

# DIVIDED CITY by Theresa Breslin

## TEACHING NOTES by Bridget Carrington

**DIVIDED CITY** (Corgi 2006) ISBN : 0 552 55188 0

Reading Age 9+  
Interest Level 10+

Theresa Breslin is the critically acclaimed author of over 30 books whose work has been filmed for television and dramatised for radio. She has been described as an outstanding writer who combines a powerful sense of drama with memorable characters and superb storytelling. She writes for all age groups covering most fiction genres with some titles especially suitable as EAL readers. She won the Carnegie Medal, the most prestigious award in children's literature, for *Whispers in the Graveyard*, her compelling story of a dyslexic boy.

More information on website: [theresabreslin.com](http://theresabreslin.com)

Bridget Carrington has taught in the primary sector over the last thirty years. She has an MA in Children's Literature and her research for this will form part of the forthcoming Pied Piper Publishing 'Neglected Children's Authors' book *A Victorian Quartet*.

She is currently researching the early history of writing for young adults for a doctorate at Roehampton University. She writes about, reviews, and

**First and foremost the book should be read for enjoyment, and analysis of its material should never be allowed to detract from this, its primary intention.**

### DIVIDED CITY – Some Reviews:

Compelling... this humane and edgy story prickles and nudges the reader towards tolerance and understanding of other communities. *TES*

A cracking good read...(Breslin) creates characters we both believe in and like. *THE GUARDIAN*

A complex honourable book which explores which explores the historic roots of its characters' loyalties and beliefs.-*THE BOOKSELLER*

A powerful novel to provoke, intrigue and inform.... It will promote the kind of debate necessary to inform and educate, and thereby face the truths behind the everyday behaviour which still dominates life in many areas of the British Isles. *B. CARRINGTON, WRITEAWAY WEBSITE*

A skilfully plotted page-turner... Football allegiances are tied up with other deep rooted prejudices and passions... the issues are presented in the thoughts and words of the two boys, and in dialogue - always fast and dramatic, sometimes heart-warmingly funny. *INIS. Irish Book Review Journal*

## **Curriculum Context**

*Divided City* could be used as a cross curricular resource for Key Stage 2 Years 5 & 6 and Key Stage 3 Literacy/English, Citizenship and PSHE, as well as RE.

In the National Literacy Strategy Framework document (2/98) the following areas are relevant, all building on work undertaken in earlier KS 2 objectives such as

### Year 4 Term 3

#### **Text level work:**

To identify social, moral or cultural issues in stories, e.g. dilemmas faced by characters or the moral of a story, and to discuss how characters deal with them, to locate evidence in text

### Year 5 Term 1

#### **Text level work:**

#### **Reading comprehension**

**1** to analyse the features of a good opening and compare a number of story openings;

**2** to compare the structure of different stories, to discover how they differ in pace, build-up, sequence, complication and resolution;

**3** to investigate how characters are presented, referring to the text:  
through dialogue, action and description;  
how the reader responds to them (as victims, heroes, etc.);  
through examining their relationships with other characters;

**4** to consider how texts can be rooted in the writer's experience, e.g. historical events and places, experience of wartime, friendship, holidays

### Year 5 Term 3

#### **Text level work:**

#### **Reading comprehension**

**1** to investigate a range of texts from different cultures, considering patterns of relationships, social customs, attitudes and beliefs:

identify these features by reference to the text;

consider and evaluate these features in relation to their own experience;

**2** to identify the point of view from which a story is told and how this affects the reader's response;

**3** to change point of view, e.g. tell incident or describe a situation from the point of view of another character or perspective;

#### **Writing composition**

**7** to write from another character's point of view e.g. retelling an incident in letter form;

## Year 6 Term 1

### **Text level work:**

#### **Reading comprehension**

**2** to take account of viewpoint in a novel through, e.g.:

identifying the narrator;

explaining how this influences the reader's view of events;

explaining how events might look from a different point of view;

**3** to articulate personal responses to literature, identifying why and how a text affects the reader;

**4** to be familiar with the work of some established authors, to know what is special about their work, and to explain their preferences in terms of authors, styles and themes;

**5** to contribute constructively to shared discussion about literature, responding to and building on the views of others;

#### **Writing composition**

**6** to manipulate narrative perspective by:

writing in the voice and style of a text;

writing a story with two different narrators;

**7** to plan quickly and effectively the plot, characters and structure of their own narrative writing;

**9** to prepare a short section of story as a script, e.g. using stage directions, location/setting

## Year 6 Term 2

### **Text level work:**

#### **Reading comprehension**

**1** to understand aspects of narrative structure, e.g.:

how chapters in a book (or paragraphs in a short story or chapter) are linked together;

how authors handle time, e.g. flashbacks, stories within stories, dreams;

how the passing of time is conveyed to the reader;

