



The **Sky Over Rebecca**

MATTHEW FOX

EXTRACTS AND NOTES FOR KS2 TEACHERS & LIBRARIANS

Suitable for: Ages 9–11

Explore themes of:

- ✓ **Empathy**
- ✓ **Loneliness**
- ✓ **Grief**
- ✓ **WW2**
- ✓ **Refugees**

Subject Checklist:

- ✓ **Literacy**
- ✓ **History**
- ✓ **PSHCE**
- ✓ **Art, Design & Technology**



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EXTRACT 1

Loneliness (taken from Chapter 6)

Objectives: To think about how loneliness affects us and those around us. To create friendship snow angels.

EXTRACT 2

Refugees (taken from Chapter 25)

Objectives: To consider the difficulties faced by refugees both from WW2 and in modern times. To design a leaflet for the community to help them understand the plight of refugees and how they can help.

EXTRACT 3

Grief (taken from Chapters 38, 40 and 52)

Objectives: To investigate the different ways we show our grief. To fill a memory jar with items that would help the main character remember those she misses.

ABOUT THE BOOK



When mysterious footprints appear in the Stockholm snow, ten-year-old Kara must discover where they've come from – and who they belong to.

The trail of footprints leads Kara to Rebecca, a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl, and her younger brother Samuel. Kara realises they are refugees – from another time, World War Two – and are trying to find their way home.

The grief and loneliness that Rebecca and Samuel have endured is something Kara can relate to – feeling like you're always on the outside looking in – and she finds herself compelled to help them escape. Through her eyes, we rediscover the magic that lies in the world around us, if only we have the courage to look for it.

Kara is a heroine for modern times: fragile but fierce, in this utterly compelling story from a stellar new voice in children's literature, Matthew Fox.



EXTRACT 1

LONELINESS

TAKEN FROM CHAPTER 6

I went through to the kitchen. Mum had gone to work already. I wouldn't see her again until late tonight.

I'd be alone again, all day.

Some terrible feeling rose up in me then.

It's a feeling I've had sometimes before.

Recently I've been having it more often.

It's like a cold wind blowing through you.

Somehow, having clothes doesn't seem to help. There aren't enough layers in the world. The wind rattles the bones in your body anyway.

Adults call this depression.

I call it loneliness.

Yesterday, for example, I didn't talk to anyone all day. Not until I saw the snow angel, and that's when I started talking to you. There was something strange about the snow angel and I needed to talk to somebody about it if I was going to figure it out. So I started talking to you. But before that I didn't speak to anyone.

What I did yesterday was I got a bus, and then a train, and went to the Mall of Scandinavia. That's where I stayed, all day, on the off chance that I'd see somebody I knew from school and have someone to talk to. So I went in the shops and looked at the clothes, and sat in a coffee shop and reread my old, battered copy of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, and later I sat for a long time on a bench next to some old people.

EXTRACT 1

LONELINESS

TAKEN FROM CHAPTER 6

But I didn't see anybody I knew all day.

The truth is I'm not good at making friends. It's not something I have the skills for. I don't know how to do it. I don't know what to say to people.

So instead I feel a cold wind blowing through me, raging, and I wonder if anybody cares about me.

Anybody in the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

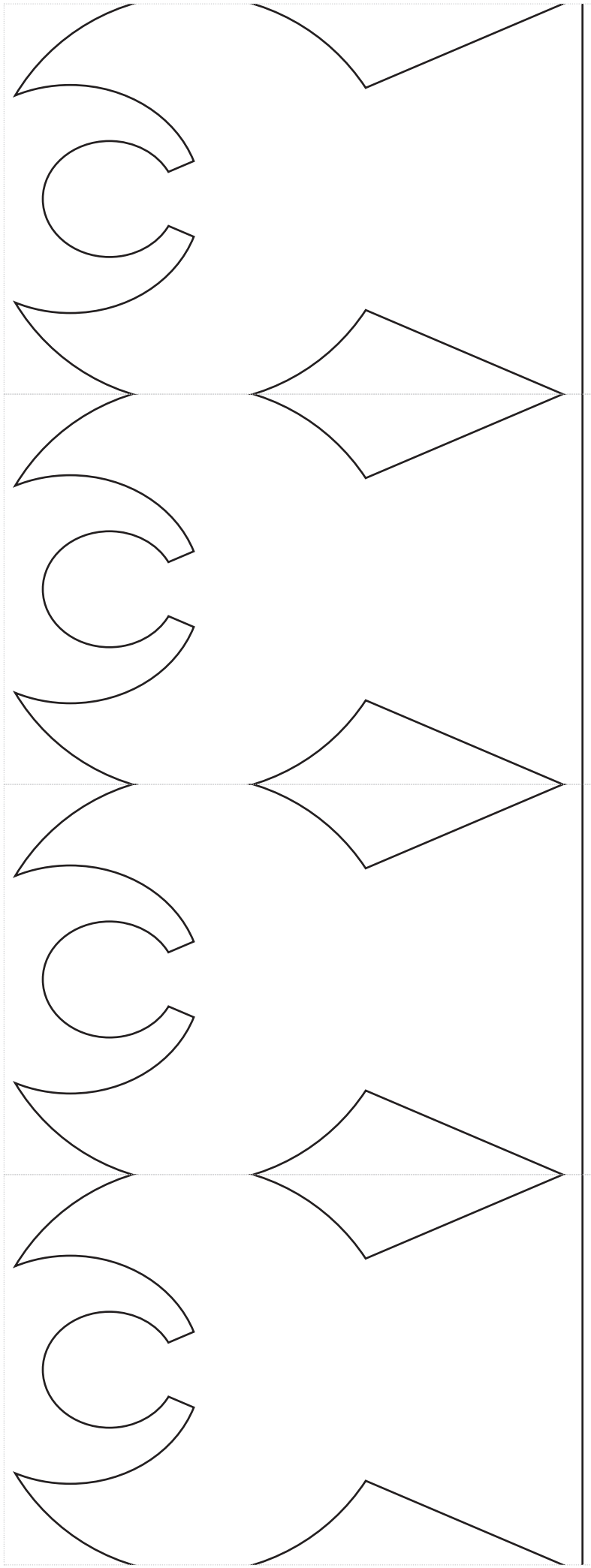
- Is it possible to feel lonely when someone else is in the room? Think about Kara on page 7 when Mum is busy working.
- In the extract, Kara says she has a feeling '... like a cold wind blowing through you.' What does she mean?
- Who do you think Kara is talking to when she says, 'I needed to talk to somebody... So I started talking to you'?
- Do you think being able to make friends is a skill? Kara thinks she doesn't have the right skills. Do you think this is true? Explain your thoughts.
- If you knew there was someone in your class who was struggling to make friends, what could you do to help them?

ACTIVITY – FRIENDSHIP SNOW ANGELS

Kara talks about her feelings of depression and loneliness. She also talks about some of the ways she tries to help herself. What are they?

It is sometimes possible to do things to help ourselves when we feel lonely. But sometimes we could use the help of someone else too. It can be difficult if nobody is there when we need them, and surprising when someone is there when we don't expect them. It is a little bit like the footprints that are missing when Kara sees the snow angel, before they reappear on the snowy roof.

- Fold your paper into quarters and cut out the shape of your snow angel, making sure you leave the edges of their wings so that when you unfold them, they are linked together.
- Write one thing you could do to help yourself on the front of each angel. Then write one thing on the back that you could do to help someone else when they are feeling lonely.
- Keep your angels safe and use them when they are needed the most.



EXTRACT 2

REFUGEES

TAKEN FROM CHAPTER 25

They were Jews. They were in hiding. The year was 1944.

They were in hiding because the leaders and the people of the country in which they lived were trying to kill them. The Nazis had already taken away every other member of their family. They had taken them to the work camps. They had taken them to the extermination camps.

All of this happened because they were Jews.

Trucks came to their house in the country. Soldiers rounded everybody up. Rebecca and Samuel survived because they were playing hide and seek in the cellar.

The trucks departed. Upstairs, only the cook and the housekeeper, who were not Jews, remained. They, along with Rebecca and Samuel's parents, had pretended the children had gone to Sweden two weeks previously to visit their aunt.

Now the cook and the housekeeper told Rebecca and Samuel to go for real.

'Take what you want but travel light,' said the housekeeper, who loved Samuel. 'We cannot hide you here. Soldiers will come back to loot the house. Everything that is yours will be taken and the house will be given to the wife of an officer in the Gestapo.'

EXTRACT 2

REFUGEES

TAKEN FROM CHAPTER 25

Then the cook said, 'They'll kill us if they find you here when they come back.'

So Rebecca prised the mezuzah from the wood of the door and kissed it and they left that day.

They had a bicycle. Samuel clung to Rebecca.

