

Notes for teachers and librarians on

Will You Catch Me? by Jane Elson

OVERVIEW

Nell Hobson lives with a tortoise called Bob Marley, guinea pigs Asbo and Chaos, goldfish Beyoncé and Destiny, gerbils Fizz and Tyrone, Auntie Lou the Hamster ... and her mum, who drinks too much. Nell does everything she can to be a good daughter so that her mum will stop. But when things get really hard, Nell stands on her head. Everything looks better upside down, don't you know?

Nell wishes she knew who her dad was. When new teacher Mr Samuels makes history come alive and tells the class the story of Nell Gwynn, the Orange Girl who became one of the first actresses on the London stage, Nell is captivated and is determined to dress up as an Orange Girl for the Costume Parade. She hatches a plan with her best friend Michael: a way to make her dad step forward and claim her. Will she succeed?

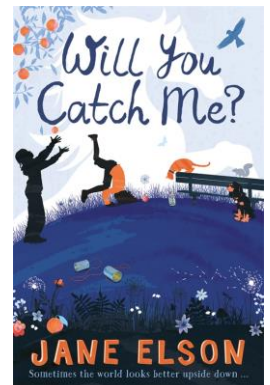
BEFORE READING

- Share the front cover, title and back cover blurb with the pupils – discuss and predict what the story might be about. Does the title and illustrations give any clues?
- Discuss why the author has chosen the words '*Sometimes the world looks better upside down...*'

WHILE READING

Ongoing Activities:

- Discuss the themes covered within the story (*friendship, family, loyalty, hope, courage, personal strength, identity, self-belief, community, illness, trust, addiction*)
- Keep a reading journal to record thoughts, ideas, viewpoints, author style/technique, literary devices and examples of effective vocabulary.
- Collect and explore the meaning of unfamiliar words through the use of a dictionary.



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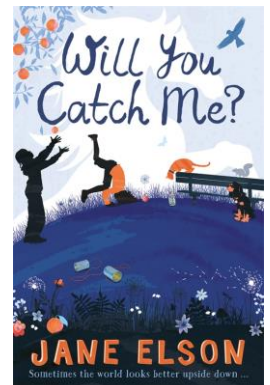
WHILE READING (cont.)

Ongoing Activities:

- Collect and explore effective words and phrases used by the author to develop the setting, characters, plot, mood and atmosphere.
- Visualisation – at different points of the story, use the author’s language and descriptions to create illustrations for the story.

AFTER READING

- Why do you think the author has chosen the following quotes?
‘There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.’ Nelson Mandela
‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ African Proverb
What is the meaning of the quote?
How do they relate to the story?
- If you could give the chapters a title, what would they be? Explain why, giving reasons and examples from the text to justify your answer.
- Why are happy memories so important to Nell?
- How does the author show hope?
- Why is the setting important to the story? How does the author create a sense of community?
- Why is Nell’s friendship with Michael so important?
- Nell is on a personal quest to find a place where she belongs. Find examples in the text to show how she belongs to a diverse community.
- How does Nell cope with her anxieties?



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AFTER READING (cont.)

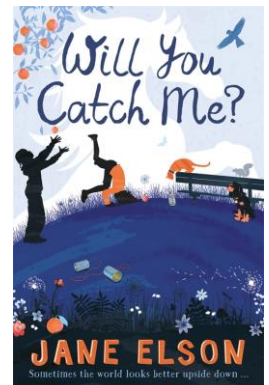
- Why does the author make references to historical figures (*Charles II, Napoleon, Nell Gwyn*)? Why does the narrator have dreams about the historical figure Nell Gwyn? What significance does this have on the story?

Discuss the techniques used by the author to show that the narrator dreams of the past?

- I like the way the author...

BEYOND THE BOOK

- Nell is a naturalist. Imagine you are Nell and create a notebook describing key information and diagrams about the animals and creatures you look after.
- Compare and contrast two characters, finding quotes to support your suggestions and ideas.
- Choose a passage or event and re-write it in the third person. Discuss how this can change the tone.
- Same Scene, Different Perspective - Pick a scene from the book and re-write it from the perspective of Michael or one of the other characters.
- Nell Gwyn lived in a different time in history. As a group research different aspects of life in the 17th Century and share findings – scientific discoveries, inventions, events, fashion, theatre etc.
- Write a short biography of one of the historical figures referenced in the story to feature as an entry in an illustrated children's encyclopedia e.g. *Charles II, Napoleon, Nell Gwyn, Samuel Pepys*.



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BEYOND THE BOOK (cont.)

- In chapter 11, Nell learns about 'The Great Plague of 1665' and 'The Great Fire of London of 1666'. Research and present findings as an information book for younger children.
- Imagine you are a newspaper journalist and write a news article describing the key events. Compare and contrast a modern journalistic style with the style that would have been used during the period of history of the event being reported.

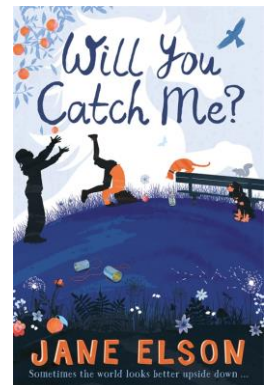
FURTHER QUESTIONS

In the Beginning

- How does the author hook the reader?
- What is meant by the term '*demon drink*'? How will this impact on the narrator's life?
- What is a Naturalist?
- What inspires the narrator to save animals and creatures?
- Who is the narrator?

Chapter 1

- Why do you think Nell feels that '*The world looks better when you're upside down*'? Pg. 1
- From reading chapter 1, what are your first impressions of Nell?
- Why is the cat called Napoleon?



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Chapter 1 (cont.)

- Explain the description:
'Only it's not funny and my happiness to see her smashes into a thousand pieces.' Pg. 9
Find other ways to show how the author describes the narrator's feelings? Find examples from the text.
- Why does the author use italics?
- What is *Operation Ark*? Why are they waiting to tell Aunty Lou?
- Why is it suddenly time to put '*Operation Ark*' in to action? Do you think Aunty Lou is right to come and help?

Explore Language Used:

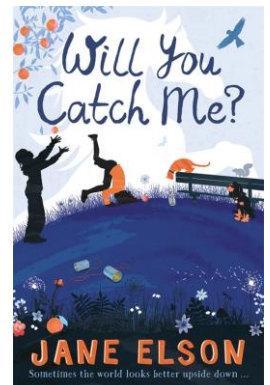
anxieties, invades, brindle, evicted, attitude, sass, micro chipped, muffled

Chapter 2

- What is the importance of Nell's animal family?
- Why does Aunty Lou want to change the guinea pig's names to Asbo and Chaos?
- Why does Michael seem reluctant to visit his dad?
- Why does Nell describe Michael and his family as '*precious treasures in my life*' ?
- From reading the final sentence at the end of chapter 2, what do you think will happen next? What does Nell plan to do? Do you think this is a good idea?

Explore Language Used:

chaos, bribe, squirming, rummage, betrayal, solemn, oblige



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Chapter 3

- How is Michael's family situation similar to Nell's? Why do you think the author has done this?
- Why does the author use different fonts?
- Why does Nell desperately want to find her dad?
- What has given Nell hope?

Explore Language Used:

sprawled, canerow, makeshift, conscience, haul

Chapter 4

- Why did Nell push Chantal and her friendship away? Was this the right thing to do? What has happened as a consequence? Would you have handled things differently? What are the key characteristics of a strong friendship?
- Why is Nell suddenly interested in history?
- Why does Nell need extra people in her life? Do you agree?

Explore Language Used:

savage urban landscape, Mother Nature, tragedy, cowering, scarpered, usherettes, ancestor, bellowing, honorary



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Chapter 5

- Discuss the following:

'It's at that moment that I realise with every breath in my body that my very soul is tied to Nell Gwyn.' Pg. 45

- What do you think the narrator means?

