

TEACHING NOTES

FOR *THE MAYA SACRIFICE*

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These notes have been written by the teachers at the [CLPE](https://www.clpe.org.uk) to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

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Before You Start:

- As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group Reading Journal to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. Children will also be asked to consider the writer's use of language and how he creates a particular effect or image.
- The length of the book means that you might need to consider how you wish children to engage with the text. The sessions below propose a blend of reading aloud and discussing key passages; allowing time for pupils to read sections of the text independently between sessions; revisiting specific passages and episodes and engaging in specific activities to deepen response and comprehension.
- This novel is set both in the present day in the UK and in 859 CE in what is now called Tikal, Guatemala. To support children's overview of the story and location in time and place, it would be helpful to create: a geographical storymap; a simple cast of characters, perhaps grouped according to the social groups and hierarchy to which they belong, e.g., Oxmoco and the court and Balam's village/the temple-builders/Pok-ta-pok/Pitz players.
- Children's understanding of the text, including some of the vocabulary used, will be enhanced by a level of understanding of the historical period and, in particular, what it meant for the different classes of people living in Tikal at the time. The population's experiences (of rites and rituals including sacrifice, of leisure activities, of architecture and slavery) are all evident in the pages of this novel. Therefore, you may wish to read this novel alongside wider cross-curricular study, or provide opportunities for children to share existing knowledge and ask questions and seek clarification about any aspects of the period that are unclear to them during discussions. You could provide access to appropriate non-fiction texts (see suggestions at the end of these notes) and carefully selected websites or online documentary footage (links are provided in the notes where they might be helpful).

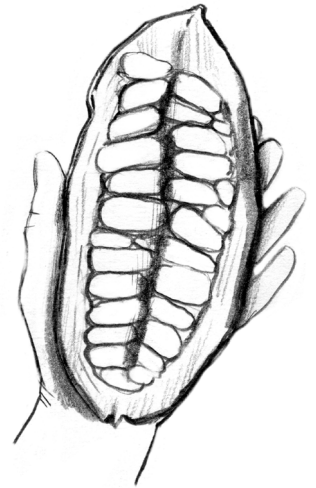
Cover and Chapters 1 to 4 (pages 1 to 35)

- Begin by sharing the cover, and asking children to consider it carefully, responding to what it might suggest about the book they are about to read. Ask the children to make predictions of the type of book this is and what it could be about, justifying their responses, and drawing out any connections they may make to other books or experiences. Record the children's responses and return to these as you read the book, comparing the children's initial thoughts to how the story actually unfolds.
- Encourage them to look in detail at all aspects of the cover, the layout and typography as well as the illustration:
 - *Who do you think these characters could be? What do you think they are doing and why? What clues do you get from their body language, the clothes they are wearing and the things they are holding?*
 - *Where do you think they are standing, what are the two landscapes they are standing in? What is suggested by the starry band which divides them? What else do you notice about the setting? Where and when do you think the story might be set? What leads you to think this? Would the cover make you want to read the story? Why? Why not?*

