

SPLINTERS OF SUNSHINE

By Patrice Lawrence

THEMES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS AGES 12+



INTRODUCTION

Splinters of Sunshine by Patrice Lawrence is suitable for sharing with students ages 12+ – either in the classroom, as recommended reading at home or in extra-curricular book clubs.

The quotes and discussion questions included in this pack are linked to prominent themes in the book and help young people to explore the ideas in the story.

Note: This book covers some sensitive issues. It is advised that teachers/parents/carers read the book before sharing with students.

ABOUT THE BOOK

I pick up the envelope . . . As I rip down the sides, there's loads of paper bursting out; stuck on flowers, dandelions, roses . . .

Spey recently received two surprises. The first: his ex-prisoner dad turning up unannounced, and the second: a mysterious package containing torn-up paper flowers.

Spey instantly recognises it as a collage he made with his old friend Dee, and decides she must be in danger, but there are no clues to her whereabouts.

There's only one person he knows who can help to track her down . . .

On a road trip like no other, will Spey and his dad find Dee, before it's too late?

These resources have been created for Hachette Schools by Shapes for Schools.



CONTENTS

EXPLORING KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS - Pages 4–8

Objectives: Identify and explore key ideas in the book; record notes about the different themes; use language from the text to look closely at different themes and concepts.

LOOKING AT EXTRACTS - Pages 9–12

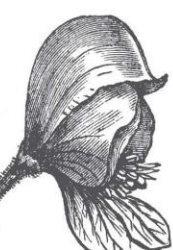
Objectives: Take a closer look at three extracts from the novel; analyse themes, style and characters and discuss ideas.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTIVITIES - Page 13

Objectives: Create a Wildflower Scrapbook; reflect on the different challenges that characters face in the story; discuss the theme of empathy in the book.

EXPLORING KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS


1. TAKE A LOOK AT THE COVER



First, look at the cover of *Splinters of Sunshine*. Use it to think about the questions below:

1. Which words stand out to you in the title? Why? What do they make you think about?
2. What prominent images or imagery do you see on the cover?
3. Can you guess any prominent themes or concepts that might be explored in the book?

2. THEME SHEET



Themes are the main ideas that lie beneath the surface of a text. When working with a short extract of a fiction text, it helps to look closely at the language to work out the themes.

There are many themes in *Splinters of Sunshine*. If you have already read the book, think about the themes below and write down some notes about how they feature in the story. If you haven't read the book yet, use this 'theme sheet' to record ideas as you read. Try to add two themes of your own



SPLINTERS OF SUNSHINE THEME SHEET

THEME	NOTES
FAMILY	
BELONGING	
HOME	
CLASS IDENTITY	
RACISM	
HOPE	
ADANDONMENT	
WILDFLOWERS	
FRIENDSHIP	
FORGIVENESS	
MEMORY	
FATHERHOOD	
VIOLENCE & ABUSE	



3. QUOTE-THEME MATCH UP!

'The Better Dads guy told us that we have to take steps to rebuild ourselves and our relationships, like with Alcoholics Anonymous. The step I've reached is about making amends, with you and all my kids.' Benni

'But it was the smell. It made me want to cry. I knew it was Dee's Mum and I didn't want her to smell like that.' Spey

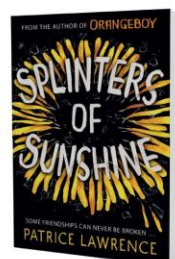
'Nan says that the only difference between a flower and a weed is judgement.' Dee

'There's still one dandelion left. It's like it doesn't want to change. It wants to stay there and shine for me. But I know the rest of the plant is there under the concrete. In spring, there will be more flowers. So when you look down from the street, all you'll see is suns.' Dee

'I keep going over the times I've let her down. Now I'm persuading myself to do it again when maybe I've got a real chance of setting things right.' Spey

'I wish Chez well. I don't condone nothing he did to Dee. All of us are standing on our families' shoulders, for good or bad. You don't want to step off because when you fall, you don't know where you'll land.' Benni

