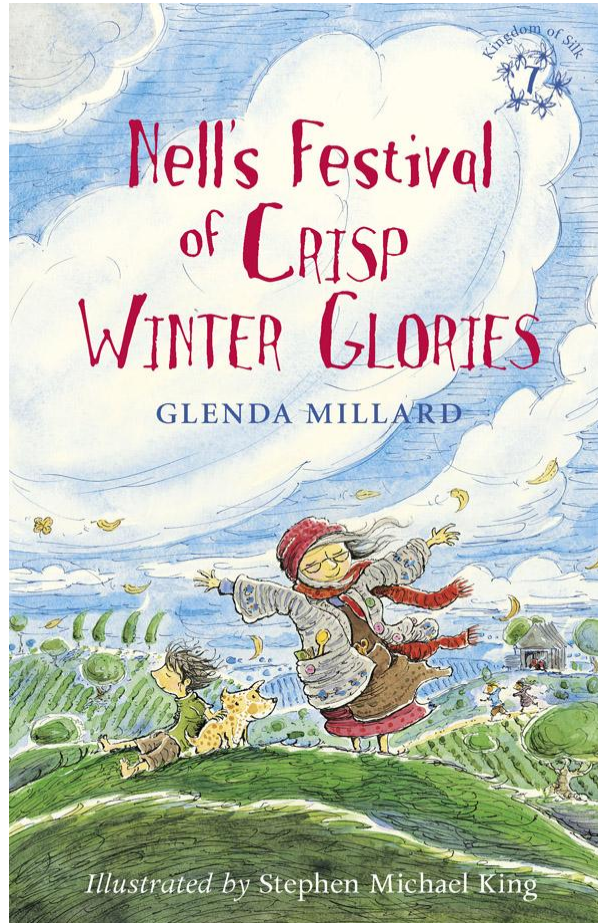


***Nell's Festival Of Crisp Winter Glories* by Glenda Millard**

**Illustrated by Stephen Michael King**

**TEACHERS NOTES**

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**Notes by: Robyn Sheahan-Bright**

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## Introduction

‘The Silks understood that language grows more slowly than movement and that dance has a way of saying things we cannot find words for.’ (p 2)

Perry Angel has heard many of Nell’s stories about the dances she loved in her youth, and how much she particularly loved dancing with her beloved Johnny Silk. In this final instalment in the *Kingdom of Silk* series, Perry resolves to organise a dance so that Nell can dance with Jenkins, now that her husband Johnny is long gone. The Silks and the Cameron’s Creek community love the idea, and plans soon expand into a festival encompassing the dance. But an accident challenges that dream, and the Silks hold grave fears for Nell’s future.

*Nell’s Festival of Crisp Winter Glories* is the seventh and final book in Glenda Millard’s enchanting *Kingdom of Silk* series illustrated in a delicately suggestive style by Stephen Michael King. It revolves around the Silk family and the complicated web of connections and strong bonds which they have made between them.

Ben, like Perry, was a foster child who came to live with Nell Silk after she lost her beloved family. Ben and Annie Silk have had seven children, although the last – their beloved Tishkin – was sadly taken away from them as a baby. Griffin is the only boy, and is the youngest of the Silks, with five sisters known as the Rainbow Girls: Scarlet, Indigo, Violet, Amber and Saffron. They also share their home with Perry Angel, who arrived at the Kingdom of Silk, with a suitcase inscribed with his name ‘Perry Maxwell, God’s Dearest Angel’. Nell still lives with them all, and the children love her. Layla Elliott is Griffin’s friend, and has become an ‘honorary’ member of the family. And at the end of the book, Perry’s real mother Sunday Lee forms another branch of the family with Sparrow and their new baby. Finally, Nell welcomes Henry Jenkins into the family as well.

In each book a different character becomes the focus, and here it is Perry and his love for Nell. Will Perry be successful in secretly organising Nell’s Festival of Crisp Winter Glories?

## About the Author

**Glenda Millard** has written seven books in the *Kingdom of Silk* Series:

1. *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*
2. *Layla, Queen of Hearts*
3. *Perry Angel's Suitcase*
4. *All the Colours of Paradise*
5. *Plum Puddings and Paper Moons*
6. *The Tender Moments of Saffron Silk.*
7. *Nell's Festival of Crisp Winter Glories.*

She says that she 'has loved reading and being read to from early age.' As a child, her more robust pursuits included billy-cart racing, tree-climbing and attempting to fly. She used to dream that she could fly and on windy days she could be found at the football oval with her arms outstretched, poised to be whisked away, or sometimes balanced precariously on the roof of her Nana's shed. Neither of these techniques worked. Even an impressive bandage around her wrist, a day home from school and a ride in the council grader was poor compensation for the spectacular failure of her launch attempt from the high-up swing at school. Glenda left school at 15 and didn't discover the joy of writing until nearly thirty years later.