- What can you say about the layout and appearance of the cover, the palette and style of the illustration, the typeface used for the title '**The Maya Sacrifice**', and the strapline '**Time Travel Twins**'? Children may be familiar with previous titles in the Time Travel Twins series: *The Viking Attack*, *The Roman Invasion*, *The Stone Age Clash*. What associations does time travel have for you? Do you know any twins, are there any in your class? Do you know anything about Maya civilization and what role sacrifice played in it?
- Have you heard of the author Josh Lacey, or read other stories by him? What does your knowledge or experience of his other books lead you to expect here?
- Read aloud Chapter 1 (page 1). Give the children time and space to reflect on and discuss what they have heard and consider:
 - Can you summarise what happened in this chapter? Who are the main characters and what do you learn about them? What impression do you form of Scarlett and Thomas, and their wider family including their poorly Grandad? Do they or this setting remind you of other characters and settings you have met in books or films?
 - What is the impact of the opening scene of the story: the anxious family gathered around Grandad's sickbed while he declines their invitation to recuperate at their house? What impression do you form of Grandad, from hearing about where and how he lives, his inventions? How do you think the twin's hunt for cocoa powder relates to the story that is unfolding, why exactly are they so driven to find some? What do you make of Thomas's suggestion, '**Maybe Grandad has some cocoa powder in his workshop**' and his sister's reaction: '**Scarlett understood immediately what her brother meant.**' What do you predict will happen next?
- Read aloud all of Chapter 2 (page 12). Again, allow time and space to reflect on and discuss what they have heard and consider:
 - Can you summarise what has happened in these pages? What more do you find out about Scarlett and Thomas and the time machine in Grandad's shed? Children who have read the previous Time Travel Twins titles will be familiar with the process. What do you think you find out about the twins as individuals and about their relationship?
 - How does the author make the time travel element of the story believable? Children might comment on the ready supply of appropriate costumes, the transmitter/translator the twins will wear, the device to return them to the shed from wherever and whenever they travel. Can you predict any problems that might arise travelling in this way? What problems might their dress, or the technology present? How does this compare with other 'time travel' stories that you know?
- Support the children to discuss how the dynamic of the twins' relationship leads to a crisis in the story, as Thomas rushes on ahead leaving Scarlett behind, while Scarlett's concerns for her brother send her through the portal. How do Garry's illustrations deepen your engagement with and understanding of the story? How do you feel seeing Scarlett climb the steps into the time machine? How do you think Grandad – or their parents – might feel to read the note on the page opposite? What do you predict will happen next?

- Read Chapter 3, where we travel with Thomas, then give time and space to reflect on and discuss what they have heard and consider:

- *How do you think it felt to arrive in the jungle? How is this communicated in the writing? Children might comment on the heat, the light, the fortuitous discovery of the cacao tree, tasting the bitter cocoa beans, the shock as **'he felt two hands clamp around his shoulders'**. Whose eyes are you seeing the story through? How does that feel? Which words and support the imagery and our visceral responses? Who do you think might have seized him, and why is he being called a thief?*



- Then read Chapter 4, where we join Scarlett in following Thomas, and again give time and space to reflect on and discuss what they have heard and consider:

- *Where do you think Scarlett has arrived? Are you surprised she is not in the jungle alongside her brother? Why do you think Josh might have chosen to depict Scarlett also finding chocolate, although in a different form? Who do you think the 'girl, not much older than herself' might be? What clues do you get about her from what she is wearing, her bearing, the way she addresses Scarlett? What do you imagine she might think **'having seen someone emerge from nothing, appear out of the air'**?*

- Having discussed the cover and the first four chapters – what they tell us about Thomas and Scarlett, the two places they have arrived, that both have tasted chocolate but both have been caught – ask the children to note their predictions for the rest of the story based on what they have read.

- Children might observe that each chapter focusses on one of the twins. Josh uses this device – separating the two main protagonists and treating them in alternate chapters – until he draws them back together in Chapter 24 (page 201). *What do you think writing the story in this way adds to your engagement with, understanding of and enjoyment of the story? What do you think having these two viewpoints allows him to do? Children might suggest that as a reader, we can see settings, characters and events through different viewpoints, and as we read on, we will see that the twins have landed in geographically and socially different settings.*

Chapters 5 to 6 (pages 36 to 46)

- After reading the following two chapters:

- Chapter 5 (page 36) in which Thomas tries to escape and loses the device that will return him to Grandad's shed and the present day;
- Chapter 6 (page 42) in which Scarlett convinces the princess that she is a god.

ask the children to summarise what they have read so that they reach consensus on how things stand with Thomas and Scarlett, the situations they each find themselves in, and the threats that surround each of them.

- *What do you think we have found out about the king's cacao plantation where Thomas has landed and the guards who protect it? How do you think Thomas will manage to return now he has lost his magic button?*

- How is Scarlett's predicament similar and how is it different? Do you see any problem with her claim that she is a god, even if it has pacified the princess for now? What impression do you gain of the princess, her father the King, and life at the royal court?
- How do you predict the author will bring these two very different settings and social classes together in the story? What do you think might happen next?

