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Teachers' Notes

Michael Rosen



The Missing

The True Story of
My Family in World War II

9781406386752 • Hardback • £8.99 • 9 years + • eBook available

“Essential reading.”
The Times



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THE MISSING by Michael Rosen

About the Author

Michael Rosen is most certainly one of the UK's best loved writers for young people and he has published over 140 books. Most children will be familiar with his books, whether it's the classic picture book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, his hugely popular poetry collections or classic retellings. A former Children's Laureate, Michael is an advocate and activist for children's books and reading. He was involved in setting up the Roald Dahl Funny Prize and the LOLLIES (Laugh Out Loud Awards). He is a broadcaster, presenting the language programme Word of Mouth on Radio 4. He is Professor of Children's Literature at the University of London, Goldsmiths College.



Photograph © Wiener Library
At the Wiener Library in 2018

About the Book

The Missing is an account of Michael's search for his two uncles who were there before the war but not afterwards. For thirty years Michael tried to find out exactly what happened: he interviewed family members, scoured the internet, pored over books and travelled to America and France.

The book documents the horror of Nazi occupation and the human cost of the scientific killing machine that resulted in the Holocaust.

This first-hand account of his search includes personal reflection, letters and documents and is interspersed with poems that express his feelings and capture the "pictures in his mind".



Michael Rosen aged ten, in Pinner

Note

You might choose to read this book close to Holocaust Memorial Day (27th January) if studying the Second World War or as a standalone class read.

Whatever the context, the subject of the Holocaust is a difficult one and potentially harrowing. Children will come to Michael's family story with varying experiences, some families will have direct links to the Holocaust, others may have suffered traumas in other countries, and some will simply be curious about relatives that make fleeting appearances in family photographs but are never seen or talked about. For this reason, the topic needs to be approached with due care and the limits or explanation should be considered in advance. This will of course be dependent on the age and experience of the children.

It is important to develop children's empathy and knowledge of the world they live in, so they are better equipped to understand it. Our role as educators is to help them navigate a difficult world in positive and reassuring ways. This is a story about real lives and there is much to talk about which will resonate with children. We encourage you to approach the book with due sensitivity.

These notes provide suggestions for areas of exploration and discussion. It isn't intended that you use all of them. Select what is most appropriate for your class and group, and importantly allow time to talk about the responses triggered by Michael's story.

Before Reading

Where in the World?

Michael's search for his missing uncles leads him to uncover events in different countries: Poland, France and America. Before reading, get together a globe and some maps so that you can locate the different places that are mentioned. It would be useful to have maps of different scales including a political map to show the national boundaries as they were in 1939 – 45.

It is helpful for children to locate these places in relation to where they live so start by finding the UK, and then identifying the other countries, and then regions and towns.

Some simple line maps are included in the book too.

During Reading

Michael Rosen: The Missing

It is likely that most of the children will be familiar with Michael Rosen, perhaps they know his books, and they may have seen him at a festival, on the television, or perhaps from his YouTube videos reading poems like "Chocolate Cake". Invite them to share their knowledge with each other.

Explain that you are going to read a new book by Michael Rosen called *The Missing*. It is part of Michael's family history.

Show the front cover and invite the children to tell you what they see. Share questions that the children might have based on what they can see. Record the questions to refer to later.

- Do we think these questions might be answered when we read the book?

Not Just For Them

This opening poem "Not Just for Them" underlines the significance of the Holocaust for all of humanity. The reader is prompted to consider that although this is a personal story of what happened to Michael's family, it has implications for all of us.

The following process slows down the pace of reading and invites reflection on the simplicity and power of word choice.

Read the poem aloud (omitting the title). Allow space for the children to contemplate without needing to answer questions.

Display the poem without the title and read again.

Ask:

- What does this poem make you think about?
- Do you notice anything about the way the poem has been written?
- Did you find anything puzzling?

Now display the poem with the title and the word “Just” blacked out.

- What could the missing word be?

Reveal the full title. Read the title and the poem aloud. The children could read it to each other.

- Why is that simple word “just” so important?
- Who else is it for?
- Do you have any thoughts about the reason it might have been selected as the first poem in the book?

Introduction and Chapter 1

Michael was born and grew up just after the Second World War. There may be elements about his childhood that are familiar to the children and some that will be unfamiliar or strange. Encourage the children to compare their experiences with the ones described in this chapter.

- Does anything about Michael’s story remind you of things you do or things that have happened to you?
- Is there anything about Michael’s childhood that is very different from your experience?

Skeletons

This short poem shows how memories can be passed down from one generation to another as stories. Even though Michael didn’t see the dinosaur skeletons, he can imagine them in his mind’s-eye.

