

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

The Promise by Nicola Davies and Laura Carlin (Walker)



1. Explore it

Look at the spread from the book below, searching like a detective in the illustration to see what clues it gives you to the story:



What do you think is happening here? Where do you think this is?

Think about how this illustration makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you know in stories or real life? How? What stands out for you in the scene? How do you respond to the colours and body language of the figures? What do you think it might be like to be in the crowd? What might you overhear people saying if you were part of this group?

Think about the girl on the right-hand page. What do you think you know about her and what she might be doing? What can you tell about her life from what you see? Why do you think she might be behaving this way? How would you describe her? What clues do you get to the time and place the story might be set? What do you think it might be about?

2. Illustrate it

Read this passage, or ask someone to read it to you, or maybe record it for you so you can play it over again.

When I was young I lived in a city that was mean and hard and ugly. Its streets were dry as dust, cracked by heat and never blessed by rain. A gritty yellow wind blew constantly, scratching round the buildings like a hungry dog. Nothing grew. Everything was broken. No one ever smiled.

Take a pen or pencil and a bit of scrap paper. You can use the back of an old envelope or cereal packet; whatever is to hand. Draw what you see in your imagination. It can be shapes or shading — anything that

captures the place and the mood of these words. Remember, everyone has their own ideas and imagines things their own way. This is a good thing! Add to your illustration any words and phrases that have helped you make your picture, which might come from the passage or from your own imagination.

Share your drawing with family or friends or talk about what you have drawn with someone else:

- What do you and they like about your drawings? Do you agree?
- What have you chosen to draw and why?

3. Talk about it

- If you didn't do this as part of the illustration, find and copy now any words and phrases which show what the city was like, and how it affected the people who lived in it including the girl from the picture.
- Why do you think the city was '**mean and hard and ugly**'? Do you think it had always been that way, or might something have happened to change it? Why do you think the people '**never smiled**'? Does the city remind you of anywhere, either real or imagined?
- Do you think we are affected by our surroundings? Can you think of a time when your surroundings have affected you and your behaviour? This could be negative as here, or a positive example, where the place lifted your spirits and made you feel better. You could write a quick postcard from that place, describing how it affects your mood and your behaviour, and illustrate the front to reinforce your words.

4. Imagine it

In the rest of the story a promise is made and kept that has a massive and positive impact on the city and its inhabitants.

- What do you imagine that promise might be? What do you think the girl or the people of the city could promise to do that would improve the way the city looks and alters the behaviour of the people who live there and the way they treat each other?
- How is the city different from the kind of ideal city you would like to live in? What are the things you like best about the place where you live, or that would like to see where you live to make it even better for everyone to live together?

5. Create it

Having thought about the things a city and its people need, you are going to be an urban planner and come up with a design for your ideal city. What kind of buildings will it have? What will they look like? Will there be green spaces, and sports facilities, water, and wildlife? How will people travel to work, and how will they spend their free time? The choices are all up to you! Draw a map of the city of your dreams, and then annotate it, highlighting all the choices you have made to make it the opposite of the 'mean and hard and ugly' city of this book. You may choose to do this in drawing and writing, or on the computer if you have access to one. Think carefully about how to share your plan with someone who may not know you are an urban designer. Give it to someone else in your home to read. What did they learn about your city from reading it?

You can hear Nicola Davies read the whole of *The Promise*, and see Laura Carlin's emotive illustrations here: <https://vimeo.com/73026206>