

A Curriculum Guide to

Rooftoppers

by Katherine Rundell

with illustrations by Terry Fan

About the Book

When Sophie is a year old, Charles, a quirky, English bachelor, discovers her adrift in a cello case after a terrible shipwreck. He brings her up with pure love but neither with proper Victorian manners nor sensibilities. So when the Childcare Agency sends a letter stating that Sophie, now age twelve, will be taken away from Charles and put in an orphanage, the two escape London and head to Paris to find Sophie’s mother. Charles, afraid for her safety, tells his beloved ward that she must stay in her attic hotel room while he journeys out onto the streets of Paris. Sophie locks her door and then leaves through the skylight, where she discovers a whole new world. She finds rooftoppers—urchins who live in the hidden spaces above the city. Still in some ways adrift, she seeks their help to search for her mother.

Prereading Question

There is an illustration at the beginning of each chapter that foreshadows what will come in the chapter. Examine the illustrations. Based on the artwork, predict what will happen in each chapter. Then, after you finish the book, go back and examine the illustrations. Write a chapter title for each of the chapters, making sure it coincides with the illustrations.

Discussion Questions

The discussion questions below align with the following Common Core State Standards: (RF.5.4, 4A) (RL.5.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10) (SL.5.1, 1A, 1C)

1. Explain why Charles should be able to keep or *not* keep Sophie as his ward. Use evidence from the novel to back up your ideas.
2. Is this a realistic story or a magical one? Explain your answer.
3. Describe how books are used in the story. What does this suggest about the author’s feelings toward books?
4. Describe scenes that demonstrate that Sophie is a rebellious person.
5. Summarize Sophie’s backstory, her early childhood. Retell how she ended up with Charles, and describe her first few years. Be sure to include details about how she got her name, how she was raised, and Miss Eliot.

6. Compare and contrast the parenting styles of Charles versus Miss Eliot.
7. Explain in what ways Sophie would have been different if she had been raised by Miss Eliot, or someone like Miss Eliot. Make sure to back up your notions with evidence from the text.
8. In Chapter 12, what is Matteo's definition of "ownership"? How does this definition relate to the American definition? How does his definition relate to "squatters' rights"? A squatter is a person that settles on property without right or title or payment of rent, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary.
9. Is Matteo better off living as a rooftoper, or would he be better off living as a legal orphan in nineteenth-century Paris? What would his life be like if he lived legally?
10. What are Sophie's fears? How does she overcome some of them? What does Matteo do to help her with the natural fear of falling and heights?
11. The story takes place during the Victorian era, a time when women were supposed to be "proper." In what ways is Sophie *not* "proper"?
12. Explain why this story *has* to be set in Victorian times.
13. As there are today, there were many stereotypes during the Victorian time. For example: Tall people are considered to be more honest. "people believed you more easily if you were taller." What are some of the stereotypes in the novel regarding males and females? Use quotes from the book to support your answer.
14. One of the themes of *Rooftoppers* is "Never Ignore a possible." Where in the story is this theme demonstrated?
15. Miss Eliot's voice is described with the simile "like a window slamming shut." Explain what this simile means and how it relates to Miss Eliot in general.
16. For Charles and Sophie, nature and humans are all part of the same world. They lived "in a street smelling of trees and horse dung." The basement held books and spiders. "[T]he roof belonged to the birds. Charles lived in the space in between." Find other instances of how Charles and Sophie are part of the natural world.
17. Explain how Matteo survives: how he eats, stays warm, etc.
18. Cello music is compared to "eight thousand birds," to "fresh air," and to "shine." Explain how the cello leads Sophie back to her mother.
19. Is music part of the natural world or human world? Support your answer using examples from the book and from your own life.

20. Even though Charles worries about Sophie, he has great trust and faith in her. Find two examples that show this statement to be true.

21. There are several languages used in this book, mostly French and English. How does Safi communicate most of the time? Could other people learn and use her language? Why do you think she communicates in the manner that she does?

Research, Writing, and Speaking and Listening Activities

The activities below align with the following Common Core State Standards: (RF.5.3, 4, 4A, 4B, 4C, 9) (SL.5.1, 1A, 1C, 2, 4, 5) (RI.5.4, 6, 7, 9)

1. Readers' Theatre. Chapter 17 is one of the most exhilarating chapters in literature, especially if you have acrophobia, which almost all of us do to some degree. Have three readers (per page, if you have a large group) practice and then dramatically read this chapter out loud. One student reads Sophie, one Matteo, and the other the narrator. Also try reading only Sophie's and Matteo's dialogue without the narration.

2. Matteo tells Sophie how he keeps warm. The main way is using birds. Knowing that birds must be light enough to fly, research how different birds keep warm. Make a powerpoint presentation that shows and explains how birds keep a healthy body temperature.

3. Make a chart of all of the things that Matteo eats. Would you be able to stay alive on his diet? Is it a healthy diet? Then make a chart of all of the things that Charles and Sophie eat. Compare and contrast these items with Matteo's. Which diet is healthier? Explain why.

4. More than half of *Rooftoppers* is set in Paris, France, and to make the story more realistic, the author uses many French words and phrases. Make a French/English dictionary from the French words and phrases used in the book. What words are similar to English words?

5. Matteo says, "Waiting is a talent. You have to learn it . . . It will be good for you." Make a plan with a friend to meet up at a safe place. Arrive a half hour early and practice waiting. What do you find you do to pass the time? And/or next time you have to wait for something or someone, use it as a time to practice waiting and to become better at waiting. Again, observe what you do. Do you think that you could ever look forward to having to wait?

6. Research "rooftops of Paris." You may use Google Images. There is a beautiful book, *Rooftops of Paris* (in the series Sketchbooks) with watercolors by Fabrice Moireau. Make a collage of the rooftops or skyline of Paris. Or make a map of Paris from a bird's-eye view.

7. *Rooftoppers* is a story about family. Who is Sophie's family? Why is her family important? In the last chapter, Sophie is reunited with her mother. But what happens next? Write the next part of this tale. What happens to Charles and Matteo? Sophie and her mother? Does Sophie stay with all the members of her family?

Guide written by Shari Conradson, an English, drama, and history teacher at Brook Haven School in California.

This guide has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes.