

TEACHING NOTES

Between My Father and the King



by JANET FRAME

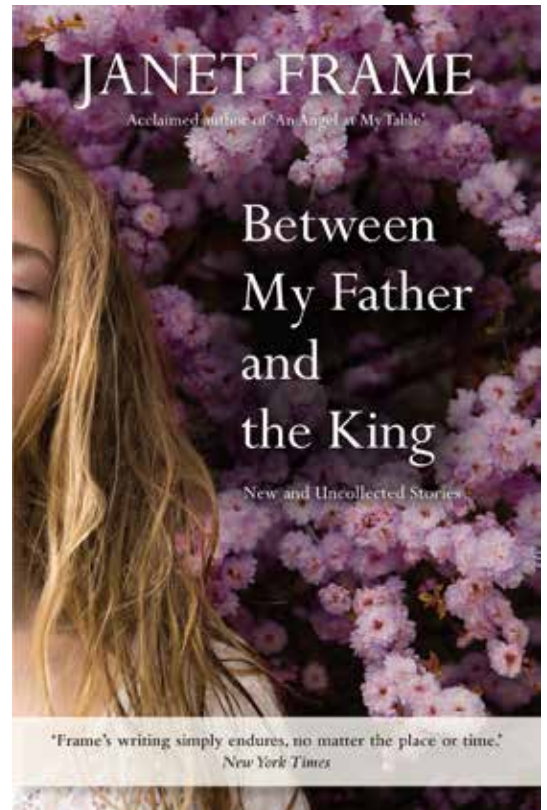
Janet Frame writes evocatively of life and growing up in New Zealand during the mid-twentieth century. Her works have a strong autobiographical flavour, favouring the first person voice, but extend through a broad range of forms, exploring the nature of the short story form.



Year 7

Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1619)

- Consider the representation of time and place in *Between My Father and the King* or *University Entrance*. How does this world differ to your own? Use a graphic organiser to represent your understanding of the similarities and differences.
- Recount a memory from your own childhood which identifies a child's view of the adult world.





Year 8

Recognise, explain and analyse the ways literary texts draw on readers' knowledge of other texts and enable new understanding and appreciation of aesthetic qualities (ACELT1629)

- Read *The Wind Brother* or *The Friday Night World* with reference to the structure of myths and legends. How has Frame utilised the conventions of these genres?
- Compare one, or both, of these stories with *Howl's Moving Castle* or *Ponyo* as modern interpretations of the genre.
- Create a visual representation of either story to illustrate the connection to genre.
- Compose a narrative, exploring an everyday occurrence [rainy weekends, car breakdown, why dogs chase cats] through the style of mythical writing.



Year 9

Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635)

- In *The Birds of The Air* Frame describes a child's response to finally meeting a grandmother of mythical status. Discuss how our impressions of others are formed by the stories we hear about them prior to meeting. How is this 'prejudice'? Why does the child in the story respond as she does?
- Describe a character, or someone you know, through a personal recount of events. What impression is given by this recount?
- Explain how authors creatively use the structures of sentences and clauses for particular effects (ACELA1557)
- Examine *The Spider* through a close reading, with reference to Frame's use of metaphor and description in creating a character sketch. Use the understanding gained to compose your own.



Year 10

Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (ACELT1812)

- *The Night Visitor* reflects on cultural and social prejudices. How is this achieved? Summarise the story and its message and explain to a learning partner.
- *The Atomiser* considers issues raised by the use of atomic weapons. Interpret Frame's position. How is it achieved? Research other texts which have sought to reflect the views of the composer on social, moral or ethical issues. Create a text to demonstrate your developing understanding: short film, PPT, voice recording, etc.

Create literary texts with a sustained 'voice', selecting and adapting appropriate text structures, literary devices, language, auditory and visual structures and features for a specific purpose and intended audience (ACELT1815)

- Choose one of the stories and use it to compose your own: in the style of Frame; as a stimulus; by incorporating one or more element – character, setting, or theme. Post your work to a fan fiction site for feedback. Read and respond to the work of others in your class.



Senior Students

- How is friendship explored in *Sew My Hood, Cut My Hair*? Is your word your bond?
- What killed Ted Polson? Caring for the Flame
- How is point of view manipulated in *The Big Money*?
- *My Tailor is Not Rich* expresses a migrant experience. Compare this story with Peter Skrzynecki's *Felix Skrzynecki* and *Migrant Hostel*. Together they offer a rich insight into another world. What effect do they have on your view?