They came to the island.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What do you already know about how Jewish people were treated by Hitler's Nazi party in World War Two?
- Use a dictionary to look up the following tricky words from the passage: extermination, loot, Gestapo, mezuzah.
- Why did Rebecca and Samuel's parents pretend the children had gone to Sweden to visit their aunt?
- Can you imagine how Rebecca and Samuel must have felt when they realised they had to run away, without their parents, to try and find safety?
- The housekeeper says: 'Take what you want but travel light.' If you were given this instruction, what would you take with you and why?

ACTIVITY – REFUGEES THEN AND NOW

- Design a leaflet to help other people in your community understand what it might be like to be a refugee and what they could do to help make them feel welcome and supported.
- Use the table to make some notes before you create your leaflet.
- Remember that empathy can be a very powerful tool, so perhaps ask people reading your leaflet to think about their own lives too.

<p>Give a few facts about what it means to be a refugee.</p>	<p>What are the most important things a refugee in a new community might need?</p>	<p>How can refugees be supported in our schools or communities?</p>
<p>What do you think some of the hardest things about being a refugee might be?</p>	<p>What problems might a refugee face when trying to settle in a new place?</p>	<p>How can we make refugees feel welcome?</p>

EXTRACT 3

GRIEF

TAKEN FROM CHAPTERS 38, 40 AND 52

He was dead before I arrived at the old house and spoke with him there. Before we spoke about ghosts. Before he told me about light that needs to be seen so it can go on its way through the universe.

I held his hand. I whispered in his ear, 'Thank you.'

I said, 'Go on your way through the universe.'

Mum overheard me.

'What did you say to him?' she said.

I told her.

'Yes,' she said. 'Yes. That's it.'

She looked at her father lying there. 'You can go on your way through the universe now,' she said.

I squeezed her hand.

Now we were two.

Just me and her.

Something happened in her eyes. They darkened and clouded while I watched.

'Rebecca,' I said.

'Rebecca,' I said again.

'Talk to me.'

'Please, Rebecca.'

'Look at me.'

She didn't close her eyes. But she didn't look at me either.

'Please, Rebecca,' I said. 'Please . . . Live . . . Please live. You can't go. You can't . . .'



But she was gone.

Anger surged inside me.

‘But I don’t have any friends!’ I shouted, to the night, to the world, to the universe. I looked up at the stars and shouted right up at them. ‘I don’t have any friends! Don’t you understand? I don’t have any friends! I don’t have anyone in the world!’

The stars looked down on me, cold and unfriendly, and didn’t answer.

I was crying, I noticed. I had been crying for some time. I closed Rebecca’s eyes.

I stayed with Rebecca for a long time, holding her in my arms, cradling her.

It was cold but I no longer cared.

I couldn’t bring myself to move.

‘Oh!’ Her hands flew to her mouth and she dropped the wood she was carrying. It clattered on to the ice.

‘It’s happened, hasn’t it?’ she said.

I nodded.

I had tears in my eyes.

Rebecca nodded. Then she said, ‘Is he safe? Is Samuel safe?’



I nodded again and Rebecca smiled.