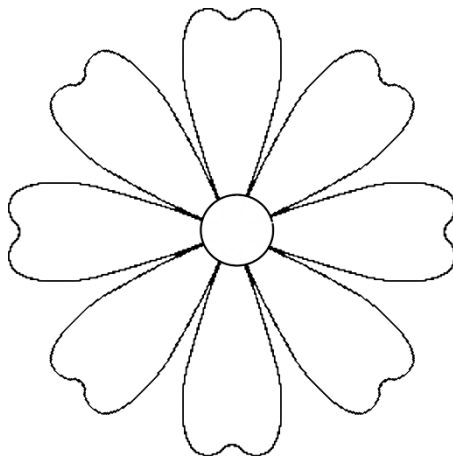
Refer back to your Theme Sheet. You might want to colour-code each theme. Can you then match some of the themes to the quotes? Do any of the quotes explore more than one theme?



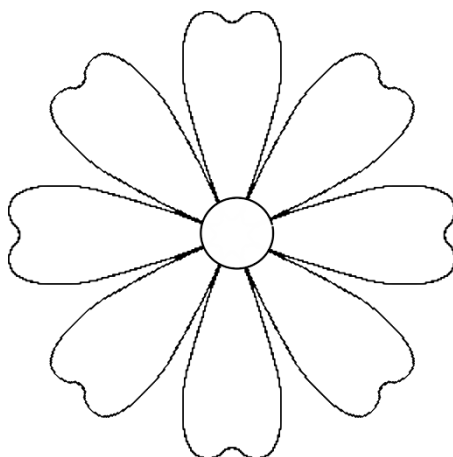


CHALLENGE 1: Try to add some more themes to your Theme Sheet. Can you pick out any more quotes or important moments in the book that link to these themes?

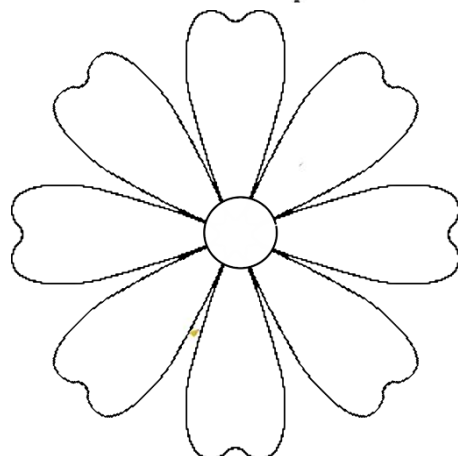
Consider what you can learn about each of the characters from these quotes. Fill in some of your ideas inside the Character Flower Petals below.



SPEY

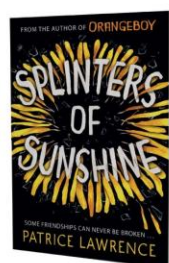


DEE



BENNI

CHALLENGE 2: Can you draw another flower or diagram to show how these three characters' stories and ideas interweave and overlap?





LOOKING AT EXTRACTS: SPLINTERS OF GOOD

Read the extract taken from Pages 64–65:

‘Our neighbours used to say that Nan didn’t care what anyone thought. They’re wrong. She cared what I thought. She told me that there were bad things in the world. It was sad that I knew this already even though I was so young. She wanted me to believe that there were also many good things. They can be so tiny that you can’t see them. It’s like when you climb over a log in the park and your finger hurts and you have to look close to see what’s wrong. But this time, it’s a tiny splinter of good, buried in deep. Nan said you mustn’t pull out the splinters of good. Let them bury deeper and grow. It doesn’t matter if you forget about them because they’ll always be there when you need them.’

- What are ‘splinters of good’? Why are they important?
- What ‘bad things’ has Dee had to face in her life? What about Spey and Benni – and the other characters in the story?
 - What ‘splinters of good’ can you find in the story?
 - Why is this idea relevant to the book as a whole?
- What does Nan tell Dee to do with the ‘splinters of good’ in her life?