• Ask the children to discuss their overall responses to everything they have read so far. The group can begin to explore their responses to it with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls '**the four basic questions**' (Tell Me: Children, Reading & Talk with The Reading Environment, Thimble Press 2011). These questions give children accessible and open starting points for discussion and values individual reader response:

- Tell me... was there anything you liked about this text?
- Was there anything that you particularly disliked?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Were there any patterns... any connections that you noticed...?

• As you read on through the story, the children will benefit from regular opportunities to return to these questions and share their personal responses to the key events and character developments as they occur.

• Invite the children to consider how the author conveys the excitement of the action scenes, such as Thomas finding himself at spear-point then trying and failing to escape (page 36, '**The two guards had spears...**' to page 41, '**... the cord bit into his flesh.**'); or the tense dialogue between Scarlett and Oxmoco before she persuades the princess that she is a god (page 42, '**"Who are you?"**' to page 45, '**"I can go where I want."**'). Provide copies of the text while you re-read aloud and ask the children to text mark, looking at the language choices and structure of these parts of the story and encouraging the children to identify any features that stand out for them. You might also get the children to prepare their own rehearsed reading of these sections, thinking about how they might convey the tension in their voices.

• Reflect on the events of the story so far and the characters of Thomas and Scarlett. Ask the children to complete two **Roles on the Wall** for them. To do this, have prepared outline templates to represent the two characters onto which the children can record their ideas. Ask the children to write words or phrases sharing what they know about their outward appearance, their actions and behaviour from the story events so far on the outside of the outline. Then, use these to begin to infer and deduce their internal feelings and characteristics and note these on the inside of the outline.

• To promote a higher level of thinking, ask the children to consider what we know from what they say and what is said about them by other characters and by the narrator, and what we have to infer from body language, gestures and actions. Support the children in making explicit links between the external and internal. For example, what does something Thomas does – dashing off to Tikal before Scarlett can stop him, or trying to trick the guard and escape – tell us about his



- Encourage the children to continue to return to the Roles on the Wall as you continue to read the story, using a different colour each time to highlight the knowledge they gain as they read on. Another way to organise the children's thinking about the two protagonists would be to plot a two-circle Venn diagram to identify the similarities and differences between them.

Chapters 7 to 12 (pages 47 to 96)

- Either read aloud or give children time to read the following chapters:
 - Chapter 7 (page 47) in which Thomas is taken to the village, volunteers to help build the temple the king, and befriends Balam;
 - Chapter 8 (page 62) in which Scarlett and Oxmoco pass through the palace to find the High Priest;
 - Chapter 9 (page 71) in which Thomas and Balam reflect on their situation;
 - Chapter 10 (page 77) in which Scarlett, Oxmoco and the High Priest join the King as he receives tributes from visitors;
 - Chapter 11 (page 86) in which Thomas arrives at the building site for the new temple;
 - Chapter 12 (page 96) in which Scarlett meets the King, his 'own sacrifice' and a ball game is mentioned;
- After reading, give the children time and space to reflect on what they have read. Ask them to summarise these chapters, arriving at a shared understanding of the events described and the impact these events have had on Thomas and Scarlett, and how the plot has been advanced. Then discuss:
 - How do you think Thomas and Scarlett might feel in the different circumstances they find themselves? How do the different personalities of the two characters express themselves, and how do you feel about each of them? What do you think the author's intentions might be in the portrayal of these characters - how do you think he wants readers to respond to the twins?
 - *How does Thomas demonstrate his impulsiveness and Scarlett her more careful nature? How do you feel when Thomas volunteers to build the temple, especially when he arrives at the site?*
 - *How is your sense of the world of the story deepened by the events in the village and the palace, the way the people behave and how the different levels of society operate?*
 - *What impression do you have of Oxmoco and Balam? What about the High Priest and the King?*
- Consider with the children how Thomas and Scarlett behave in their different situations. Update the **Roles on the Wall** with the insights you gain from observing them in these scenes.
- As new characters continue to be introduced children could organise their thinking about the characters Thomas and Scarlett meet by adding a quick pen portrait of each to the Reading Journal. A pen portrait is an informal description of a person or a group of

people, a character sketch in words. A pen portrait may discuss 'hard' facts, such as age or gender, but it should also focus on 'softer' aspects, such as attitudes and appearance. It might be interesting to let the children choose the characters they think are worth noting, but to include Balam and Oxmoco, the High Priest and the King. Information you could include in the pen portrait might be name, appearance, background, likes and dislikes, as well as any other ideas they have expressed and the reader's own inferences about them from what they have read.