Glenda was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award 2004 as well as receiving the Honour Book Award for the CBCA awards that same year for her book *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*. Her picture book *Kaito's Cloth* was shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Award 2005, and *Layla, Queen of Hearts* was shortlisted for the Younger Readers CBCA Award in 2007, and winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award in 2007. Her most recent novel *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark* is for lower secondary readers and was winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for YA Fiction in 2009 and has been included in the prestigious international IBBY Honour Book List in 2011. Her picture book *Isabella's Garden* illustrated by Rebecca Cool was a CBCA Honour Book Award and was shortlisted the Queensland Premier's Literary Award 2010. *All the Colours of Paradise* was also shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Award 2010. *Mbobo Tree* illustrated by Annie White is another of her latest

picture books.

Glenda has written picture books for very young readers as well as novels for lower secondary readers. Her books are beautifully written, and are an inventive mixture of whimsy and reality which will entrance both children and the adults who read her books with them.

## **About the Illustrator**

**Stephen Michael King** says that he can remember drawing all of his life. Growing up in suburban Sydney in an environment where his imagination and creativity were nurtured, he wrote stories, dreamed of illustrating a book and of one day working with Walt Disney Studios. When he was nine, Stephen went partially deaf but his hearing loss was unnoticed for a number of years. During this time he began to immerse himself in art where he could communicate without words. Due to his deafness he found school a traumatic experience which failed to prepare him for the future. However, he was eventually employed as a children's library assistant and this job made use of his natural affinity with children and helped pave the way to future opportunities. In 1990 he was employed by the Walt Disney Studios in Surry Hills and he subsequently worked as a book designer and illustrator for Scholastic Australia.

Watercolours, black ink, oil painting and sculpture are Stephen's favourite media, and he has now produced a number of successful books. His first picture book, *The Man Who Loved Boxes*, won the Family Therapy Association Award and was shortlisted for the Crichton Award in 1996. It has since been published around the world and translated into a number of languages. In 1997 Stephen collaborated with Robin Morrow over *Beetle Soup* - Australian Stories and Poems for Children, which was shortlisted for the 1997 CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers. *Patricia* was released in 1998 and in 1999 both *The Little Blue Parcel* and *Henry and Amy* were shortlisted by the CBC for the Picture Book of the Year Award.

Some of Stephen's most recent books are *The Pocket Dogs* and *Pocket Dogs Go on Holiday* (with Margaret Wild), *Emily Loves to Bounce*, *Millie, Jack and the Dancing Cat*, *Mutt Dog!, You!* and *Never Ever Before*. *Applesauce and the Christmas Miracle* (text Glenda Millard) and *Leaf* were both shortlisted for the

2009 CBCA Early Childhood Book of the Year Award. He has an excellent website where you can find out all about his work.  
<http://stephenmichaelking.com/bio.html>

## **Author Inspiration**

Glenda Writes:

‘When I was a little girl, I lived halfway down Elizabeth Street in Campbell’s Creek. At one end of the street my Nana lived and towards the other end was my Grandma’s house. Consequently, I spent many happy hours with them both and although they were very different both in upbringing and personality, I loved each of them dearly.

Many years later I wrote Nell into the Silk Books. But it wasn’t until I was asked for my input into the subsequent teacher notes, that I realised Nell epitomised all that I loved about my grandmothers.

As the series expanded, I became very conscious of Nell’s aging. The books reflect on events that happen in real families and how the Silks respond to them. Sadly, death is part of that reality. Over the years, readers have begged me not to let Nell die, so I understood there was some expectation and dread this might happen. It was there at the back of our minds, mine and my readers, this apprehension and inevitability of loss. Perhaps it weighed more heavily on me at the time of writing this book, since my parents were becoming increasingly frail.

*Nell’s Festival of Crisp Winter Glories* is the last book of the series. I had to say goodbye. From the outset it was a difficult book to write and I struggle even with these notes. I wanted to prepare my readers, to gently guide them to an awareness that Nell’s time was coming to an end. Letting go is hard to do. I don’t know if one ever can be. I wasn’t ready. I didn’t know that my Dad would pass away before this book was published.

Perhaps in a sense I was subconsciously preparing myself. I wanted to comfort and reassure my readers with an understanding that beyond the closing pages, Perry Angel is now a confident, competent and well adjusted member of the Silk family. I want their hearts to dance with his. I want them to know that

there is much richness and wisdom and joy to be had by embracing and interacting with our elderly. I want them to know that the Silk family will be alright whatever comes, for as Nell says, *'Even in Winter there are glories to be found.'*

## Study Notes

### Themes

The themes in this book include: **Imagination, Families and Foster Families, Love and Grief, Feelings, Individual Choice and Responsibility, Different Cultures, Memories, Secrets, Community** [See also **Thematic Activities and Discussion Points** in **Study Notes** below.]

### WRITING STYLE

**Interpretation and Reading Comprehension** is also encouraged by this text which is enhanced by **drawings** which will stimulate both **Visual Literacy Skills** and **Creative Arts Activities**. [See also **Activities and Discussion Points** in **Study Notes** below.]

**The following activities and discussion points** relate to the **themes, writing style** and to other curriculum areas such as **Interpretation and Reading Comprehension, Visual Literacy** and **Creative Arts**.