**2** to analyse how individual paragraphs are structured in writing, e.g. comments sequenced to follow the shifting thoughts of a character, examples listed to justify a point and reiterated to give it force

**8** to analyse the success of texts and writers in evoking particular responses in the reader, e.g. where suspense is well-built;

#### **Writing composition**

**10** to use different genres as models to write, e.g. short extracts, sequels, additional episodes, alternative endings, using appropriate conventions, language;

**12** to study in depth one genre and produce an extended piece of similar writing, e.g. for inclusion in a class anthology; to plan, revise, re-draft this and bring to presentational standard, e.g. layout, paragraphing, accuracy of punctuation and spelling, handwriting/printing;

**14** to write commentaries or summaries crediting views expressed by using expressions such as *.The writer says that..*;

### Year 6 Term 3

#### **Writing composition**

**7** to annotate passages in detail in response to specific questions;

**8** to use a reading journal effectively to raise and refine personal responses to a text and prepare for discussion;

**9** to write summaries of books or parts of books, deciding on priorities relevant to purpose;

**10** to write a brief synopsis of a text, e.g. for back cover blurb;

**11** to write a brief helpful review tailored for real audiences;

**12** to compare texts in writing, drawing out:

their different styles and preoccupations;

their strengths and weaknesses;

their different values and appeal to a reader;;

**14** to write an extended story, worked on over time on a theme identified in reading

In the Key Stage 3 Framework for teaching English: Year 7, 8 & 9, the following areas are relevant:

### Year 7

#### **Sentence level**

##### **Vocabulary**

##### **Standard English and language variation**

**15.** vary the formality of language in speech and writing to suit different circumstances;

**16.** investigate differences between spoken and written language structures, e.g. *hesitation in speech*;

##### **Understanding the author's craft**

**12.** comment, using appropriate terminology on how writers convey setting, character and mood through word choice and sentence structure;

**14.** recognise how writers' language choices can enhance meaning, e.g. *repetition, emotive vocabulary, varied sentence structure or line length, sound effects*;

**15.** trace the ways in which a writer structures a text to prepare a reader for the ending, and comment on the effectiveness of the ending;

**16.** distinguish between the attitudes and assumptions of characters and those of the author;

### **Study of literary texts**

**17.** read a range of recent fiction texts independently as the basis for developing critical reflection and personal response, e.g. *sharing views, keeping a reading journal*;

### **Write to persuade, argue, advise**

**15.** express a personal view, adding persuasive emphasis to key points, e.g. *by reiteration, exaggeration, repetition, use of rhetorical questions*;

### **Write to analyse, review, comment**

**18.** identify criteria for evaluating a particular situation, object or event, present findings fairly and give a personal view;

### **Group discussion and interaction**

**14.** acknowledge other people's views, justifying or modifying their own views in the light of what others say;

## Year 8

### **Sentence level**

#### **Vocabulary**

#### **Standard English and language variation**

**11.** understand the main differences between standard English and dialectal variations, e.g. *subject-verb agreement, formation of past tense, adverbs and negatives, use of pronouns and prepositions*;

### **Text level – Reading**

#### **Reading for meaning**

**4.** review their developing skills as active, critical readers who search for meaning using a range of reading strategies;

**5.** trace the development of themes, values or ideas in texts;

**6.** recognise bias and objectivity, distinguishing facts from hypotheses, theories or opinions;

**7.** identify the ways implied and explicit meanings are conveyed in different texts, e.g. *irony, satire*;

#### **Understanding the author's craft**

**10.** analyse the overall structure of a text to identify how key ideas are developed, e.g. *through the organisation of the content and the patterns of language used*;

**11.** investigate the different ways familiar themes are explored and presented by different writers;

### **Study of literary texts**

- 12.** record and review the development of their independent reading, and identify ways of increasing its scope and challenge;
- 13.** read a substantial text (novel, play or work of one poet) revising and refining interpretations of subject matter, style and technique;
- 16.** recognise how texts refer to and reflect the culture in which they were produced, e.g. *in their evocation of place and values*.

### **Write to persuade, argue, advise**

- 13.** present a case persuasively, making selective use of evidence, using appropriate rhetorical devices and anticipating responses and objections;
- 14.** develop and signpost arguments in ways that make the logic clear to the reader;
- 15.** give written advice which offers alternatives and takes account of the possible consequences, e.g. *money management for young people*;

### **Write to analyse, review, comment**

- 16.** weigh different viewpoints and present a balanced analysis of an event or issue;

### **Group discussion and interaction**

- 9.** reflect on their individual strengths as contributors to group talk and identify points and opportunities for development;
- 10.** use talk to question, hypothesise, speculate, evaluate, solve problems and develop thinking about complex issues and ideas;
- 11.** recognise and build on other people's contributions;
- 12.** take different roles in discussion, helping to develop ideas, seek consensus and report the main strands of thought;

## Year 9

Consolidation of objectives from previous years.

The following themes and topics would be relevant when using *Divided City*:

### Citizenship/PSHE/RE

Rights and responsibilities  
Human rights  
Diversity – national, regional, religious, ethnic  
Conflict resolution  
Perception of social/class distinctions  
How to bring about social change  
Attitudes to mental illness  
Friendship and loyalty  
Intergenerational relationships  
Cultural heritage  
Religious heritage  
Prejudice: religious, racial, class  
Migration, refugees and asylum seekers  
How opinions are formed

*'Deprivation, and all that goes with it, is what really divides this city.'* (Graham's Dad, p.160)

*He was aware of how difficult it might be for them, given their differences in background and culture, but this vibrant mixture was the essence of Glasgow.* (of Jack Burns, p.186)

### Synopsis

Glasgow in May: a young man lies bleeding on the street...Graham doesn't want to get involved. He just wants to play football with his new mate, Joe. But he witnesses a shocking moment of violence, and he gets caught up in injustice, prejudice and religious rivalries old and new. Theresa Breslin tackles the seemingly eternal question of religious intolerance, emphasizing its longstanding influence on the everyday lives of communities by introducing a very twenty-first century issue - Islam and asylum seeking - into the centuries old conflict between Catholic and Protestant in Glasgow. Graham, a keen Rangers supporter, comes from a traditional Protestant family in a middle class area of the city. His Granda Reid is a passionate Orangeman, and hopes that his grandson will march in the forthcoming Orange Walk, the visible proof of the strength of Protestant feeling in a city of divided religions. Graham's parents are educated professionals, more tolerant, less certain of the wisdom in displays of religious power. Joe, Celtic supporter, brought up

in his Catholic faith by a deeply religious family whose outspoken and sometimes violent advocacy of their religion suffuses their working class city estate. Yet he too has access to more measured opinions to leaven his attitudes, his father, an educated, thoughtful man and his Aunt Kathleen, who insists the family leave their partisan Catholic opinions at the door when they enter her house for Sunday lunch.

United by their love of football, and the club they play for, and their attempts to help Kyoul, a Muslim asylum seeker, the victim of religiously inspired torture in his own country and racial attack in Glasgow, each works through the passions of his own family's religious heritage. Each comes out the stronger for facing the issues in his own life, first accepting and finally rejecting the comforting, unquestioned prejudices which ignorance of the lives of others lulls us in to. A powerful novel to provoke, intrigue and inform Key Stage 3 and older readers, which will promote the kind of debate necessary to inform and educate, and thereby face the truths behind the everyday behaviour which still dominates life in many areas of the British Isles.

### Characters

Graham, only child, Rangers supporter from a middle class family and area of Glasgow

Joe Flaherty, Celtic supporter from an extensive working class family and area of Glasgow

Kyoul, Muslim asylum seeker, subject of religious and racially motivated violence

Leanne, Kyoul's girl friend from an expensive area of Glasgow

Graham's Mum and Dad, educated professionals, overprotective but fair  
Joe's Dad, PhD in political history, suffering from depression and unable to work since the death of Joe's Mum

Jammy, one of Joe's many cousins, who is unquestioningly partisan

Granda Reid, Joe's grandfather and a proud and lifelong Orangeman

Joe's Grandma, staunchly Catholic, but willing to befriend anyone

Aunt Kathleen, Joe's aunt who bans partisan football talk in her house

Uncle Tommy, Kathleen's husband and Partick Thistle supporter

Uncle Desmond, an aggressive Celtic supporter

Aunt Rita, his wife

Bernadette, Joe's cousin, a nurse at the City Hospital

Mr Sinclair, the patient in the next bed to Kyoul, World War II veteran

Jack Burns, Joe and Graham's football coach, seeking to unite young football players whatever their background

### Setting

Time: the present

Place: Glasgow:

streets in Catholic and Protestant areas of the city,  
the protagonists' homes in run down, comfortable, and affluent housing areas,

the City Hospital, & Religious Museum & Central Art Gallery

Celtic and Rangers football grounds.



### Structure and Style

Short (4-9 pages) chapters which tell the story chronologically: 230 pages divided into 45 chapters

- Opening: the reader is immediately engaged in Graham's dilemma – alone, taking a short cut in a part of the city his parents ban him from, catapulted into a situation over which he has no control

#### Extracts from *DIVIDED CITY*

*Footsteps.*  
*Running. (p.1)...*  
*Footsteps.*  
*Running. (p.2)...*  
*'Get the scum ! Asylum scum !' (p.2)...*  
*'Scum ! Scum !' (p.3)...*  
*'We've got him ! He's here !'...*  
*Nothing. No scream. No cry for help.*  
*Then footsteps. Running away. Diminishing...*  
*A dark stain spreading. (p.4)*

Short sentences, with phrases repeated at intervals in the text create a claustrophobic intensity of experience, indicating both the speed of the pursuit and Graham's fear.

- Inciting Moment: witnessing the attack and then asked for help by the stabbed Kyoul, Graham must decide whether to run away, or incur complications and consequences by summoning help and agreeing to do a favour for the attacked boy. He stays, holding Kyoul's hand, giving him hope and life (p.24), certainly saving his life, but thereby possibly compromising his own comfortable existence. He and Kyoul are now 'brothers', united by trouble (p.15).
- Development: we are introduced to Joe, walking home carefree, who while his team mate Graham faces life and death issues in the back streets, is daydreaming of scoring the winning goal for Scotland in the World Cup (p.8-10). Despite their different backgrounds, Graham seeks his help in fulfilling the promise he has made Kyoul.
- Climax: Graham and Joe are forced into subterfuge to help Leanne, to visit Kyoul in hospital, and to avoid their families realizing what they are doing, and that each boy comes from a totally different, misunderstood and hated background, religion and cultural heritage.
- Denouement: Graham must also decide whether to march with the Orangemen, as his Grandfather wishes. He does, but in

the knowledge that pride in his cultural identity must never overcome his ability to judge people as individuals.

- Resolution: each boy learns about the other's religion and cultural heritage and discovers the depth of ignorance, intransigence and the stupidity and dangers inherent in this prejudice. An outstanding act of selflessness and generosity on the part of Mr Stanley saves Kyoul from homelessness and immediate deportation. We will never know the final outcomes, but we are left with hope...

Extract from *DIVIDED CITY*

*'...it's good you're both still trying to be friends.  
It gives us hope, doesn't it?'*

(p.210)

### Narration and Point of View

Although dealing with universal questions, Theresa Breslin identified the primary audience for *Divided City* as being teenaged boys. She is particularly concerned with promoting and encouraging boys' reading, literacy and literature and the subject matter was chosen partly with this in mind. Having chosen her subject – the experience of asylum seekers in big cities – she set the book in Glasgow, already a stronghold of ancient religious and cultural rivalries, and decided that immediacy of language and constant action were best suited to its topics – football and adolescent male city life - and target audience.

She realized that, as an adult female, she had to 'observe, listen and absorb' adolescent male culture to portray it accurately and meaningfully for her readers.

Both Joe and Graham are intensely loyal to their cultural and religious backgrounds, and Chapters 4, 7 and 15 explain the history, feelings and expressions of identity of Protestants and Catholics in Glasgow, and how they are manifested in the life of the city, while Chapter 33 parallels them by giving the background of prejudice in their own countries and in Britain experienced by asylum seekers and refugees. Breslin is entirely even-handed in exposing the roots of their cultural identity, its manifestation and ingrained prejudice and misconceptions about groups seen as historic rivals. It is in the final Chapter that the prospect of *Glasgow City*, a football team which unites young men, capitalizing on their strengths despite their differences, which encourages them to '*behave like grown men...in some cases better than grown men*' (p. 230) offers a constructive future away from sectarian intolerance. Joe and Graham's footballing daydream interludes may presage a positive future in more than sport alone.

## Teaching Suggestions

### Aims:

- to encourage informed reflection and discussion on the themes and issues raised in *Divided City*
- to encourage wider reading of books with similar issues and themes
- to promote reading, literacy and literature amongst boys

In addition to the specific NLS Framework objectives and Citizenship/PSHE/RE themes and topics detailed above, *Divided City* could be studied for further specific

### Discussion Topics

#### Characterization:

- Graham and Joe come from very different backgrounds and beliefs. How does the author engage us with Graham and Joe? Are we encouraged to favour one sectarian point of view over another? Why not? How does the author prevent this happening?
- Both boys have family members who represent extremes of opinion. Why do they hold different degrees of loyalty to their culture and religion? Who do we feel sympathy for? Do we despise any of the characters for their opinions?
- Kyoul tells very little of his own story. How does the author fill in the detail? Who tells us? What does their background add to our understanding of their account of asylum seekers?
- There are characters from three generations in each family. How do their views differ? Why do you think this is so? What factors affect how you form opinions?

#### City Culture:

- Graham encounters a gang and witnesses a stabbing, but admits it to no one. Why do you think he keeps quiet about this?
- When Kyoul asks him a perfectly reasonable favour, and the boys try to fulfil it, Graham and Joe's relatives are afraid that they are getting caught up in something which they see as a far greater danger. What is it that they are frightened of, and why do you think this is constantly in adults' minds?

#### Football Rivalry:

- During and after the Celtic v Rangers games there are many examples of hatred and violence between the sides. What are they? How are they continued outside of the football ground, and every day?
- What lies beneath the rivalry between the teams and their supporters? How does each side justify their opinions? Do you

consider their opinions to be sensible and based on fact or misunderstanding?

- Although Glasgow's football rivalry is ancient and notorious, what aspects of this hatred and violence are also evidence in other football supporters elsewhere? Can you think of or research chants and slogans which reflect this?

Emotion:

- The boys hold back from overt displays of emotion. Why does Joe keep quiet about his mother's death and his father's mental illness?
- In what situations do the boys feel able to show emotion? Why do you think this is?
- Do you think girls would display emotion differently, and for different reasons? Why?

Friendship:

- '*You have to work at friendship, Joe*' says his father (p. 208). Chapter 22 is a crucial point in the development of a real friendship between Joe and Graham. Between entering and leaving the church their relationship has changed. What happens (or doesn't happen) which allows the boys to move closer together in their friendship? How does this influence Joe's reaction to the Orange Walk?
- In the final chapter Joe makes an offer of supreme sacrifice to prove the depth of his friendship for Graham. Although it's funny, it is deeply significant. Why do you think this is?

Conflict:

- Look at Chapter 27, which begins and ends with almost the same sentence. During this the boys discuss their allegiances, mainly repeating what they have heard adults saying as though they are indisputable. Do their different points of view affect their relationship? Do boys deal with conflict in a particular way?
- Peer/family pressure: how do Joe and Graham cope with this? Is either of them bullied into conforming?
- '*...these wombles*' says Jammy (p. 214). What other terms are used by the Catholics and Protestants to describe their enemies and indicate their contempt?

Opinions:

- Graham and Joe repeat the opinions which older members of their families hold, yet through the boys' own experiences in the book, they also learn to question them. How are our opinions formed? How far do we take them from others? What makes us question or move away from historical attitudes towards others?

Citizenship- wider implications:

- Theresa Breslin's dedication states: '*This book is for Glasgow*'. As well as the topics mentioned earlier in these notes, *Divided City* considers the power of a city over its citizens, their identification

with it as an entity, and their conviction that it is somehow 'special'. Look at page 222 and the final chapter as a whole. Where and by whom is this put into words?

### Creative Projects and Activities

- Girls as well as boys are keen football fans. Both could be encouraged to research the formation of and historical roots of particular rivalries between their team and others. How relevant were the causes of these rivalries, and are they still really pertinent today? What do different generations of supporters feel?
- Migrant workers/refugees/asylum seekers/ethnic minorities. In many classes some or all of these will be represented. Students could be encouraged to find out about the numbers and experience of any of these in their own local area. What difference does it make when you really know one of these people? How does it change your perception of the whole question? How can we improve understanding and tolerance amongst ourselves, and influence others along this path? Students could be encouraged to devise realistic strategies for their school, and the wider community.
- There is a horrible and almost irresistible attraction for us all in the rude, crude and cruel remarks used against those we dislike or don't understand. Students could attempt to create alternative slogans for use with rival teams or groups which concentrate on their own strengths and celebrate difference rather than using it as a weapon to insult or create enmity.
- Press and media frequently are the major creators/perpetuators of unpleasant sporting rivalry and anti-immigration views. Students could identify and research examples locally and nationally, and confront the perpetrators to gauge why this is allowed to continue despite informed opinion and legislation which deplores it.

### And after all this?

What can students do in the future to begin to influence racist/religious attitudes, and in particular to help asylum seekers? Is there a local organization which provides support? Ensuring that they are working in a safe environment with appropriate supervision, can they befriend newcomers, offer help with interpreting, learning English, fitting in and understanding British life?

### Useful websites

<http://www.theresabreslin.co.uk/index.htm>

[http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/authors/Theresa\\_Breslin.htm](http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/authors/Theresa_Breslin.htm)