum today.

- What types of things do you think you would have had to have done to end up in the book and what might your punishment be?
- Think about what gets you into trouble at school today; are your teachers as strict as the matrons were at the Foundling Hospital?

4. Hetty often talks about the 'sameness' of daily life in the hospital (Chapter 12, p 189 & Chapter 15, p 247).

- Take a look at the daily menus and pupils timetables from the Foundling Museum ([weblink as above](#)).
- How do they compare with what you do on a daily basis?

5. 'Aren't you hungry, Sissy?' I asked. 'I'm always hungry,' she said. 'But you get used to it.' (Chapter 20, p 369).

- Go back to the 'Pinch of Poverty' painting on the pre-reading task page and your questions.
- Can you now answer all the questions you had about this painting based on the description of Sissy's life?
- Sissy has a very different life to Hetty. After experiencing Sissy's life how do you think it made Hetty feel about life at the Foundling Hospital?

Pupil's Notes

After reading

1. At the age of about 13 the foundlings left the hospital to begin their working life.
 - ➔ From what you have read in *Hetty Feather*, what types of jobs did the boys and girls from the Foundling Hospital get?
2. Just like Gideon, the majority of foundling boys went into the army or navy. See if you can find out what life in the Victorian services would have been like for these boys. Did they end up going to war?
 - ➔ Useful sites:
www.victorianmilitarysociety.org.uk
www.royalnavy.mod.uk/history
www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/foundling_02.shtml
3. Even though the foundlings left the hospital aged 13, their employers had to send yearly reports back to the hospital until they reached 21 years of age. After that it was up to them to make their own way in the world. One of the most famous foundlings was named John Brownlow.

Foundling number 18607, John Brownlow went on to become a key figure in the recording of life at the hospital during the 1800's and may be the inspiration for the kindly Mr. Brownlow from Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.

 - ➔ See if you can find out about any other foundlings who went on to become influential members of Victorian society.
4. Hot Seat Hetty!
 - ➔ Pick one person from your class to play Hetty Feather and place them in the 'hot seat'.
 - ➔ Based on all the things you have learnt about the Victorians and the Foundling Hospital and from reading Jacqueline Wilson's tale of life as a foundling, ask 'Hetty' about how she really felt.
 - ➔ What did she think of the hospital and did she think her life there was better than Sissy's?



Join the **Jacqueline Wilson Fan Club** and find out more about all of her books at www.jacquelinewilson.co.uk.

About Jacqueline Wilson



Jacqueline Wilson was born in Bath in 1945, but spent most of her childhood in Kingston-on-Thames. She always wanted to be a writer and wrote her first 'novel' when she was nine, filling in countless Woolworths' exercise books as she grew up. As a teenager she started work for a magazine publishing company and then went on to work as a journalist on Jackie magazine (which she was told was named after her!) before turning to writing novels full-time.

One of Jacqueline's most successful and enduring creations has been the famous Tracy Beaker, who first appeared in 1991 in *The Story of Tracy Beaker*. This was also the first of her books to be illustrated by Nick Sharratt. Since then Jacqueline has been on countless awards shortlists and has gone on to win many awards. *The Illustrated Mum* won the **Guardian Children's Fiction Award**, the **1999 Children's Book of the Year** at the **British Book Awards** and was also shortlisted for the **1999 Whitbread Children's Book Award**. *Double Act* won the prestigious **Smarties Medal** and the **Children's Book Award** as well as being highly commended for the **Carnegie Medal**. *The Story of Tracy Beaker* won the **2002 Blue Peter People's Choice Award**.

Jacqueline is one of the nation's favourite authors, and her books are loved and cherished by young readers not only in the UK but all over the world.

According to a recent Mori poll, Jacqueline was voted English children's favourite children's author. She has sold millions of books and in the UK alone the total stands at over 25 million! In 2002 Jacqueline was awarded the OBE for services to literacy in schools and from 2005 to 2007 she was the Children's Laureate.

In 2008 she became Dame Jacqueline Wilson.

→ Other books by Jacqueline you may be interested in



Log on to www.jacquelinewilson.co.uk for information about all of Jacqueline's books and more teaching notes.