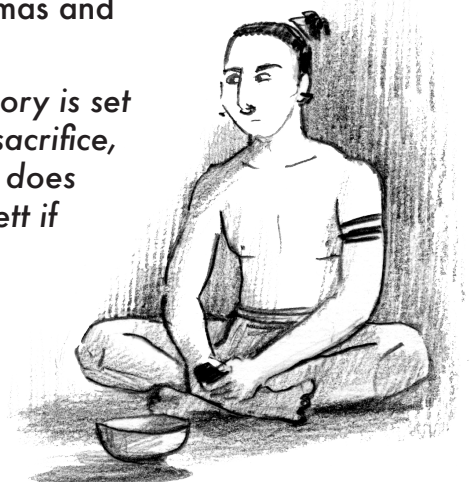
- The scene where the King holds court and receives visitors (Chapter 10, page 77) is impressively captured. Discuss with the children how we get a sense of the scale and majesty of the occasion. Invite them to re-read or read aloud passages that they find especially effective, identifying the features of the writing that convey the sense of theatre. They might notice the change of focus from the wide view to the close up on the King and his visitors; the careful selection of vocabulary, including powerful verbs to capture the action or in sensory descriptions, asking how they affect the reader's experience; the use of multiple perspectives we are placed in as readers during this series of events – seeing through the eyes of Scarlett, Oxmoco, the High Priest, the King, the delegation, the crowd.
- Children could write a news piece reporting the court reception– the 'grand courtyard' setting, the 'great crowd', the gift-carrying delegation, the 'extraordinary'-looking king – offering varied viewpoints, including eye-witness testimony. They could consider the purpose and audience of such writing and how it might reflect the viewpoint of the voice they are adopting.

Chapters 13 to 19 (pages 101 to 150)

- After reading the following:
 - Chapter 13 (page 101) in which Thomas and Balam volunteer for a ball game;
 - Chapter 14 (page 110) in which Scarlett is a witness as the king cuts himself and offers his blood to the gods;
 - Chapter 15 (page 117) in which Thomas and Balam find out more about the ball game;
 - Chapter 16 (page 121) in which Scarlett attends a royal feast;
 - Chapter 17 (page 127) in which Thomas and his team visit the stadium;
 - Chapter 18 (page 138) in which Scarlett and Oxmoco go to the stadium;
 - Chapter 19 (page 150) in which Thomas helps his team win their first game;

ask the children to summarise the seven chapters, arriving at a shared understanding of the way the plot has developed and the implications this has for Thomas and Scarlett. You might also discuss the following:

- *What more do we learn about the world in which this story is set from the episode where the King offers his blood as a sacrifice, and the increasing discussion of human sacrifice? What does this make you think might happen to Thomas and Scarlett if their identity is discovered?*
- *What is the impact on Scarlett – and on Oxmoco – of seeing the King harm himself in this way? How does it make you feel about him?*



- *What are your feelings about the ball game in which Thomas and Balam will be involved? What do you think are their chances of success?*

- Deepen the children's response to the setting and unpick how the author has elicited that response by engaging in visualisation. Re-read parts of the scene at the stadium, such as the opening of Chapter 17 (page 127) where Cabraca (another ideal candidate for a pen portrait) leads his team into the stadium 'Cabraca led the thirty players...' or Scarlett's view from page 140, 'When the royal party was ready...' Ask the children to visualise the scene in their mind's eye as you are reading aloud, closing their eyes and picturing the moment unfolding as if it were a scene in a film. Read the chosen section aloud two or three times and then ask them to describe to a partner what they pictured. You could give the children simple art materials to sketch out their visualisation.

