

Teacher Notes and Worksheets for Letters to a Princess by Libby Hathorn

Teaching notes and worksheets by Julia Watkins.

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The following tasks are possible activities for a class or group of students studying Libby Hathorn's novel *Letters to a Princess*.

The tasks will help teachers meet learning outcomes for High School English. The tasks can be downloaded to suit different needs; they are set as learning tasks, they are easily manipulated into assessment tasks. Suggestions for assessment are included with some tasks.

This novel focuses on a young Australian girl, Diana Moore who in writing to HRH Princess of Wales. Diana faces her own family and school problems. The story has humorous elements but at the same time deals sensitively with what has become a growing teenage problem; that of eating disorders. For the teacher, the text has the potential to open discussion for students to consider the implications of this is damaging behaviour; it may also serve to support those students returning from therapy for eating disorders, or some form of depression. The novel refers to the main characters' suicidal thoughts.

“Setting the scene” may help students with difficulties in these areas adjust to the demands of studying such situations.

It is suggested that teachers make themselves aware of Child Protection implications.

Additional notes:

- Googling ‘eating disorders’ will bring up many websites, some of which are dieting websites. It may be necessary to be specific if you wish students to research the illness.
- At the time of writing, www.eatingdisorders.org.au/ will get you to Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria INC. Here you can access a guide for consumers and carers. It gives concise descriptions about the illness and its therapies.
- www.relationshipsforum.org.au. This website enables the download of 2 documents:
 1. Stating the Obvious.
 2. An Unexpected Tragedy. (Authors Paul Shepanski, Dr Michael Schluter, John Ashcroft and Dr Bill Hurditch)

These documents describe how the face of government in Australia and the UK has changed over the last 25 years, with a particular focus on the emergence of the dominant economic paradigm for setting public policy. The limitations of the current approach in addressing critical social and environmental issues are assessed. It would be a useful tool if the Social Science Faculty was in the process of studying the directions that these reports suggest in conjunction with the study of the book *Letters to a Princess*.

Task 1 sets the reading task; conversations will enhance prior knowledge (the field) that students can bring to the task. Differentiated learning suggestions attached to the tasks may help you cater for a range of learning needs.

Task 1

Setting the scene: The Field.

Differentiated learning. The less confidence your reader has, the more 'field knowledge' will assist in the reading task. You may wish to set the scene for each chapter or just take a few questions to start the conversation. Open forum discussions, prior to reading are to be preferred in developing field knowledge.

Further Differentiated Learning; you may wish to pair students to read chapters together.

Each of the following questions has been designed to be used prior to reading each chapter, they are meant to guide conversations to help students predict content and manage the reading and the concepts of each chapter.

At some point, students may want to move through the story without such scaffolding. You may then wish to use the questions to consider each chapter after students have read it.

Questions

Chapter:

1. Why does it help to write about it when you have a problem?
2. What makes people not want to eat? (*Not just weight; wellness, smells, textures, associations, etc.*) One meal? Many meals?
3. How do/ why do people look to 'celebrities' to guide them in their lives?
4. What excites people when their favourite celebrity comes to town?
5. What do people/ relatives say or do that could make you feel small and insignificant/ what do people/ relatives say or do that builds you up/ makes you feel good.
6. What are some of the group dynamics you have experienced in a film or book?
7. What would you expect, if you were to see your favourite celebrity, face to face?
8. Can you share something you have done which seemed to be a good idea at the time but later, backfired?
9. How could little white lies become big black holes?
10. Have you ever experienced not being trusted? Was it deserved? How was it/ could it be overcome?
11. What do you think/ feel/ do when you have been caught out and exposed in a lie? What could have made it better or worse?
12. What might be the consequences of the loss of respect by a significant other (family member, trusted adult, friend etc), because of something that was said or done?
13. Sometimes, we think we know about someone close to us but then it turns out that we didn't really know the full story. Have you ever believed that someone was to blame for something, then discover that they were victims themselves? (Share a story from your own past where things don't turn out to be what they first seemed to be.)
14. For Diana to get out of hospital and move on with her life a number of things have to happen. What do you think they might be?
15. In this chapter Diana explains a bit more about what she has found out about her disease and explores the origin of her name, explained in a letter to the Princess.
16. Diana's life begins to take on many threads as she moves back into ordinary life