Discuss this idea:

- Is it possible to have pictures in your head of things that you have never seen?
- Where do these pictures come from?
- What pictures do you have in your head from the stories that you have been told?

Chapters 2, 3 and “Bagel”

In Chapter 2 we learn a little bit about Michael’s family, particularly his grandparents. We learn about different kinds of families and family relationships. Families are unique but they also have things in common.

After reading this chapter, make connections by talking about family experiences. It is likely that in the class you have a huge range of different family structures. Grandparents are referred to in different ways in different cultures and even within cultural groups. Simply by talking about the names given to grandparents you can stimulate a rich discussion about cultural similarity and difference.

Harvest from the children different words used to describe a female grandparent. For example, granny, gran, nanny, nonno, daadi, naani, anneanne, babaane are just some that might be used. What about male grandparents? Are both sets of grandparents given the same name? (Some children will have more than two sets of grandparents.) For instance, a Turkish maternal grandmother is distinguished from a paternal grandmother by name.

- What impression do you have of Michael's Zeyde from the poem "Bagel"?
- Does he remind you of any of your relatives?

"The Absentees", "Counting" and Chapter 4

After reading the poem, talk about who is absent.

- How did the poem make you feel?
- Did you get a sense of Michael's feelings from reading the poem?
- Do we know who is absent and why?
- Do the words at the end of the poem give us a clue?

At this point, it would be good to elicit the children's existing level of knowledge about the Second World War. Gather information and record their suggestions. This will help you establish their level of understanding and highlight any misconceptions that will need addressing. *The Missing* includes succinct and clear exposition, so some misconceptions can be dealt with in the course of reading. Others may require further research and reading.

Ensure that the children know about Holocaust Memorial Day and its aims.

As well as establishing the children's prior knowledge, invite them to ask questions.

- Is there anything that you would like to know or find out?

Read Chapter 4 and the poem "Counting". Allow time for the children to respond and ask questions.

Chapters 5 – 7

Michael's family history research starts with a visit to France.

At the end of Chapter 7 he writes, *"I felt so angry and sad that I hadn't found a way to remember Oscar and Martin. No one in my family knew anything about them, and that frustrated me beyond words. It meant the Nazis had succeeded. And the last thing I wanted was for them to have won."*

- Officially Germany lost the war, so why does Michael feel that the Nazis have won?

Discuss the concept of memory, remembrance and memorial:

- Is it important to remember the Holocaust? Why?

- What are the different ways in which we commemorate events like the Holocaust? (You might talk about commemoration days, memorials, memoirs, fiction, poetry, drama.)
- Michael is making the point that it is important to remember missing relatives; are there other things we need to remember?

Chapters 8 – 9

To help with the family relationships, you might find it useful to display the family tree from page 108 – 109.

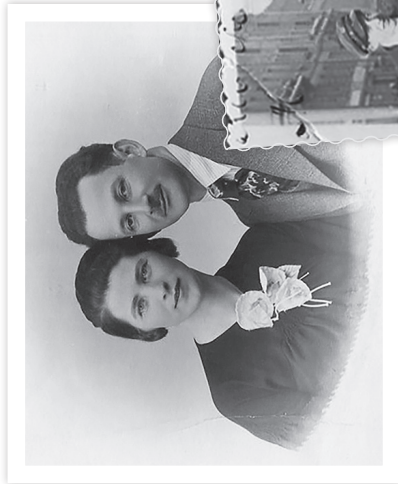
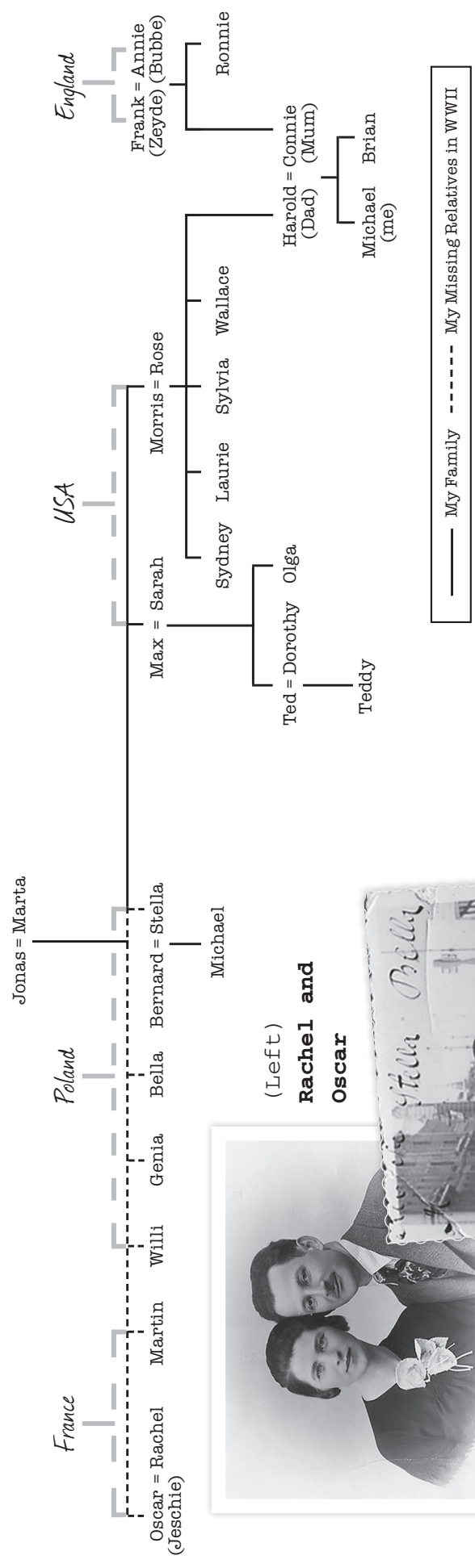
The letters from Oscar and Stella are what historians call **primary sources**. They are documents that were created by the actual people or witnesses to a historical event. Primary sources can include diaries, letters, interviews, photographs, documents, newspaper articles, novels and there are several that have been reproduced in *The Missing*.