'Cause no matter what you look like on the outside if you're a unique and interesting human being on the inside, like Michael, -it's going to come shining through.' Pg. 48

- How does the author show Nell's ever changing emotions? Find other examples as you progress through the book.

Explore Language Used:

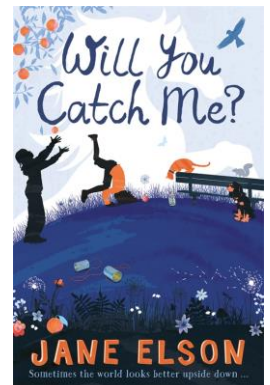
fruitier

Chapter 6

- At the beginning of the chapter, how does the author mirror Nell's feelings with the environment? Find further examples within the book.
- What has changed when Nell gets home? Describe her feelings using 10 well chosen adjectives.
- *'Mum's looking at me like a little girl who wants to please her mum. It should be the other way round.'* Discuss.
- Using the style of the author, describe Nell's feelings at the end of the chapter.

Explore Language Used:

deprive, gerbilarium



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Chapter 7&8

- Discuss the author's effective use of the weather.
- Is Nell right to send TJ away?
- Nell wants to wait for her mum to return. What do you think Nell should do? Is it her responsibility to stay and look after her mum?
- How does the story with Nell Gwyn connect with the present day?
- Why does hope start to trickle into Nell's heart at this point of the story?
- Why does Michael like to look at the clouds?

Explore Language Used:

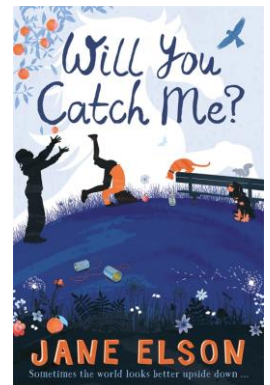
Deliberately, higgledy-piggeldy

Chapter 9

- Why does Nell see Mr Richardson in a '*whole new light*.'?
- What does the author mean?
'*The shame swallows me whole.*'
- Was Nell's mum right to take Nell's charm bracelet and then her animal fund?

Explore Language Used:

savage urban landscape, Mother Nature, tragedy, cowering, scarpered, usherettes, ancestor, bellowing, honorary



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Chapter 10

- What is a 'soul mate'?
- What does Nell discover at the old youth club? What should she do next?

Explore Language Used:

woozy, provisions, cackle

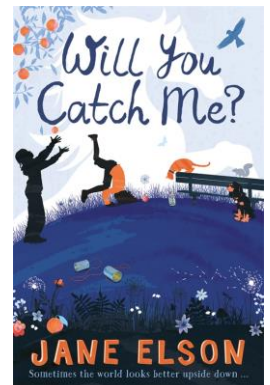
Chapter 11&12

- Discuss how Nell is feeling from the following descriptions:
'My heart beats like a hollow drum without my animal family.' pg. 104
'I grit my teeth with determination...' pg. 105
'I wolf the chips like a piglet...' pg. 106
'I feel myself exploding inside...' pg. 112
'My tummy catapults up to my tonsils.' pg. 115

Select different emotions that could be felt by a character. Write a sentence to describe the emotions through their actions.

Explore Language Used:

wedged, oozes, wafts, smudges, scrumpled, breeches, quench, hydrated, liberties, dissolve, razz



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Chapter 13&14

- What do you think Nell should do in her situation? Should she tell a teacher or not? *Conscience Alley: divide the class in two. Half the class to support one point of view while the other half the opposing point. Then organise the class into two facing rows, making a central alley. Pupils on both sides take it in turns to voice their thoughts and opinions. Review and then make an informed decision of what the character should/would do in this situation. Does everyone agree? Discuss further.*
- How and why does the mood change in chapter 14?