- again. How do you think she might handle being asked to the school dance?
17. Diana Princess of Wales dies. How do you think this will affect the character of Diana?
 18. How will Diana react when Seb tells her that he asked her out for a dare? (Why do you think that Seb decides to tell her that he asked her out for a dare?)
 19. Diana has decided to take her life. As she watches the funeral what thoughts might Diana have?
 20. In the previous chapter we see Diana finally come to terms with herself. She was transformed. (transform; change or alter in form, appearance, or nature. How can you see her moving forward now?)
 21. What are the benefits of moving from writing to a person that will never receive your letters to writing to someone who can write back?

After reading, where applicable you might like to add the riders: What did this (question) look like for Diana in the book? How did this relate to Diana's situation, in the book? Students could be paired to write responses to questions if you wish to use them for assessment, after the reading of a chapter.

Task 2

Diana Moore is complex and her character is developed over the course of the book. Because Diana tells the story, we have to consider her bias and the clues the author gives, to help us define Diana's positive and negative attributes.

Students complete a chart similar to the one below, using evidence from the story to confirm or reject the following statements about Diana. The first one has been done for you.

Diana doesn't have a problem with eating	<i>Eg. She does, but denies it. She pretends it is just to keep fit (p7) or she doesn't like Graham's cooking, or that she's just careful about her weight. (p8)</i>
Diana is insecure	
Diana needed someone to tell or suggest how she should behave	
Diana didn't tell outright lies like Zoe but avoided telling the truth in other ways	
Diana was a hypochondriac	
Diana was manipulative	
Diana was attention seeking	
Diana demands her own way	
Diana likes to be with people	
Diana was frightened of people	
Diana didn't listen	
Diana was unforgiving	
Diana was helpful	
Diana was in control	

Differentiated learning: Use discussion to help students untangle the evidence and argue the

confirmation or rejection, before completing the task in writing.
Or complete the table (or part of it) as a class/ group activity.

Task 3

Find other examples of narratives written in the first person. Discuss how successful they are.

Discuss techniques of storytelling and how each genre has positive and negative implications to the delivery of the story.

(Discussing the drawbacks of narrating in the first person will encourage students to see the relevance of the use of letters to move the story along.)

Notes:

There is an intimacy between Diana Moore and the reader as Diana shares some of her innermost secrets with us. She also tries to retain her sense of 'looking good', not admitting to some of her most glaring flaws or garnishing them to cover her mistakes. She relates that Graham realises that she has embellished the truth in the past.

Libby Hathorn is able to construct this because of the choice of narrating in the first person... Diana is telling her story. Although there is an innocent honesty about this conversation with the reader, the reader must keep in mind that some things are not admitted, a reactively denied or not realised by Diana, about herself. Is she in denial? Likewise with her illness, at what point in the story does the reader know that she has become anorexic and at what point does Diana finally admit it.

The letters are another way of Diana recounting what has happened and reflecting on it. She could not apologise to the reader, for instance, in the same way that she apologises to Diana Princess of Wales in the letters. As readers, we are as it were, looking over Diana's shoulder as she is putting thoughts on paper, thoughts meant to be shared, but not with us. Libby Hathorn has used letters as a way for Diana to reflect on her actions, be joyous about secret moments and to grieve, using the Princess of Wales as the shoulder to lean on, which would have been either pathetic or tedious for us as readers.

Task 4: (Written)

1. Explain possible reasons for the layout of the book, which moves from recount to the reader, to recount in the form of letter writing to a third person.
2. Why would an author choose this form for the narrative?
3. How does adding letters enhance the delivery of the story written in the first person?

Differentiated learning; Work individually or in pairs. Before the writing task allow for students to suggest reasons and consider them in small groups.
Sheets with printed scaffolding may help less able students to write. (See example below)
Break the writing task into small sections.

Explain possible reasons for the layout of the book, which moves from recount to the reader, to recount in the form of letter writing to a third person.

A possible beginning might be "I believe the author has chosen to move from recount to letter writing and back again because..." list 2 or 3 reasons keeping in mind the delivery of the story. This answer is technical, not personal.

Why would an author choose this form for the narrative?

A possible beginning might be "The author may have chosen this form for the narrative because..." list 2 or 3 reasons that someone might choose to write in the first person rather than in the third person

How does using letters enhance the delivery of the story written in the first person?

A possible beginning might be "The delivery of the story is enhanced by the use of letters because..." list 2 or 3 reasons that you think the story was enhanced. This answer is more personal than technical.

Task 5 Hot Seat

Have students prepare questions they might ask a character of the book if they were to meet him/her.

As a class/ group select questions to work on in a 'hot seat' activity. (This removes the frivolous, thoughtless or insensitive questions)

Allow students to take the roles of different characters and prepare answers to the questions they have previously selected. Allow a set amount of time for the student taking on the role to answer the question. Extra marks/ points can be scored where a student can refer to incidents from the text to enhance their answer.

You may wish to extend the activity into questioners being allowed to question freely, points allocated to searching questions that play to the character, and the student 'in character' answering freely, scoring points when the answer maintains the integrity of the character, and further points when this includes reference to the text.

Complete the grammar activities

Task 6 Explain the function of the apostrophe in the following sentences.

He had an ego on him, that's for sure. (Contraction; that was)

Hammond Junior told me how his mum and dad now have plenty of good laughs about Hammond's royal affair. (Possession; the royal affair belongs to Hammond)

Since the funeral, with Marcus's change of heart, (Possession; he change of heart belongs to Marcus. *It could have also been written; Marcus' change of heart*)
...he's trying to act like a human being from time to time. (Contraction; he is)

I wanted to look up something I'd heard at the funeral. (Contraction; I had)

I heard Mr Blair's clipped voice and I remembered the fragment. (Possession; the clipped voice belongs to Mr Blair)

Task 7 Rewrite the following passage in the present tense;

My hands shook as I opened the envelope, wondering what the real Hammond Zeigler would have to say to me. I was a bit frightened, actually. My eyes went straight to the signature and, yes, it was Hammond Zeigler's all right. But in that American way they have of naming their sons after themselves it was Hammond Zeigler Junior. A photo fell out. Not a stunningly handsome face but pleasant enough, with really nice eyes; brown and deep and lots of curly brown hair. I looked at the photo for ages. Hammond Zeigler Junior reminded me of someone. But I couldn't for the life of me think who it was.

Answer;

My hands shake as I open the envelope, wondering what the real Hammond Zeigler would have to say to me. I am a bit frightened, actually. My eyes go straight to the signature and, yes, it is Hammond Zeigler's all right. But in that American way they have of naming their sons after themselves it is Hammond Zeigler Junior. A photo falls out. Not a stunningly handsome face but pleasant enough, with really nice eyes; brown and deep and lots of curly brown hair. I look at the photo for ages. Hammond Zeigler Junior reminds me of someone. But I can't for the life of me think who it is.

Task 8 Connect each proper noun to all the pronouns relating to that character. The first one has been done for you.

Uncle Tarquin Aronda Diana Uncle Tarquin's mother

~~I~~ have a lifelong fear of gardenias, you know," he continued. "Childhood trauma-bashed to the floor by a gardenia I was."

He sat down beside me, parting the untidy fronds so that we had a better view of the wedding throng. And though I hadn't asked, he told me about his near-death experience with a gardenia.

Flowers have played an important part in my life. My mother was a botanist, you see," he said. "Well, not really a botanist. She botanised as well as bred, as young English women did in those days. Botanised me, you might say, when I came along to spoil her fun!" And he laughed at some obviously odd memory.

"Frightful girl, that Aronda! But how could she help it with a name like that?" He said. I felt unfaithful to Aronda because I laughed loudly at this remark.

