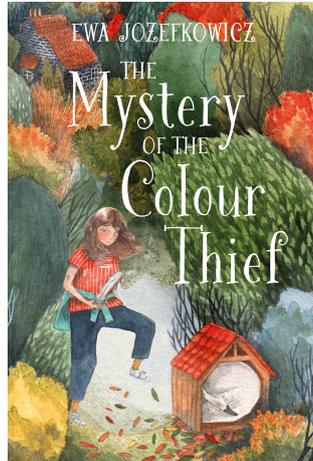


Readers'/Teachers' Notes

The Mystery of the Colour Thief

By Ewa Jozefkowicz, illustrated by Sophie Gilmore



Publication date: April 2018

Fiction/ Children's 9+ • £10.99

HB: 9781786698940 • E: 9781786698933

Structure

Look at the title of the book: *The Mystery of the Colour Thief*. **Discuss:** Think about the word 'mystery'. What is a mystery book?

Activity: You may wish to consider 'key elements' of the mystery genre.

These include:

- a sense of foreboding
- an unsolved crime
- clues
- a detective
- witnesses
- wrong turns or red herrings
- a cliffhanger moment or danger
- resolution



See if you can identify all these features in the book? Where do they appear - highlight the passages or make a note of the page numbers.

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Discuss: ‘A colour thief’. What does this mean? Can a person really steal colour? Or is it metaphorical? What is a metaphor?

Activity: Now think about what it would feel like if the world lacked certain colours. Draw a ‘colour by numbers’ scene with simple shapes, attributing 1 to green, 2 to red etc, but don’t colour them in, just write the number inside each shape. Give to your classmate/partner and have them colour in the scene according to your numbers. Do one colour at a time. Think about what the colours do to the scene. Do they make it fresher, more lively? Do they give it atmosphere? What about if you take the same scene, and colour it all shades of the same colour? Does it change the feel of the picture?

Now read the first chapter of the book.

Discuss: Why has the author chosen to start her book with a dream? Just from reading the first chapter, what do you think the dream means?

Activity: Write a diary entry from Izzy’s point of view after reading Chapter One. Which emotions do you feel?

Once you have read the whole book, take a look at just the dream sequences. These are on the following pages

1, 35, 71, 97, 131.

Discuss: What clues do they give about the colour thief? What else can you piece together from reading the dream sequences as one?

The explanation to the dreams and the resolution of the mystery is revealed on page 163.

Discuss: Did you solve the mystery before then? Could the dream sequences mean anything else? Were there any red herrings?

One of Izzy’s dreams is not in italics. See page 147.

Discuss: Why is this?

Activity: Write your own dream diary over a fortnight. Can you see patterns in your dreams? Do they give clues about your own life?

Now share your dream diaries with your classmates. See if there are similarities.

According to scientists, there are certain dream symbols that we all share. Popular symbols include: being chased, falling, a test at school, flying, and food. Do any of these feature in your dreams?

Make a list and write down what you think each one means.

Discuss: Do you think dreams tell us about the future, like Joseph’s, or about events in the past, like Izzy’s in *The Colour Thief*?

Characters



Ewa Jozefkowicz is very good at portraying people through the things they wear or have about them. “Even the usual crowds of sixth formers with their slouchy rucksacks and rolled-up blazer sleeves had disappeared inside.” (page 2)

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“The two screens of her computer were placed at what looked like an exact forty-five degree angle from one another, and out of the corner of my eye, I caught the glimmer of a gold-nibbed fountain pen, lying in its special velvet green holder.” (page 78)

Discuss: Think about what these two sentences tell you about the sixth formers and the headmistress?

Aunty Lyn is described on page 102: “she was still in her pyjama bottoms and an oversized jumper, and without make-up her face looked different - softer.”

And Lou on page 107:

“had a large white bandage stuck to the side of her head. *Get Well Soon* cards were arranged in an elaborate display in front of her.”

Discuss: Do clothes and accessories make people appear different from how they might be inside? Think about Aunty Lyn when Izzy first mentions her in chapter Seven. Look at how Lou manipulates her victimhood on page 107.

Activity: Invent a character simply by listing the clothes and accessories they have. What does this show you about your character? Give the list to your classmate and see if they can tell you about the character’s personality just from this list.

