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# Teachers' Notes

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## ELSEWHERE

Shelby Matheson

ISBN: 9781761112140

Recommended retail: \$19.99

Reading level: 9 to 14

## BOOK SUMMARY

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At the outbreak of World War I, eleven-year-old Elsie Clarke is sent to a mysterious school in the woods for only the most talented children. But fewer still, the Gifted, are invited to the other side – a sentient forest called Elsewhere with a magical secret.

Elsie's world is transformed by the knowledge of Gifts – special talents born from their traits, desires and fears. Talents they will need when the formidable headmistress reveals that she'll do whatever it takes to win the war, robbing the students of their childhood.

The Gifted must bring down her awful regime and win a battle of their own. But is Elsewhere recruiting them too, training them for something even bigger?



## THEMES

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Childhood & Growing Up • Trauma • World War I • Acceptance & Belonging • Feeling Lost •

## CONTENTS

Book Summary.....	1
Themes.....	1
About the Author.....	3
Reasons For Studying This Book.....	4
Key Curriculum Areas.....	4
Teaching Points and Activities.....	5
Knowledge and Literal Understanding.....	5
Discussion Questions.....	6
Activities.....	10

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**Shelby Matheson is available for author talks and workshops.  
Contact Wombat Books for more information.**

*Elsewhere Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.*



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Shelby Matheson is a born-and-raised Australian, currently residing in the quiet, beachside town of Hervey Bay, Queensland. She has a Bachelor in journalism and creative writing, and a graduate diploma in editing and publishing from USQ. She has been writing full-length novels since she was fourteen and has always known that being an author is the only career for her. In her spare time, she enjoys video games, drawing, crochet, collecting books (and even reading them), but her greatest passion will always be writing and escaping to the worlds in her head.

### AUTHOR NOTES

*Elsewhere* was inspired by my deep love of classic literature, especially children's fiction. It began when I went with my family to the cinema to watch the live-action film, *Christopher Robin*, and was reminded of the beauty and charm that Winnie-the-Pooh still holds in our hearts, nearly one hundred years after its initial release. I remember thinking, "If I ever write a book for children, I want it to feel like this."

That very afternoon, I had a plan in my mind for a trilogy that featured an endless sentient forest that gave lost children magical powers, and an eccentric ever-purple teacher named Madam Tryll. I drew inspiration from books such as *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery, *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, and many, many more. Easter eggs and references can be found hidden throughout the series and I invite readers to try and spot them all.

The World War I aspect came into play when I finally decided on the time period for the novel to be set and realised that World War I was the most significant event to take place at that time. From there, that concept began to dominate the series and before I knew it, I was researching every aspect of the war (how it began, who was involved, when and where battles and bombings took place, etc.) and how these ideas could fit into my fantasy narrative. It became my goal to create a series that teaches younger readers about this significant part of history, but in a way that children can easily follow along with and still stay connected to the characters and the magic, rather than getting lost in facts and details. *Elsewhere* stays true to the timeline and facts of World War I, exploring the horrors of the time through the eyes of a child, creating a symbolic parallel between the pains of adolescence and the extreme changes that the world went through during the war.

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## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

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The *Elsewhere* trilogy follows the timeline and events of World War I through the eyes of an awkward and imaginative eleven-year-old girl, Elsie Clarke. Readers can learn about this significant historical period in a way that is easier to remember and connect with, fusing fantastical and magical elements with real history, and using a fantasy narrative structure to keep the book interesting for younger readers. The series explores themes of cultural diversity, trauma and loss, the feeling of being lost and learning to belong, and the struggles of growing up and entering the adult world unprepared. The ways in which society was altered due to World War I are explored throughout the series and are used as a symbolic parallel to the pains of adolescence and the fear that comes with great change.

## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

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Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes.

### YEAR FOUR

English

ACELA1490	ACELT1602	ACELT1603	ACELT1605
ACELY1692			

### YEAR FIVE

English

ACELT1609	ACELT1610	ACELT1795	ACELY1699
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### YEAR SIX

English, HASS

AC9E6LY05	AC9E6LA02	AC9E6LY01	AC9HS6S01
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### YEAR SEVEN

English, History

AC9E7LE01	AC9E7LE02	AC9E7LE03	AC9E7LE05
AC9E7LE06	AC9E7LY06	AC9E7LA03	AC9HH7S07

### YEAR EIGHT

English

AC9E8LE01	AC9E8LE03	AC9E8LE05	AC9E8LE04
AC9E8LY03			

### YEAR NINE

English

AC9E9LA05	AAC9E9LY01	AC9E9LY05	AC9E9LE02
AC9HH9K11	AC9HH9K12	AC9HH9K09	AC9HH9K10

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## TEACHING POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Foundation to Year 6 primary aged children. Some activities may be applicable to early secondary school students, as well.