Michael is using **primary sources** for his research, to help him piece together what happened to his relatives.

- Why might primary sources be important for historians?
- Could primary sources have limitations?
- What do you learn about the situations in Poland and France from the letters that were sent to Max Rosen?
- Can you tell what Oscar and Stella are thinking and feeling when they write these letters?
- Do you think there might be things left unsaid that they are not putting in their letters? Why might that be?

Allow time for children to ask questions and talk about the things that concern them.

My Family Tree



(Right)
Michael, Stella and Bella



(Left)
Rachel and Oscar



Rose and Morris



(Left) **Martin**

Chapters 10 – 11

Michael describes efforts to get members of his family to safety. Olga had filled out the official forms to get Oscar out of danger in France and to safety in America. Michael explains that the reason that this was not followed through is uncertain, but it is true that many people were refused entry and were denied a haven.

The children may be aware of current crises in the world where people are trying to flee persecution and war and get themselves and their families to safety.

Clarify terminology. People forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution or natural disasters are refugees. Refugees seeking to enter a country to escape political persecution are called asylum seekers. There is often misconception the status of refugees and asylum seekers.

Make the point that refugee is derived from refuge – a place of safety.

One way to access misunderstanding is to present a series of statements and ask the children to decide whether they think they are true, untrue or if they are undecided.

- Most refugees are looked after by poor countries.
- Asylum seekers are a tiny proportion of the people arriving in Britain from other countries.
- Most asylum seekers are looked after in luxury accommodation.
- Asylum seekers come to Britain to get money and free houses.
- Immigration to Britain is a new phenomenon. In the past people used to stay in the countries where they were born.
- Refugees take jobs that British people could do.

After an initial discussion present some basic information to challenge popular myths.

SOME BASIC INFORMATION:

Most refugees are looked after by poor countries.

This is true.

What does it make you think/feel to know this?

The UN's Refugee Agency estimates that nearly nine in ten of the world's refugees are sheltered by developing countries.

Asylum seekers are a tiny proportion of the people arriving in the UK.

This is true

People come to live in Britain for many different reasons. These include:

- Work is the main reason. People may come to the UK to be teachers, doctors, farm labourers, hotel and restaurant workers. Some jobs would not be filled without overseas labour.

- Language learning and to study are major reasons for migration.
- Family reasons.

Refugees take jobs that British people could do.

This is often presented as a negative fact. Here are some facts from official reports:

- Immigrants, including refugees, pay more into the public purse compared with their UK born counterparts. (Institute for Public Policy Research, **Pay-ing their way: the fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK**, 2005)
- An estimated 30,000 jobs have been created in Leicester by Ugandan Asian refugees since 1972. (*The Observer*, **They fled with nothing but built a new empire**, 11 August 2002)
- It is estimated that it costs around £25,000 to support a refugee doctor to practise in the UK. Training a new doctor is estimated to cost between £200,000 and £250,000. (**Reaping the rewards: re-training refugee health-care professionals for the NHS**, October 2009, NHS Employers)

Asylum seekers come to Britain to get money and free houses.

Most asylum seekers in Britain are looked after in luxury accommodation.