About the author

Janet Paterson Frame (1924–2004) is New Zealand’s most internationally acclaimed and distinguished author. She received numerous awards, prizes, grants, fellowships and scholarships in New Zealand and abroad, including honorary doctorates from the universities of Otago and Waikato. In 1983 she was awarded a CBE for services to literature, and in 1990 was made a Member of the Order of New Zealand, the country’s highest civil honour. In her lifetime Janet Frame published eleven novels, four collections of short stories, a book of poetry, a children’s book and three volumes of autobiography. Another novel, a poetry collection and a compilation of selected stories have since been published posthumously.



Preface

Between My Father and the King includes some of the best stories Janet Frame ever wrote. More than half of the twenty-eight stories in this volume have never been published before. Of the rest, seven were individually published in Janet Frame’s lifetime but were never included by her in a collection; and another five have been published since her death in 2004. The new stories span almost the entire breadth of Frame’s publishing career, from ‘University Entrance’ (1946), the very first story she published as an adult, to ‘A Distance from Mrs Tiggy-winkle’, written forty years later. They extend the themes and characters of the seventy-one stories that appear in the five previous collections: *The Lagoon*, *The Reservoir*, *Snowman Snowman*, *You are Now Entering the Human Heart* and *Prizes* (also known as *The Daylight and the Dust*).

There are several reasons why these stories have not previously been published. First, we know from Frame’s autobiography that the rejection of the story ‘Gorse is Not People’ by Charles Brasch in 1954 had crushed her: ‘I felt myself sinking into empty despair. What could I do if I couldn’t write? Writing was to be my rescue. I felt as if my hands had been uncurled from their clinging place on the rim of the lifeboat.’ Similarly, just one year later — when she had rallied from the previous year’s setback, had moved to Auckland and was making yet more headway in her career — she proudly showed her latest achievement, ‘An Electric Blanket’, to Frank Sargeson; but after his nitpicking criticism she never offered that story for publication. Taking the experience as a lesson in learning to trust her own judgement about her writing, she also never showed any further work to Sargeson.

Second, at times Frame was so prolific that she found she had a backlog of manuscripts. For instance in 1965 and 1966, when she held first an official and then an ‘unofficial’ Burns Fellowship, her working conditions were so favourable that as well as completing a book of poems, finishing one novel, writing another and starting a third, she also worked on a new

collection of about thirty stories. In May 1966 she reported to Professor Horsman at the University of Otago: 'I'm ahead of myself in publication of my work.' The planned collection never appeared, but Frame did publish individual stories from it such as 'The Bath', 'A Boy's Will' and 'In Alco Hall'. She was scandalised by the knowledge that stories published in prestigious magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, *Mademoiselle* or *Harper's Bazaar* earned her more than some of her publishers offered as an advance for a whole book.

Frame withheld other work because it was based too closely on living people. 'The Silkworms' is an example of a story she called back from an editor for fear of causing offence to its lampooned subject. Some recognisable events from Janet Frame's life recur in her short fiction and her long fiction and even her poetry, and it's interesting to have the opportunity now to compare the way she transforms the same source material for different literary ends. Several of the stories in this volume share their subject matter —

and sometimes also their title — with a chapter or passage in her autobiography, although the material is always treated in a much different way. Frame distinguished clearly between writing fiction inspired by her life and writing autobiography: 'It is harder to write in the autobiographical form. Actually it's *awful*. All those sticky facts to work in. In fiction, one can just go to town.' The story 'Dot' is a good example of the way Frame was able to start with a true life experience and shape and twist it to make fiction, so that it was impossible to tell what was fact and what was imagination.

Later in her life Frame occasionally drew up a proposed table of contents for a new selection of stories; and her lists included the abandoned older typescripts. But once she had moved on from earlier work, she was reluctant to revisit it. It is also true that once she had financial security she was less willing to subject herself to the rigours of publication and the inevitable public attention, for good or otherwise. She had been very disillusioned by the initially hostile reception to her last book *The Carpathians* (1988), even though the critical tide on that novel subsequently turned so much in its favour that it won not only the New Zealand Book Award for Fiction but also the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book.

Whatever the motivation, we know that Frame deliberately left work unpublished during her lifetime. She often remarked of this decision, '... I think posthumous publication is the only form of literary decency left.'

Pamela Gordon & Denis Harold

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