Explore Language Used:

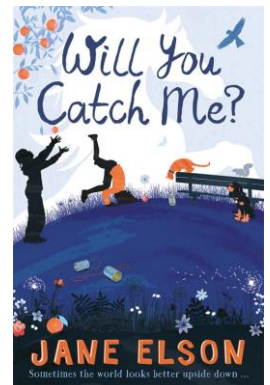
droning, plead, handiwork, figurines, confiscates, mayhem

Chapter 15&16

- Explore Nell's relationship with Aunty Lou.
- Do you think it is possible to feel happy and sad at the same time?
- Create an emotion graph showing Nell's feelings at different points of the chapter(s).
- Do you agree that 'everybody needs somebody'?
- How does Michael show support for his friend? Discuss the value of friendship.
- What do you learn about Nell's character when she receives her award?

Explore Language Used:

loitering, unavoidably detained, vexed, tormenting, alcove, traipsing



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Chapter 17

- After reading chapter 17, discuss the significance of the title of the book.
- Why does Sasha have respect for Nell?

Explore Language Used:
sobered, aligned, plonk

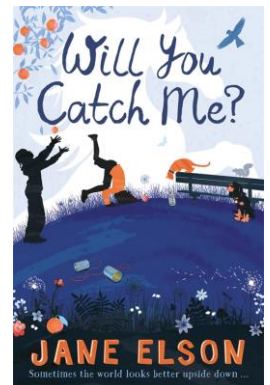
Chapter 18 & 19

- Trace Nell's adventure on a map of London.
- What does Nell mean when she says '*Mum, most kids want adventures. I just want normal.*'?
- Why does Nell not believe her mum's empty promises?

Explore Language Used:
squirm

Chapter 20, 21 & 22

- Nell takes a bundle of newspapers and convinces herself that it is not stealing. Do you agree?
- What do you think Nell should do to find her dad?
- Do you think Mum will keep her pinkie promise this time?



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Chapter 20, 21 & 22 (cont.)

- Sculpting Characters – pick two contrasting scenes. Pupils recreate the scene and freeze to show the event. Other pupils to sculpt the characters to show emotions, reactions etc. Pay attention to gaze, tilt of the head, hands, position of the character.

Explore Language Used:
inconspicuous, trudge

Chapter 23, 24 & 25

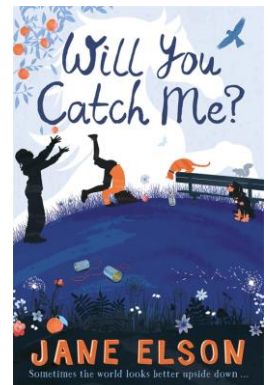
- What is the role of social services and the RSPCA?
- Why does Nell blame herself for her mum's illness?
- What does it mean to have an addiction?

Explore Language Used:
addiction

Chapter 26, 27 & 28

- What does the philosophy '*Strong body, strong mind*' mean?
- How does the community come together to support Nell?
- How does Michael feel when Nell asks for his help? What would you do in his situation?

Explore Language Used:
alcoholic, fragile



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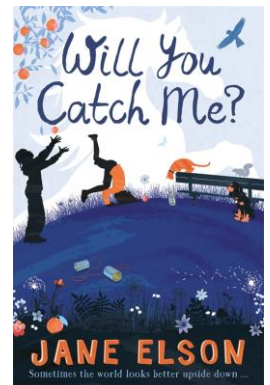
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Chapter 29, 30, 31 & 32

- What does the phrase '*the coast is clear*' mean?
- Summarise Michael's feelings in five words.
- Is Nell a good friend to Michael? Discuss.
- What does Nell learn from her experiences?
- What did Mary mean when she said '*Sometimes what we seek lies with us all along.*'?
- What does the white dove symbolise?
- Why does Nell Gwyn vanish at the end of chapter 32?

Explore Language Used:

vandalised, shimmies, flounces, chaperone, crescendo, travestry, official guardian,



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