Mind map your thoughts and discussions below:

SPLINTERS OF GOOD



LOOKING AT EXTRACTS: BELONGING

Read the extract taken from Page 42:

‘Now the Better Dads guy is in my head saying, *Careful, Benni. This is for your boy, not you.* And that’s the problem, Spey. I want to paint a glittering picture of your biological grandparents, but it’s hard. I want to give you a gift that’s even better than the Jordans. I want you to know where you came from. I want you to have an anchor, Spey, like I never did. I thought about having one of those DNA tests so I could get more ethnic background. It’s supposed to tell you where you come from, where you really belong. I think it’s too late for me, Spey. I don’t belong nowhere.’

- What does it mean to ‘belong’ somewhere?
- How is the theme of belonging explored in the book?
- What are the different characters’ experiences of this theme?
- How is the idea of ‘belonging’ also linked to themes of ‘home’ and ‘abandonment’?
- How is the theme of ‘belonging’ linked to ‘family’ and ‘fatherhood’ in the story?

Mind map your thoughts and discussions below:

BELONGING



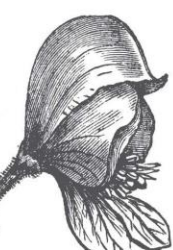



LOOKING AT EXTRACTS: RACE AND IDENTITY

Read the extract taken from Page 34:

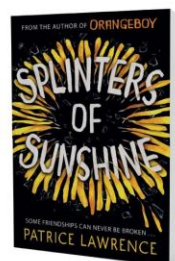
‘The mixed race kids get it straight away. The white kids are confused. Folks sometimes think I’m white, especially when my hair’s cut low. But I’ve been asked if I’m Turkish or Colombian and once if I was North Korean. (Of course I said, ‘Yes.’ So the girl asked me to say something in Korean to her. I said, ‘Welcome,’ in Arabic because we’d learned it in playgroup.) The Black kids just raise their eyebrows, probably waiting to see what side I’m going to take.

And . . . it’s the clichéd side. The absent-Black-dad side. The Black-dad-that’s-in-prison side. I’m sure there’s a few stereotypes I’ve left out.’

- 
- 
- In what ways does the novel explore how skin shade impacts identity?
 - How do characters internalise the racism of others here and elsewhere in the story?
 - Why do you think Spey’s Mum sent him to Beckford Academy? How does Spey feel about it?
 - Spey refers to several ‘stereotypes’ here; what are they? How are they explored in the novel – thinking in particular about Benni’s trajectory from being placed in care to his time in prison?

Mind map your thoughts and discussions below:

RACE AND IDENTITY





FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1: WILDFLOWER SCRAPBOOK

Make a note of all the different wildflowers that Dee mentions in the story or that feature in her flower book. Create your own scrapbook or collage of wildflowers inspired by what you find.

Choose a few of these flowers and carry out more research into them. What do they look like? Where can you find them? Include drawings and photographs. Consider which of these flowers is your favourite in the story and why. How does it relate to your own feelings or situation?



2: TELLING DIFFICULT STORIES

Splinters of Sunshine tells the interweaving stories of people who face difficult circumstances, often with the odds stacked against them. For example, Benni is placed in care because of the colour of his skin; he then spends time in the criminal justice system, where black people like him are in the majority. Dee is used for drug carrying because she is a white girl, and white girls are much less likely to be stopped and searched.

Reflect on why it is important to tell these stories. What bigger societal problems do they represent and help us understand?

For each character, write down the challenges or difficulties they face in society. How do they impact their identities and daily lives? Choose a societal issue in the story that you feel passionate about and write a summary of how it is explored.



3: SHOWING EMPATHY FOR OTHERS

Consider the theme of 'empathy' in *Splinters of Sunshine*. Why is it important? How is it explored?

How does Patrice Lawrence's decision to write from the perspectives of three characters (Spey, Dee and Benni) help to encourage empathy in the reader? Create an Empathy Map to represent the different events and relationships in the story. Who has empathy for who? Why? How do these connections help us to see the 'splinters of good' in the world?