Activity: Think about the clothes in your own wardrobe. Do you wear different kinds of clothes for different occasions or to give a certain impression? Draw an outfit as if you were going to a wedding, then to school, then if you are staying at home for the day. What clothes have you picked for each occasion?

Izzy

Izzy is the protagonist of the story. Most protagonists change over the course of their adventure, or show character growth. The explanation for Izzy’s dreams and the resolution of the mystery of the colour thief are revealed on page 163. In the following chapter, on page 165, Frank says that Izzy looks different.

Discuss: Why might that be? How has Izzy grown during the course of the novel?

To help you, look at when Lou says that Izzy has nothing to look forward to on page 76, but on page 95, Izzy says “I was already looking forward to coming back again tomorrow.” What has helped Izzy to change her mindset?

Activity: In order to be happy, it is important to have things to look forward to. Make a list of things you are looking forward to. It might be something small like a meal or particular food or TV programme, or it might be something big, such as a holiday.

Lou

From the beginning of the novel it’s very clear that Izzy and Lou’s friendship has broken down: “Lou saw me by the lockers and gave me a disapproving glance, not mentioning a word about why she hadn’t come to mine. I’d got used to these glances over the last few weeks. Ever since we’d started Year Eight, she’d been acting as though she was a guru on everything from clothes to hair, music and even who to hang around with.” (page 3)

The reader only sees their friendship from Izzy’s point of view.

Activity: What kind of person do you think Lou is? Can you write either a diary entry for the first day

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of school from Lou's point of view, or write a letter from Lou to Izzy, explaining why the friendship isn't working.

Look at the end of Chapter One, on page 7. "We'd been friends since playschool. She wouldn't give up on me. Would she?"

Discuss: What does the author mean by this? What emotions does it convey? And why do you think the author chooses to end the first chapter with a question?

"Now that I noticed them sitting together, speaking in hushed whispers, I could see the similarities between her [Jemima] and Lou. They'd practically merged into each other with their high-heeled polished shoes, sheets of poker-straight hair and mocking expressions. They even had the same phone covers in a leopard print pattern." (page 74)

"She's a loser anyway - it's the only thing she has to look forward to." (page 76)

Discuss: Why do you think Lou says such unkind words about her former friend to Jemima?

Toby

Look at how the author introduces Toby:

"- a small silhouetted figure. At first I thought it might be a person sitting on a chair, which struck me as a strange thing to be doing in the middle of the pavement, but as I got closer, I saw it was a wheelchair.

In it sat a boy of about my age, with blond hair. A pair of round glasses balanced on his upturned nose. He grinned and waved. Just like that. It was the weirdest thing." (page 15)

Discuss: What are your first impressions of Toby? Think about the fact that Izzy first notices his chair. What must it be like to have a disability? Think about the things Toby could do before his accident, and the things he can do afterwards. (For reference on the accident, see page 128-129)

Activity: Write two lists, before and after activities. Compare with your friends.

Now read again from page 15 to page 17 when Toby gives his name.

Discuss: Write down your further impressions of Toby.

Toby and Izzy quickly become good friends.

Activity: What does it mean to be a good friend? Can you write a list of attributes a good friend should have? And then put ticks by the ones you think Toby demonstrates in the book.



Izzy's Dad

"Dad was lying, still in his work clothes, on top of the duvet. There was a stack of papers next to him, some on the pillow; others had slipped on to the floor. I sat on the edge of the bed and took hold of his shoulders." (page 28)

Discuss: Izzy's Dad is also suffering from the effects of the accident and how it left her mother. What clues can you find in the text that everything isn't okay with him? Is he a good Dad? Think about when he is, and when he isn't. Look carefully at page 103-104 as well. What clues is the author giving about Izzy's Dad here?

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Themes

Animals and Nature

For much of the novel, Izzy and Toby take care of the smallest cygnet - the baby swan they name Spike. Toby looks up facts about cygnets to help take care of him. See page 48 for Toby's research on swans.

Activity: Can you make an information poster about swans and cygnets? Think about their habitat, feeding habits, life cycle. Use the book to help you and then do some further research online.

Izzy's Dad is also very interested in caring for animals. He has started a company called Project Elephant to help save elephants from poaching (page 29).

Discuss: What do you think the author's viewpoint on poaching is? How does Izzy's father's job reflect on the sort of person he is?

Activity: Do some research on the Internet. What can you find out about poaching? You might want to start here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/37373034>

Can you make a leaflet to prevent people from poaching. Which images will you show? What persuasive language can you use?

Izzy loves her dog Milo very much, but there is some imagery in the book that uses animals in a scary way. Think about why the author uses insects to represent fear or anxiety. Izzy is often described as having 'spiders scuttling' when she feels uneasy: "I felt a spidery scuttling through my stomach..." (page 27) and "the spiders stomped, moving from my stomach to my chest, leaving a horrible tickling ache." (page 36)

Discuss: Think about how the author uses animals as both a comfort and as a way to represent fear in the book. Do you find animals comforting? And how do you express fear or anxiety? Do you understand what she means by the scuttling in her stomach?

Activity: Write an A-Z of feelings and then write an animal that symbolises that feeling next to it. Add a third column and put a part of the body in which you feel that feeling. Eg. You might feel butterflies in your stomach for nervousness, you might feel that a dog represents love, and you feel the sensation in your chest.

Colour

Ewa Jozefkowicz uses colour in the novel to indicate mood. Look at the "autumn leaves, clusters of reds and oranges" (page 85), or "the human body is quite literally filled with colour." (page 88), and how she uses red in different ways - as anger, as red blood cells, as the colour to show Spike his house from far away.

Discuss: Why does Izzy call the day of her Mum's accident 'the Blackest Day'? (page 28) What does the colour black represent here? If you have a bad day, which colour would you attribute to it and why? What colour would you paint your bedroom if you could? Why?

Activity: Investigate how we see colour. This link may help you <https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/zq7thyc/revision/6>

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Activity: Make a Newton Colour Wheel. This link may help you <http://www.planet-science.com/categories/experiments/magic-tricks/2010/12/can-you-make-a-rainbow-disappear.aspx> Spin the wheel fast to see the colours disappear. Read about why this happens.

In *The Colour Thief*, colour reflects on how people are feeling. At the start of the novel, Izzy worries that she'll be 'bland and boring...and grey' on stage (page 63). By the end of the book, Izzy says "I no longer felt bland and grey - I felt coloured in, in full technicolour..." page 174

Discuss: What does she mean by that?

Art and Drama

When Izzy's Mum was four, she started painting a mural on Izzy's bedroom wall showing key moments from Izzy's life in squares (page 26)

Activity: Using a comic book style, try drawing a few key moments from your life. What have you chosen? What do these moments show? Who are the other characters that appear in your comic strip? In the book, the colours on the mural are very important to Izzy. What colours have you used? What colour are you wearing in the pictures? Think carefully about what your colours represent.

Izzy auditions for the role of Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Activity: What can you find out about the story of *Macbeth*?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/zgd4qty>

"Lady Macbeth and I. We had both done something terrible, something truly bad. And what was more, we were being punished for it." (page 75)

Discuss: What does the author mean by this?

Activity: Can you think of a book character similar to you, or to whom you feel a connection? Can you write a couple of paragraphs explaining why?

In the end, Izzy realises that she's nothing like Lady Macbeth. "She had deliberately gone out to hurt people, and that wasn't me at all." (page 174)

Now explain the ways in which you are different to the character you have chosen.

One of the key themes in *Macbeth* is 'appearances' - whether things are real or not. Lady Macbeth imagines blood on her hands. This is a symbol of her guilt.

Discuss: Think about Izzy's guilt in the book - what does she feel guilty about? Is she justified in this? What symbolises Izzy's guilt in the story? Look at the following sentence about things seen and unseen: "And I remained the only person who could see what the colour thief had stolen, which simply meant that it wasn't real." (page 132). Why do you think the author wrote this?

Toby suggests to Izzy that sometimes he imagines doing a life swap with somebody, so that you know what it's like to walk in somebody else's shoes. Izzy relates to this because it's like acting.

Activity: Can you think of someone you'd like to be for an hour or a day? Why would you want to swap with them? Write a description of how you see the world from their eyes. It could be a celebrity, or someone you know in your own life.

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Guilt

“It was a good question. There was so much I was sorry for that I was bursting with it. And even if I tried to put it into words for Dad, I knew I wouldn’t be able to.” (page 101)

Izzy feels guilt in the story, both for her mother’s accident, but also for what she does to Lou:

“I tried to catch Lou’s eye and eventually she looked up at me. Her face was still flushed. She looked scared, and I felt awful. I mouthed the words. ‘I’m sorry,’ but she deliberately turned away.” (page 79).

Izzy also apologises to her mother in a coma. (page 13)

Discuss: Is Izzy right to feel guilty about her mother’s accident? Is Izzy right to feel guilty about what she did to Lou? Think about something you have felt sorry about, and whether your apology was accepted. How did it make you feel? Have you ever not accepted an apology? Why?

The headmistress tells her not to be sorry. Izzy is surprised by this. (page 81)

Discuss: Were you surprised when you read it? What does the headmistress mean? Why does Izzy want the headmistress to yell at her instead?

Discuss: What is the difference between being sorry and feeling sorry for someone? Think about the word. What is the difference between regret and guilt? Why do we apologise?

Activity: Make a list of apologising phrases, and then make a list of accepting an apology phrases. Roleplay them with your classmate. Which works best? Which sounds most sincere?

Independence and When to Ask for Help

When Izzy makes friends with Toby, she is surprised to find how fiercely independent he is.

“At the base of the riverbank, his wheelchair lodged itself in the mud, and I rushed to help, but once again, he’d already extracted himself before I got there.” (page 22)

Discuss: Why do you think Toby wants to be so independent?

“No one else would understand about the colour thief.” (page 36).

Discuss: Why do you think Izzy thinks that? Is she right or wrong? If you have nightmares, is it worth sharing them with a trusted adult or friend? Izzy thinks only she will notice the colours have gone. What is the author trying to do here?

“He smiled sadly and turned his gaze in the direction of the mural. I waited for him to say something, but his expression didn’t change. It was obvious he couldn’t see that the colours had disappeared. I felt lonelier than ever.” (page 69)

Discuss: Do you think that Izzy’s Dad can’t see the colours have disappeared, or do you think he too doesn’t want to admit it? Explain your reasoning.

Activity: Sometimes it’s hard to talk about something that’s upsetting you, but usually a trouble shared is easier to fix. Can you think of when it was hard to share something? How else might you express what’s upsetting you? Izzy uses art and drama as ways to express herself. Think of advice

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you could offer your friend if something was troubling them but they couldn't tell you how. Brainstorm a mind map of ideas on how to express your troubles. Eg. Art, music, diary writing etc.

Read page 90-92 again. Izzy says "sometimes I feel like I can't really do anything - I can't change anything."

Discuss: Why does Izzy feel powerless?

Activity: Think about the changes you can effect, and the things you can't. Have you ever felt frustrated about something and wondered how you could make a difference? Choose a cause you believe in and draw up a plan for how to effect change. This could be a global issue, a local issue or even a personal issue. What methods could you use? A petition, or writing a letter to an MP. Have you ever joined a protest march? Write a list of ways you could make a difference to causes you care about. If it's a personal cause, could you write a letter to someone, make a speech, even just start a conversation?

Later in the novel, Toby asks for help:

"I was surprised when he said: 'Could you give me a hand?' (page 136)

Discuss: Why is Izzy surprised? Why does it take so long for Toby to ask her for help directly?

Activity: Toby confides in Izzy about his own disability and accident, what he can do and what he can't. Write your name in the middle of a piece of paper, then around you draw lines to your own support network - the people around you in whom you can confide. (A Mind Map) Think about what you can share with each person. Is it different? How do they help you? Are they peers/friends/family or adults in authority?

Look at the author's comparisons between Spike and Toby, and even Izzy:

"He seemed somehow more solid than before. He'd grown, and his feathers were less fluffy. He flexed his wings slightly, reminding me that one day, of course, he would be able to fly. He no longer seemed as if he would be blown away in a single gust." (page 139)

and:

"He *was* weak," Toby answered. "But you can't automatically assume he won't make it." He sounded mad. (page 90).

Discuss: Why is Toby mad? Think about what Spike might represent? How does Toby identify with Spike? Is Spike like Toby or even like Izzy? Does a person's independence change how you view them?

When Spike grows, Izzy explains:

"He's been through a lot of change, and now he has so many amazing possibilities before him. He can go anywhere he wants." (page 142)

Activity: Look up the story of *The Ugly Duckling*. Explore how the story relates to the story of Izzy.

"But then it turns out that you're stronger than you think. And sometimes you just need a bit of help." (page 171)

Discuss: Izzy says this to her mother, about her mother. But is she really talking about her mother? Think about when in the novel Izzy needs help, and when she accepts it. Think about situations in which you need help. Do you ask for help in all these situations? Explore why.

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Memory and Time

Things fading is a large theme within the book. Izzy's mural that documents key moments in her life seems to be fading as the colours ebb away. But then she looks at her father's mug in the kitchen and the colours on that have faded too - but for a different reason. (page 37)

Discuss: When do things fade? Do physical things fade from overuse? Does memory fade as it becomes more distant? Think about the colour draining from people's faces when they are ill. What does this fading indicate?

When Izzy looks at the display in the history corridor at school, she sees that the colour in the recent pictures of the Year Nine trip to Egypt has faded, making them look more like the older black and white pictures. (page 41)

Discuss: Is Time a colour thief?

Izzy studies Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* in art. (page 68)

Activity: Take a closer look at the painting: https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/1168-2

Discuss: How has Dali used insects in the picture? What do you think they represent?

Dali was interested in the relationship between actual time and remembered time, and represents this in the melting of the many clocks. Einstein said that 'time is relative'.

"Time swung suspended at night; it didn't leak away at its normal speed." (page 151)

Discuss: What do the clocks in the painting represent to you? Think about how you use time. When does it go quickly and when slowly?

"Dreams and clocks were linked to the colour thief. He'd appeared first in a dream, which was really more of a nightmare, and when he'd faded from my mind, the first things I always saw were the luminous numerals on my clock" (page 46-47)

Discuss: Why is time so important to Izzy? Why does she think of her aunt as an old-fashioned watchmaker (page 57)?

"Dali often described his paintings as 'hand-painted dream photographs', he said." (page 109)

Discuss: What is meant by hand-painted dream photograph? Look at the words 'dream' and photograph next to each other. Is this a contradiction in terms? If a photograph is a true representation of fact, is a dream a fiction?

Izzy's Dad interprets the painting:

"It's because sometimes your memories are constantly with you, whether you want them to be or not. Time passes, the clocks move on, but you remain stuck there - your useless, floppy clock always telling the same time. And even if you think you've escaped, your memories always catch up with you."

Discuss: What does he mean by this? Are your memories constantly with you?

Look at pages 98-99. Izzy has a memory of her skiing from when she was quite young, but there's a piece of the memory she can't picture, and she has to get her father to help her solve the mystery.

Activity: Think back to a childhood memory and try to write about it. Then go and ask a parent or

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carer about that memory. Do they remember it differently? Think about how they saw that time from their point of view. Has their memory distorted yours or made you feel differently about it?

Towards the end of the novel, Toby shows Izzy his 'Before Box'. (page 136) Note how it contains feathers of different colours. But also, think about how it captures memories with mementos and pictures.

Activity: If you were making a box about the previous year of your life, what would you put in it? Find an old shoe box and see if you can decorate it stating the year, then fill it with small bits and pieces that remind you of the past year. Attach a small label to each one explaining your reason for it being there.

Language Questions

Discuss: Did you find the book easy to read? Explore your reasons why.

Look at the first chapter again. Explore the different ways the author starts her sentences, the variety of length of sentence, and the amount of dialogue.

Activity: Highlight when Izzy uses her different senses in the first chapter. When does she 'hear' something, 'see' something, 'feel' something? Are there smells and tastes?

Think about how the author makes you feel emotion.

Vocabulary

Izzy's dad likes to make up words using a fusion of other words - such as specsational, which is a mixture of spectacular and sensational.

Activity: Can you have a go at making up a list of ten new words from a combination of other words?

Further Reading

The Colour Thief by Gabriel Alborozo

The Extraordinary Colours of Auden Dare by Zillah Bethell

The White Giraffe series by Lauren St John, including *The Elephant's Tale*

A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness

There May be a Castle by Piers Torday

Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot by Horatio Clare



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