- Following this, ask the children to share what they imagined and to identify key vocabulary or phrases which supported their understanding or interpretation. For example, **'... raised areas where platforms and staircases offered vantage points for an audience of thousands, maybe even tens of thousands...'** or **'... The stadium was in the shape of a capital I...'** or **'... rather like a basketball hoop, if you can imagine a basketball hoop which has been hung sideways, and carved out of stone rather than made of plastic...'** or **'... The royal party had a platform overlooking the pitch, directly behind one of the hoops, offering the best possible view of the action....'** or **'... The High Priest sat nearby with more priests around him. Other places were taken by the king's generals, his advisers, other important men from his household, and their families...'** Ask the children why these words or phrases in particular stood out to them.

- *What made them so vivid or memorable?*
- *What impression is created by the author through the descriptions?*
- *How do these descriptions make you feel?*
- *What would you be thinking if you were an onlooker?*

- Invite the children to identify, re-read aloud and examine some of the more exciting parts of the description of the opening game; for example, the tense silence before the game starts (page 150); the description of the opposing team (page 152); the king dropping the ball to start the game (page 157); going six-nil down (page 159); hitting the ball through the hoop and the aftermath (page 160–162). The children could again use **text-marking** to identify the author's choices in both language and structure (e.g., verbs: **'quietened, staring, glared, held, ran, charged, knocked, bounced, threw, sprinted, jerking, sprang, hit, sped, sailed, shot'**.) that keep the reader on the edge of their seat, building and sustaining tension, and could read aloud sections again to see how the features of the writing translate into oral performance.

- Children will not fail to notice that Thomas spots someone who looks like Scarlett (page 156), and Scarlett someone who looks like Thomas (page 144), but neither can believe their eyes. *How does this moment of realization make you feel? Were you expecting something like this? How do you think each twin feels? How do you know?*

- End the session by inviting predictions. *Now that Thomas's team has won their first game, what do you predict will happen next? How might both twins manage to return home to the present day?* The children could write a brief **note of advice** to Thomas or Scarlett or both, caught in an apparently insoluble dilemma. This could include summarising what they have so far achieved, and why you think they could still be successful.

Chapters 20 to 27 (pages 163 to 220)

- After reading the final section of the story:
 - Chapter 20 (page 163) in which Scarlett watches further matches;
 - Chapter 21 (page 171) in which Thomas's team loses to the team of aristocrats;
 - Chapter 22 (page 177) in which the royal party make for the temple;
 - Chapter 23 (page 187) in which Thomas and his team feast before being taken to the temple;
 - Chapter 24 (page 201) in which Scarlett intervenes to save Thomas, Balam and herself;
 - Chapter 25 (page 209) in which the three are back in Grandad's shed;
 - Chapter 26 (page 216) in which Balam returns to Tikal;
 - Chapter 27 (page 220) in which Grandad and the family finally have their chocolate;



allow the children time and space to summarise the final section and to reflect on what they have read, how the resolution of the story has affected them, and how they feel about the book as a whole.

- *How does the resolution of the story make you feel? (Thomas's team losing their match and facing sacrifice; the High Priest preparing to throw Thomas off the precipice; Scarlett intervening to save him, Balam and herself; returning to Grandad's shed, then returning Balam to Tikal; enjoying hot chocolate) How does the author draw everything together? Does it remind you of other stories you know in books or films? Is this the kind of story ending you enjoy?*
- *Are you satisfied about the way the story ends? Do you feel this is the right outcome for Oxmoco, Balam, the King, the High Priest? Would you change anything?*
- *How do you think the author wants us to feel about Thomas and Scarlett, and what they might go on to do? This book is the fourth in a series: what setting and form might the next episode take? Are you tempted to read the other titles in the series and see how the twins fare amongst the Vikings, the Romans and in the Stone Age?*
- *How do you think each of the characters feels at the end? How do you know?*
- Invite the children to choose and read aloud short extracts of this final section that they particularly enjoyed or found effective, sharing the reasons why they selected them. This could include further **text marking**, giving them insights, for example, into how the author sustains tension, paces action, uses dialogue for effect or leaves a cliff-hanger, depending on the excerpts the children choose.
- Revisit Aidan Chambers' basic questions, giving the children the opportunity to reflect.
 - *Did you enjoy this story?*
 - *What puzzles did it contain? What questions do you still have?*
 - *What links do you see to other stories you already know?*

- A review on the back cover states that this book is '**exciting, gripping and full of historical details.**' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Who do you think would enjoy this book? What would you say to them about it? How could you make an enticing recommendation without giving away too much of the plotline?