Both points are largely unfounded.

Some people are afraid that a disproportionate amount of the country's resources is given to people seeking asylum in the UK. But what do the facts tell us?

- Most asylum seekers are living in poverty and experience poor health and hunger. Many families are not able to pay for the basics such as clothing, powdered milk and nappies. (**The Children's Society Briefing highlighting the gap between asylum support and mainstream benefits**, 2012 **Independent Asylum Commission citizens' inquiry in The Independent**, 2007)
- Almost all asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are forced to rely on state support - this can be as little as £5 a day to live on.
- Asylum Seekers do not receive more benefits than pensioners in UK (**UK Parliament briefing paper**, 2012)

Immigration to Britain is a new phenomenon. In the past people used to stay in the countries where they were born.

This is not true. Here are just a few examples of historic immigration.

Britain has a very long history of immigration. The Romans invaded Britain in 54 BC. They settled and ruled from 45 - 410AD. You probably know about a lot of good things that the Romans brought with them.

The Anglo Saxons invaded in the 5th century and the Vikings invaded Britain. In 1066 it was the turn of the Normans.

Jewish people came to Britain in the Middle Ages. Huguenots (French Protestants)



arrived in the 17th century.

And of course, Britons have also emigrated to other parts of the world: to America and Australia... Not to mention recent settlements in sunny Spain, Tuscany and France.

Do you think people should stay in the countries where they were born, or should they be allowed to travel and settle in other places?

Source of information The Refugee Council

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

After clarifying the basic facts, facilitate a discussion using a statement such as the one below as a starter.

It is the moral duty of rich countries to offer a place of safety to people fleeing war or persecution.

Chapters 12 – 14

Hope and despair. Michael ends his story, “We can’t live on in despair: we always have to find reasons for hope. Because the world doesn’t have to be this way.”

One source of hope is through actions of individuals: from people who carry out brave acts to help others in dire circumstances to small acts of kindness.

Reread the poem “Today; one Day” aloud.

- What can we do to bring hope for a better future into the world?

Bibliography

A list of books and other resources is included in the end matter. Make a collection of books for children to read and extend their knowledge, taking account of the age guidance.

After Reading

The Poems

Reread the poems.

- Choose a poem that resonated with you and read it to a partner. Tell them why you chose it.
- Choose a poem and illustrate it in any way that you want to. Display it in your classroom.
- Choose a class poem and devise a reading/performance to share with another class or for an assembly to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

Special Rooms

Michael writes that “Poems are like special rooms where I can think slowly about what happened. In a way they’re the pictures in my mind.”

Talk about this idea with the children, rereading some of Michael’s poems as part of the discussion.

- Do you have thoughts about important things that have happened to you? Perhaps you could write a poem to express your feelings?

After allowing time for the children to write, reflect together:

- Was it easy or difficult to write your poem? What made it easy/difficult?
- Do you want to share it? Who would you like it share it with?
- Would you prefer to keep your poem private?

Family History

We don’t all have stories like Michael’s, but we do all have family stories. Start a family history project. You could have a class project or for a more extensive experience, set up an extra-curricular club. Conduct your own research alongside the children.

- Perhaps *The Missing* has inspired you to write your own stories?
- You could start by interviewing relatives (or family friends or advocates) about their childhood experiences. Talk to them about their siblings, parents, grandparents.
- How far back can you go within the living memory?
- To research further you could start by looking at some of the ancestry websites. There will be stories to be discovered. Some might be ordinary, and some might amaze or even shock you.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Find out about Holocaust Memorial Day.

- What is the current theme?

For 2020 the theme is Stand Together. Some of the ways you might want to explore this theme are provided on the [Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website](#)

Additional Resources

[Holocaust Memorial Day](#) - www.hmd.org.uk

[Holocaust Education Centre at UCL](#) - www.holocausteducation.org.uk

[Holocaust Education Trust](#) - www.het.org.uk

[United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](http://www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/rationale-learning-objectives) – www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/rationale-learning-objectives

[The Nazi Concentration Camps](http://www.camps.bbk.ac.uk) – www.camps.bbk.ac.uk • features a range of materials including primary sources that are accessible to schools and can provide the basis to an activity.

[Museum of Jewish Heritage Holocaust](http://education.mjhnyc.org) – education.mjhnyc.org

[Teaching History Magazine](http://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/teacher-resources/pedagogical-guidance/teaching-history-special-editions/) – www.holocausteducation.org.uk/teacher-resources/pedagogical-guidance/teaching-history-special-editions/ • Special Editions - Dec 2010 & December 2013

A podcast for teachers about this book is available at justimagine.co.uk

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