 Resource 1b

Teacher notes on introduction to the module

(Teacher notes – attachment 2) Introduction to the module

This module is an exploration of “how texts represent individual and collective human experiences”. Students will examine how the novel “represents human qualities and emotions associated with, or arising from, these experiences”

Doerr’s novel uses the backdrop of war to explore how conflict arises when individuals confront the tension between their personal conscience and public responsibility.

The novel invites the reader to consider what causes an individual to hold certain values and moral and ethical beliefs. Despite what war brings, the novel is an affirmation of the commonality of our humanity.

The individual experiences in the novel are represented by characters which act as literary tropes. They are perhaps not meant to be read as realistic characters but rather as representations of our broader common humanity.

In addition to reflecting war’s horror through individual stories, the novel also offers glimpses into the larger-scale horrors of WWII. Civilians are killed mistakenly, women are raped, and prisoners and soldiers alike are mistreated and murdered.

Although the Holocaust is never mentioned directly, it is occasionally alluded to, creating an inescapable backdrop to the story. Despite critical voices around the novel, (see for example Dominic Green in New Republic 15th January 2015) its treatment of war and the normalisation of certain behaviours of war, the novel is not perhaps intended as a treatise on war but rather an exploration of the internal lives of individuals within the setting of war. In fact, the story need not be told within this setting, as the ideas are universal and beyond the bounds of context.

The novel questions how much power human beings have to choose their own destinies, and to what degree our lives are predetermined by the world around us. Does war makes certain kinds of personal choices impossible?

As Frederick tells Werner, “Your problem is that you still believe you own your life.”

Students will explore the idea of life as a paradox; that the conflict or tension between private and public worlds may not be resolved. There may be no answer to the paradoxes of life.

Students may also explore the idea that life is full of possibilities (as implied in the title, All The Light We Cannot See) but that we may stay confined by our own personal context. They will be invited to consider the possibility and consequence of moving outside their own context.

Doerr challenges our assumptions about storytelling through the structure of the book, the way he represents time and place, and his use of the omniscient and focalised narrators.