After reading, you could also:

- Consider the different characters, the plot and the different settings. Children might like to repeat the visualisation activity with different settings, e.g., Grandad's shed, the village in the jungle, the arrival in court of the delegation, the rite of sacrifice at the temple...
 - How and why does the author use different settings? Are the locations important to the story? Why? Do the vividly described settings help to create a credible background to the story?
 - Which character, aspect of the story, incident or episode interested the group the most?
 - Did any of the characters remind you of characters in other books?
- Briefly summarise the events of the story in chronological order and consider the different emotions that Thomas and Scarlett have felt throughout, the high and low points, using the **Role on the Wall** to support discussion of their emotional journeys. They could also revisit and refine their Pen Portraits and create a simple storymap to support their recall of the main events in the narrative.
- You could use **hot-seating** to explore the feelings of any of the characters further. In hot-seating one member of the group role-plays a central character from a poem or story and is interviewed by the other children. This activity involves children closely examining a character's motivation and responses. The children could work collaboratively to choose words that describe a character's emotions at different points of the story. Write these on post-it notes and then organise them to demonstrate shades of emotional intensity that they have felt in the story and create a **graph of emotion**. You could also explore the emotional journey of other characters such as Balam or Oxmoco.
- Josh has provided an extensive and fascinating **Historical Note** from page 230 onwards to offer background information which the children will find helpful, and which they could build on by reading from the non-fiction suggested at the end of these notes.
- Through modelling, ask the children to describe their favourite part of the story. If necessary, provide the children with an oral scaffold (for example: the most memorable part of the story was... because...; my top moment in the story was... because...) and in pairs ask them to identify their favourite part of the narrative. Encourage children to give reasons for their choices and invite some children to share these.
- If possible, leave copies of the book – and other books in the series - in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group.
- Children could find out more about the author Josh Lacey from his website <https://joshlacey.com/> and from interviews and videos (such as [this blog he wrote for CLPE](#)) where he talks about his writing and inspiration.

Other suggested titles to support the exploration of themes from the book:

Josh Lacey

- *Time Travel Twins: The Viking Attack*, illustrated by Garry Parsons
- *Time Travel Twins: The Roman Invasion*, illustrated by Garry Parsons
- *Time Travel Twins: The Stone Age Clash*, illustrated by Garry Parsons
- *A Dog Called Grk*
- *Hope Jones Saves the World*, illustrated by Beatriz Castro
- *The Dragonsitter*, illustrated by Garry Parsons
- *The Island of Thieves*
- *The Pet Potato*, illustrated by Momoko Abe

Timeslip Stories

- *The Journey Trilogy (Journey, Quest Return)*, Aaron Becker
- *Oh Maya Gods!* Maz Evans
- *Stig of the Dump*, Clive King, illustrated by Edward Ardizzone
- *Diary of a Time Traveller*, David Long, illustrated by Nicolas Stevenson
- *Hunt for the Golden Scarab (Time Keys, 1)*, M. G. Leonard, illustrated by Manuel Sumberac
- *The Wild Way Home*, Sophie Kirtley
- *Tom's Midnight Garden, a Graphic Novel adaptation*, Philippa Pearce, illustrated by Edith
- *The Adventures of John Blake*, Philip Pullman, illustrated by Fred Fordham
- *Time Travel at Puddle Lane*, Emma Shevah, illustrated by Laura Catalán
- *The Time Traveller and the Tiger*, Tania Unsworth
- *Time Travelling with a Hamster*, Ross Welford
- *The Wonder Team and the Forgotten Footballers*, Leah Williamson and Jordan Glover, illustrated by Robin Boyden

Non-fiction

- *A Question of History: Why were Mayan games so deadly? And other questions about the Maya*, Tim Cooke
- *Daily Life in the Maya Civilization*, Nick Hunter
- *Great Civilisations: The Maya*, Tracey Kelly
- *What it was like to be an Ancient Maya*, David Long, illustrated by Stefano Tambellini
- *History in Infographics: The Maya*, Jon Richards