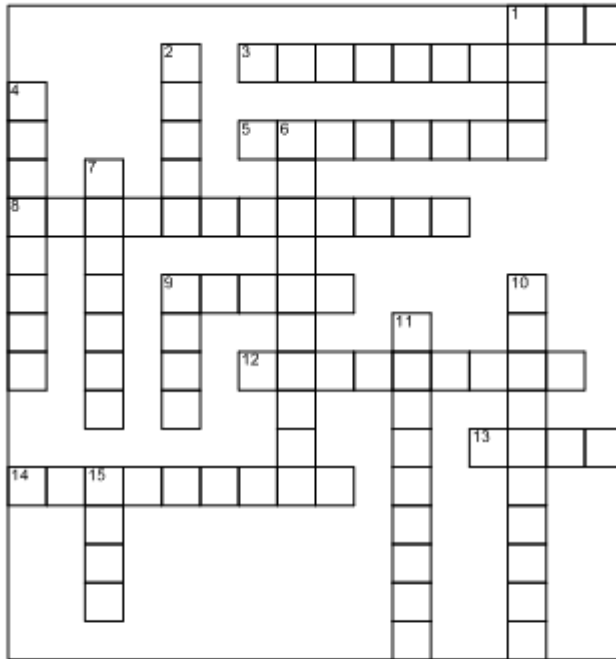
NB; The pronoun you {you might say} is not a pronoun relating to any of the above characters. It may be necessary to explain the relationship of the pronoun {you}

Relating to one, anyone or someone... one might say

You may consider collecting other examples of this aspect of English.

Task 9 Complete the crossword

Letters



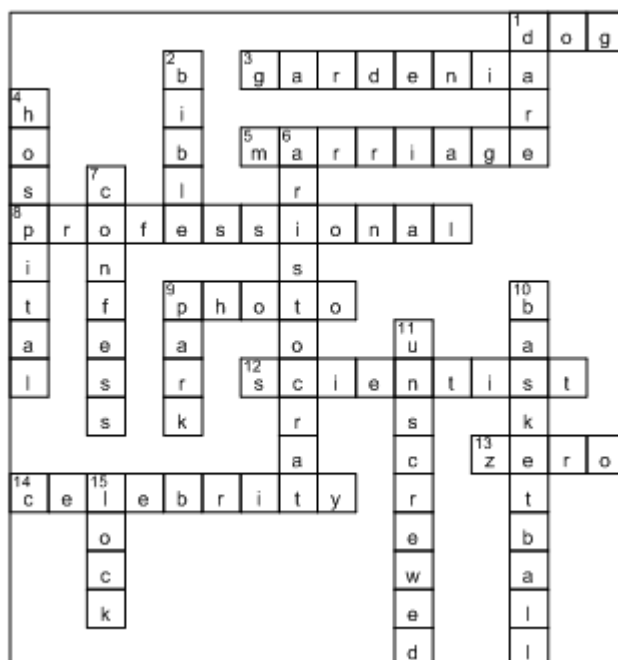
ACROSS

1. What was Giorgio Armani?
3. Uncle Tarquin was afraid of this flower.
5. What was it that Zoe thought hadn't done much for the princess?
8. Selma wanted a copy of the interview so her father could give it what sort of touch?
9. What fell out of the letter Diana received from Hammond Zeigler
12. What occupation did the real Hammond Ziegler have?
13. What mark did Diana get for journalism?
14. Bar Coluzzi was a hang out for these sort of people

DOWN

1. What was the reason that Seb ask Diana to the dance?
2. What is Martin's favourite book?
4. Where did Babs want Diana to go after she had lost a lot of weight?
6. Who, in the English parliament, called Princess Diana a loose cannon?
7. Diana plodded home in the heat, after trying unsuccessfully to do what at the bus stop?
9. Where did Graham find Diana after he'd seen what Marcus had done to her door?
10. What was Hammond Zeigler coming to Australia to play?
11. Marcus did this to the hinges on Diana's door
15. What did Diana want on her door?

Answers



Task 10

www.time.com/time/daily/special/diana/

This website leads to photos and articles from Time Magazine covering the life and death of the Princess of Wales. It contains articles and photos which Diana may have collected in the story, *Letters to a Princess*.

Collect a photographic tribute to an aspect of Diana Princess of Wales' life. Use the 'scenes from a charmed life' photo essay from the website as a starting point.

Differentiated learning; talented students may prefer to choose the following task instead or as well as the photographic tribute.

Design a tribute/ poster/ journal article that, if things had been different, Diana may have written about the Princess of Wales for the school paper. (This task could be about any part of the Princess of Wales' life. It might be the 'real' events in the Carven Memorial Building.)