## KNOWLEDGE AND LITERAL UNDERSTANDING

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### PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Give the students a moment to analyse the cover and ask them if there are any interesting details they can see. What makes these details interesting and what do they think it will mean within the book?
2. Read the back cover blurb and discuss. Ask what themes they think might be prevalent in the novel. Ask what other books it reminds them of.
3. Ask if the students have read any famous children's literature and which ones are their favourites. Ask them to keep an eye out for any references during the novel.
4. Ask if the students have any prior knowledge of WW1 before beginning the book.

### AFTER-READING QUESTIONS

1. Ask students if they related to any of the characters. Which one and why?
2. What is their first impression of Elsie and how did that impression change over the course of the novel?
3. Of all the Gifts mentioned in the book, which one would they most like to have and what would they use it for? How might that Gift apply to them following the Trait, Desire, Fear theory? Are all Gifts a blessing or are some of them a curse? Which ones and why?
4. Just as Elsewhere is a safe haven for the children, do the students have a place that is their safe haven? A place where they can relax and feel at ease?
5. Ask what the students now know about WW1. Have they learned anything throughout the story? What facts can they remember? In what ways does the war symbolise change, and how does this link to adolescence and growing up?
6. How many references could be found to famous children's literature? List examples.
7. Why do Elsie and her mother try to cover their Australian accents when they move to England?
8. Why is it important to Yasmin that Elsie remembers her name?
9. Read chapter 19, what does the colour purple mean to Ms Tryll? Why does she wear it?
10. Read pages 147-8, why does each Gifted student receive their Gift?
11. Why do so many students dislike and bully Klaus and Klara?
12. How does Elsie finally convince Ada to leave?

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### GENERAL

- What do you know about World War I? Discuss your knowledge within a small group and exchange ideas.
- What else have you read or seen that centres World War I? What are the similarities between those stories and what are the differences?
- How does the story tackle the 'escapism' from the war? Would you be like Elsie when faced with the war and trauma?
- Find three instances where a character feels guilty for something they've done. How do they cope with their guilt? Do they apologise?
- Find three examples of a character being bullied. How do they respond to the bully?
- What place feels most like home to Elsie at the beginning of the book? What about at the end of the book?
- Why does Ms Tryll worry about Elsie opening gates to Elsewhere on her own?
- How do Klara and Klaus show Elsie that they have forgiven her?

### WORLD WAR I

- World War I was a difficult time for everybody. Men went to war and women took on new roles in society to keep their country running smoothly. Children were often sent away to safety or else put to work. How might society have been altered due to these changes? Have there been any lasting impacts?
- Ask the students to imagine they are living in 1914. In what ways would their lives be different from today?
- Find examples in the text where the timeline of the war is brought back into play. How do these events impact the lives of the characters?

### ACCEPTANCE & BELONGING

- The real world is not always an accepting place, especially when it comes to our differences, whether they be cultural, financial, social, visual, etc. Elsie is embarrassed by her Australian background when she moves to England and feels like she doesn't fit in. Klaus and Klara are openly despised for their German background due to the tensions of the war. By the end of the novel, these differences are put aside, understanding that they all come from elsewhere, but they still have so much in common. Have you ever felt disrespected or unaccepted by the people around you? If so, what are some ways that you cope with these feelings? What are some ways you can remind yourself that you belong?
- If there is anyone you know who has been disrespected or feels unaccepted, what are some ways that you can show kindness to them? Even if they are different from you, what are some things that you have in common? What do you like about them most?
- Find three instances in the novel where a character is shown disrespect. How do they react to this? How does it make them feel? Do you think they reacted appropriately?

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## CHILDHOOD & GROWING UP

- Elsewhere is The Place Where Lost Children Go, a refuge for those who need a break from the real, adult world. Do you have a place where you can go when life gets a little too stressful or overwhelming? What activities help you to calm down?
- Are there any instances in which you have found growing up to be difficult? Are you looking forward to getting older or are there things you are afraid of?
- Elsie attributes her being Chosen as a Guardian to multiple things, but mostly the isolation she felt in her own home due to her parents never having time for her. What are some examples of their behaviour? Do you think Elsie's parents are good or are there things they could do better?
- Tryll is the only adult Gifted we see in this novel and yet she is still very much a part of Elsewhere and the Gifted community, ready to mentor a new generation of Gifted. In what ways does she show that she is still Gifted despite her mature age? Name some of Tryll's character traits and how they apply to the rules of Elsewhere. Give examples in the text of where these traits are shown.
- Was Miss Coleridge right to change the curriculum and teach the students in the art of war? Or do you think this was too far? What do you believe constitutes a good childhood?

## TRAUMA

- Jack's Gift of invisibility stems from his life on the streets of London, going ignored and unseen by those around him. Yasmin's ability to be forgotten stems from being the middle child of her large family, where her overstretched parents often forget to pay attention to her. Have you ever felt ignored or unseen by those around you? How do you deal with these feelings?
- In this book, we see characters like Miss Coleridge, Thomas, Klaus, and Klara who are disrespectful to others. By the end of the novel, we have some insight into why they act this way. Give at least one example for each character where we learn why they are behaving badly. What is their reasoning, and do you think it is justified or not?
- Do you think these same characters can be classified as villains? Why or why not?
- Do these characters have anything in common with our heroes? Give some examples. Does this change your perception of the bad characters? Is there anything the heroes do differently?
- Do these characters change their behaviour by the end of the novel? Why and how? What are some ways that people can learn to change? How important is it to heal past traumas?

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## ACTIVITIES

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### CONGRATULATIONS

You have just received a letter from Madam Tryll confirming that you have been Chosen as one of the next generation of Gifted. Congratulations! You arrive in Elsewhere for your first Gifted lesson of Tell and Show. What can you tell your audience about yourself and how it pertains to your Gift? Next, show us in a drawing what your Gift is with a little information about it and how you might use it in everyday life. Are you a Physical, a Mental, an Elemental or a Guardian?

### BROCHURES

Miss Coleridge's Academy for Gifted Youths is a prestigious school with a magical secret. Decide for yourself whether you would rather attend the real school which admits only the most intelligent of scholars, or its magical equivalent inside Elsewhere for Gifted children with magical powers. Create a brochure for your school of choice, keeping in mind that the real school would be looking to entice parents to enrol their children as students, whilst Tryll's classes are for Gifted children only and must be kept secret from Ungifted. With your chosen audience in mind, try and write to their needs.

### DRAW A CHARACTER

Draw a picture of your favourite character in the book. If they are Gifted, you could draw them showing off their Gifted powers. Add a brief explanation as to why they are your favourite.

### DESIGN A CHARACTER

Design a new character to join the cast of Elsewhere. Are they Gifted? What are their personality traits? What do they like to wear? Find a handout below to use in your creation.

### FLOWERS

Do some research on flowers – what they look like and what they represent. Pick one that you think best represents you. Draw a picture of your Gifted tree with your chosen flower growing from the branches. Write your name, year of birth, and Gifted category on the tree's trunk to make it official.

### TREE DESCRIPTIONS

Each Gifted has a tree in Elsewhere with a different size and shape, and different colours and flowers. Draw a picture of what you think your tree would look like.

### GREENHOUSE

5. In Chapter 5, Tryll asks her students to pick one special word to describe the old, dilapidated greenhouse. Knowing her intentions for that lesson, what word would you use to describe the greenhouse? Like Elsie, can you think of a story that could revolve around the greenhouse? Write a brief summary of your idea.

### SHARE A MEMORY

Purple and hot air balloons remind Ms Tryll of her husband and daughter. Orange and elephants remind Yas of her childhood. What colour or object is connected to a strong memory for you? Briefly write down your thoughts and then share within a group or with the class if you feel comfortable.

### WRITE A SHORT STORY

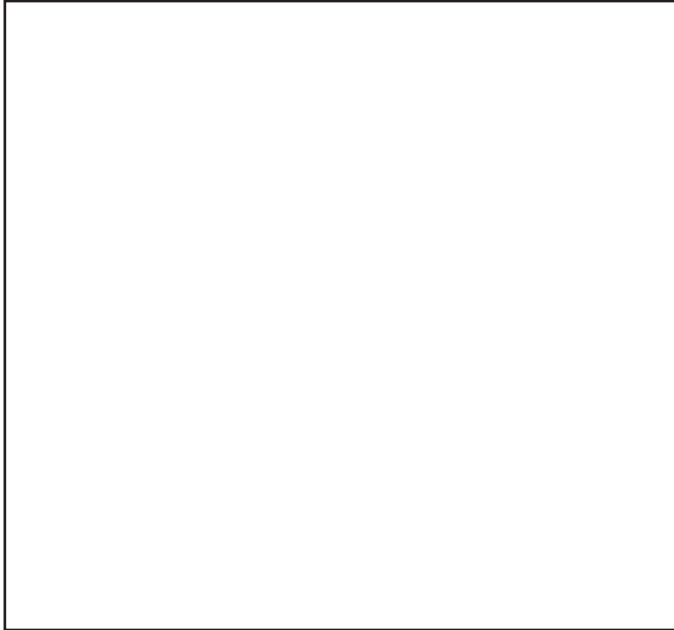
Read Jack's description of his life in London (p. 125) and write a short story from his perspective about one of his adventures, a day in his life, or his first time going to Elsewhere.



# CHARACTER CREATION

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Character's name:



Character's Physical Description:

Circle the **three** best words to describe your character:

kind	reckless	gentle	loyal
friendly	wild	hardworking	polite
aggressive	wicked	honest	rude
meek	spontaneous	lazy	quick tempered
shy	thoughtful	responsible	cheery
volatile	ambitious	judgemental	irresponsible
mean	forgetful	optimistic	openminded
anxious	deceptive	pessimistic	overthinker

Describe how these personality traits affect their role in the story, their actions, and their relationships: