

2016 Kate Greenaway shortlist: Visual Literacy notes

Title: *The Sleeper And The Spindle*

Illustrator: Chris Riddell

Author: Neil Gaiman

Publisher: Bloomsbury

First look

Try to ensure that each member of the shadowing group has a chance to look through *The Sleeper and the Spindle* alone or with a friend before working on the book with the group.

Look through the book together at the images, decorations and other graphic details. Ask the group to point out to each other anything that strikes them as interesting about the artwork.

Start with personal response, (i.e. why they like/dislike something) then move on to the more analytical (what artists have done to create responses from the reader). Chat in pairs or as a group about what they enjoyed about the artwork in *The Sleeper and the Spindle*.

Look again

When the group have discussed their first responses, return to the book; look, think and talk more about the artwork.

In *The Sleeper and the Spindle*, Neil Gaiman has written a story that uses fairytales as inspiration so the story is packed with all the fantastical elements of that genre:

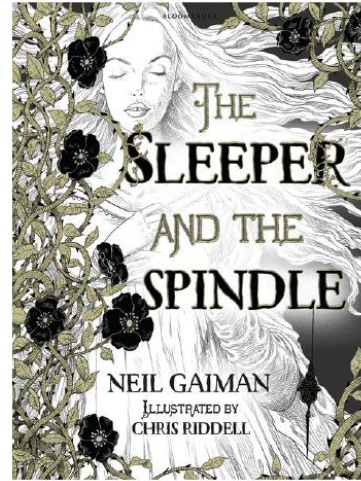
- Archetypal characters with superlative personality traits (bravest, worthiest, most evil or loyal etc.)
- Magical events and objects
- Heroic quests and adventures
- Extreme settings through mountains, forests

Chris Riddell, the illustrator, has been inspired by the fairytale focus to provide drawings of magical characters and creatures that develop and enhance Gaiman's writing.

Look closely at the drawings and at the detailed embellishments on the covers, endpapers and each page.

Discuss what you notice about:

- the use of fine line drawing to depict people, places and objects
- the use of hatching to create textures and shading
- the choice of colours used throughout the book
- recurring images or patterns on each page



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Start by studying page 12 where there is a double page spread with the words *'The queen woke early that morning'* hand written in gold at the top. This is the first time we are introduced to the queen and it is Chris Riddell (i.e. the illustrator not the author) who introduces her to the reader.



Look closely at the picture and comment on what you can see.

The clothes and the armour: Does the dress beside the bed remind you of a headless ghost? Why would a queen have armour and a sword? Do you have questions about what is in the room? For example, what is kept in the strange containers hanging over the bed? Why are golden skulls such prominent features on her bedspread?

What do you deduce from this picture about the character of this queen?

Look at everything

Talk about all the visual aspects of the book including endpapers, font choices, title page and layout. How do these 'extras' to the story contribute to the overall impact of the book?

Interpreting the texts

It is always beneficial, when studying a book, to find ways to get youngsters to fully engage with the whole text. This can be achieved through exploratory tasks and creative responses such as drama and art. The following suggestions may help young readers to become absorbed in the book.

Art

Use a pencil, or black pen, to draw a dwarf or queen; it can be either one you make up yourself or copy one already illustrated in the book.

Chris Riddell talks about his pictures

To hear and see more about the illustrations visit www.theguardian.com and put the following in the search box: *'Chris Riddell's The Sleeper and the Spindle gallery – in pictures.'*

Research (for secondary students)

1. These days it is easy to find stories that transform traditional tales into alternative versions particularly funny adaptations for younger readers. But, do you know the oldest known versions of the fairytales *Snow White* and *The Sleeping Beauty*? See what you can find out online. You may discover that they are not suitable for little children at all.
2. Why are there so many skulls in the illustrations to *The Sleeper and the Spindle*? Look up the phrase **Memento Mori** for a possible answer.

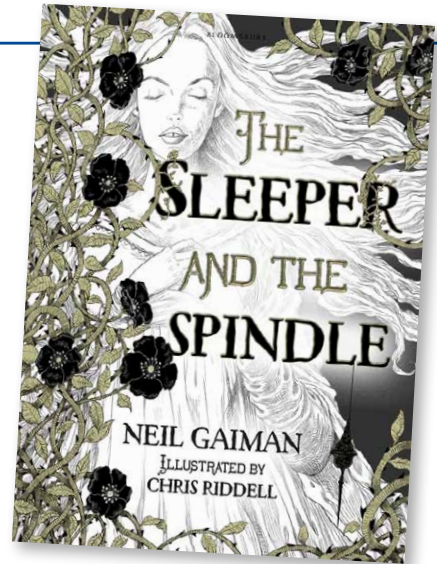


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THE SLEEPER AND THE SPINDLE

by Chris Riddell and Neil Gaiman (author)

Published by Bloomsbury



UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 1: We are all born free and equal. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way.

This book is a darker twist on classic fairy tales and explores the human rights values of justice, equality and solidarity. Claiming her right to equality and to determine her own future, the Queen postpones her wedding to deal with a threat to the neighbouring kingdom; she stands up to a powerful witch in a bid to protect people's right to life and to live freely.

There are no Prince Charmings or knights in shining armour here. Instead the Queen does the rescuing! The villain, the victim and the hero are all women – a reminder that women can step outside their perceived 'roles'. This is clear when the Queen is the one to kiss the sleeping princess – who is revealed to be the witch.

There are human rights that are routinely denied to an individual simply because she's been born a girl. These include being denied the same schooling and education as her male equivalents, and being forced to marry, suffering physical or mental harm.

All over the world, women like the Queen defend their own rights and those of family members, communities or countries, often at great personal risk. They are powerful, brave, intelligent, independent – and more important than ever. So too is Amnesty International's role in helping to protect them from the dangers they face.

For more free teaching resources go to www.amnesty.org.uk/education

THEMES

- Women's rights
- LGBTI rights
- Duty to the community
- Free and full development of the personality

QUESTIONS

- Were you surprised that the Queen rescued the princess?
- What makes the Queen heroic?
- Why does the Queen turn East at the end of the story?

ACTIVITY

- Write and illustrate another adventure in which the Queen is the hero. Where does she go? Who does she meet? How does she save the day?

RESEARCH

- Gather some stories of women who fight for rights.



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