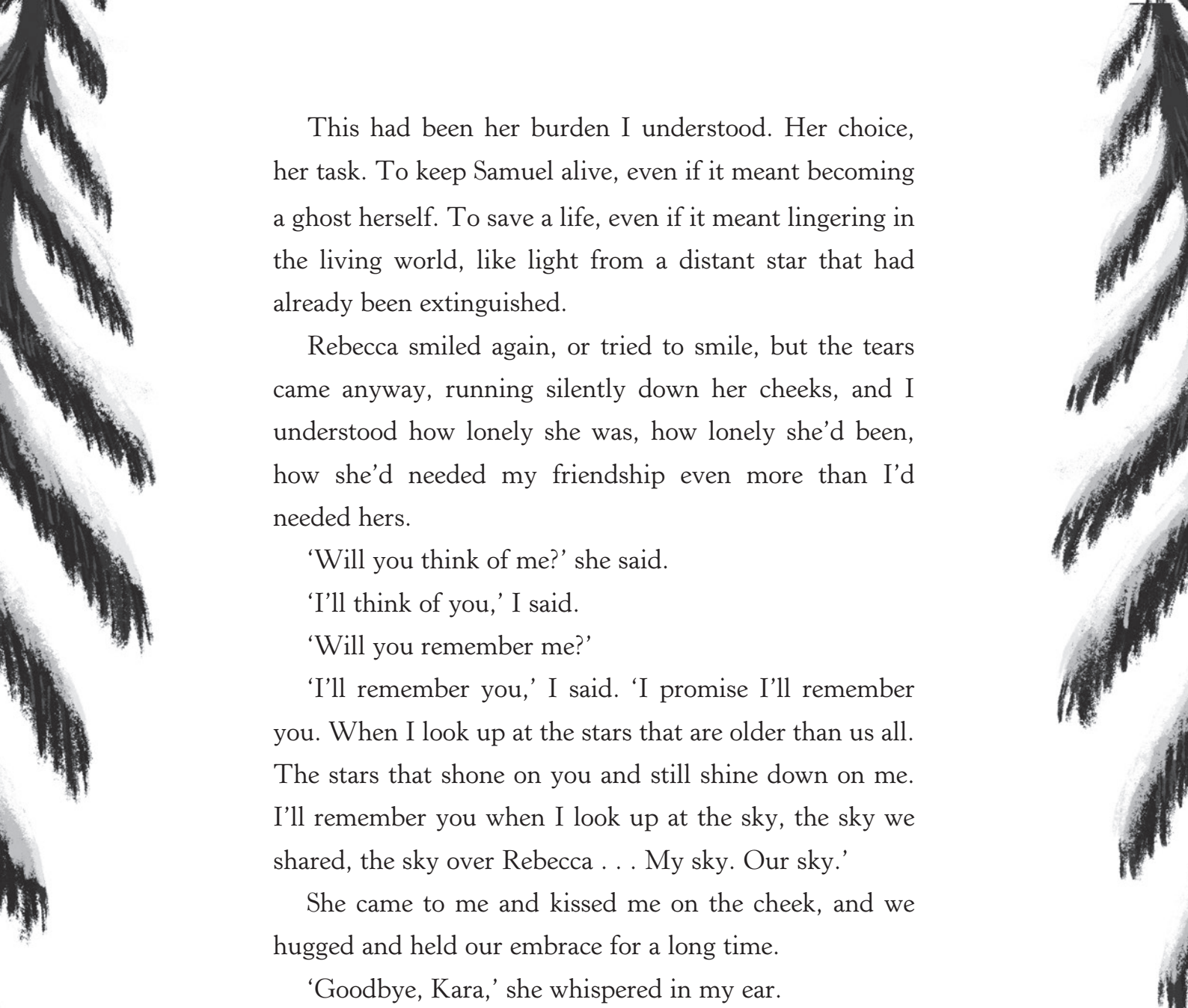
‘Then I can go on my way through the universe.’

That broke me.

That cut right through me. I cried.

‘That’s right,’ I said to her through tears, ‘you can go on your way.’





This had been her burden I understood. Her choice, her task. To keep Samuel alive, even if it meant becoming a ghost herself. To save a life, even if it meant lingering in the living world, like light from a distant star that had already been extinguished.

Rebecca smiled again, or tried to smile, but the tears came anyway, running silently down her cheeks, and I understood how lonely she was, how lonely she'd been, how she'd needed my friendship even more than I'd needed hers.

'Will you think of me?' she said.

'I'll think of you,' I said.

'Will you remember me?'


'I'll remember you,' I said. 'I promise I'll remember you. When I look up at the stars that are older than us all. The stars that shone on you and still shine down on me. I'll remember you when I look up at the sky, the sky we shared, the sky over Rebecca . . . My sky. Our sky.'

She came to me and kissed me on the cheek, and we hugged and held our embrace for a long time.

'Goodbye, Kara,' she whispered in my ear.

'Goodbye, Rebecca,' I whispered back.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did Kara think she was talking to her grandpa when he had already died? (Extract 1)
 - What does Kara mean when she whispers: 'go on your way through the universe'? (Extract 1)
 - Why did Kara shout at the stars? (Extract 2)
 - Rebecca's first thought is to check that Samuel is safe. What does this tell us about her character? (Extract 3)
 - Apart from Kara's grief, all three extracts are also linked by their talk of the stars and the universe. Why do you think the author chose to use this as a theme?
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ACTIVITY

CREATE A MEMORY JAR FOR KARA

- There are 5 key stages in the grieving process:
Denial | Anger | Bargaining | Depression | Acceptance
 - In small groups discuss what these stages mean. How might someone show they are experiencing each of these stages?
 - Look at each of the three extracts from the book. Can you recognise any of the stages of grief in Kara's actions and reactions?
 - Finding ways to remember the person we love can help cope with grief.
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- Can you think of some things Kara could put into a memory jar to help her remember Grandpa, Rebecca and Samuel?
 - Fill the jar with pictures of all the things you can think of and add labels around the outside to show what you have put in and why.