## **A. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:**

- **Imagination**

*Discussion Point and Activity:* Each of the books in the series celebrate the joy of the imagination. When the title of the festival is suggested by Perry, some people in the community have trouble understanding how or why they might celebrate the bleakness of winter. 'They breathed timidly into tightly wrapped scarves instead of blasting dragonly plumes at the wild grey steeds that thundered across blueberry skies. When occasionally they ventured out on frosty mornings they saw only grim, grey drips on barbed-wire fences, where the Silks saw sparkling fence diamonds.'(p 44) Discuss the imagination with your students. Encourage them to talk about their favourite 'imaginings'. Have them write a brief description of something they've imagined or dreamed which was particularly memorable for them. They might then like to draw it as well.

*Discussion Point:* 'The old people who belong to this part of the land say the water is earth's tears for all she has lost. They say that once you have sipped from the weeping water you will see things as they should be.'(p 35) Many aspects of the local area are imbued with magic by the strength of the Silks' belief. Discuss things which you consider to be magical.

- **Families and Foster Families**

*Discussion Point:* A strong message in this series is that families are born and also made. The Silks have a large and much loved family of children but lost their baby Tishkin. Ben was a foster child to Nell after she lost her daughters Katie and Ella and her husband Johnny. Perry's real mother Sunday Lee was not able to care for a baby when she had him as a teenager. Now that she is older, and knows that Perry is safe with the Silks, she, too, has been able to form a family with Sparrow. And at the end of this novel their baby is named by Perry. Discuss with students the many ways families are made (with sensitivity regarding individual students' situations).

- **Love and Grief**

*Discussion Point:* Grief hangs over this series as much as love does. For just as love unites us so does grief. Everyone in the Silk family has had sadness or loss to recover from. Discuss grief and how it is overcome. (This discussion also

requires sensitivity, as students may have experienced recent loss or bereavement.)

*Discussion Point:* Love is like a strong central core in the Kingdom of Silk. It holds everyone together even in the direst of times. It rescued Perry from the darkness of being an unwanted child. It has helped Nell to overcome her grief over the loss of her children and husband, and the Silks's grief in losing Tishkin. When Pearl Brady wrote a letter and sent the freesia bulbs (p 49) to Nell and Johnny on their wedding day, she was translating her grief in losing her husband by symbolically passing on something of that love to this newly wedded couple. Discuss.

*Discussion Point:* Nell and Henry's marriage vows are taken from *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. What favourite quotation would you read at such a ceremony to express your love?

*Discussion Point:* The wedding is followed by a companion ceremony in to the naming of baby Nellie-Rose Lee Sparrow. This is a celebration of love but it is also perhaps symbolic of the impending grief attached to the fact that Nell will eventually die, but will live on in her family's memories and in her namesake. Discuss.

- **Feelings**

*Discussion Point:* 'Sometimes even grown-up people can't find words for the feelings in their hearts.' (p 4) Do you ever have trouble expressing your feelings? Layla's mother Mrs Elliott (pp 78-9) has never spoken to her of her sadness in losing her own mother when Layla was just six years old. The Silks' love for Nell reminds her of this, though, and she resolves to show Layla some photos of her mother when they return home. Can speaking about your feelings make them easier to deal with?

- **Individual Choice and Responsibility**

*Discussion Point:* Every member of this family has a role to play. But they are not forced to do anything; they are expected to make their own decisions. Discuss.

- **Different Cultures**

*Discussion Point:* Mr Kadri's and Anik's families are from another country and have migrated to this one. Discuss the challenges involved in resettling such as learning a new language, understanding local customs, adapting to a new system of education, finding work etc.

- **Memories**

*Discussion Point:* 'Jenkins told Perry he had had many empty hours when his Juliette died and that becoming Perry's personal assistant at school was one of the best things that had ever happened to him.' (p 30) Discuss with students some of the best things they have ever had happen to them and why they were the best.

*Activity:* 'On the way home, Nell decided she was going to start writing all her rememberings into a book, just in case she ever forgot them.' (p 53) Does writing something down help you to treasure your memories? Encourage students to write their own 'Memory Books'.

*Activity:* Throughout this series, food has been symbolic of memories. In this novel there is a reference to previous symbolic references to food in: 'Hilde Larsson said she would make Lussekatter buns and Violet asked Amber to make an Armenian Love Cake.' (p 27) Encourage your students to write down a favourite recipe and why it means so much to them. Discuss how place, time, and the people we are with can influence how we feel about a particular food. Discuss the significance of certain foods in various cultures. Create a Class Recipe Book of everyone's favourite recipes, including each personal note, illustrated by each student, and then copy it to share.

- **Secrets**

*Discussion Point:* 'There are good secrets and bad secrets. Good secrets always make you feel happy. If you feel bad, it is a sign you shouldn't keep the secret to yourself.' (p 54) Discuss this quotation in relation to student's own lives.

- **Community**

*Discussion Point:* Everyone pitches in to make the dance and festival a success. When the bureaucrats come to assess the Silk's home for Nell's return from hospital, they are critical of its facilities. So the whole community of Cameron's Creek pitches in to build the extension and to tidy up the 'dangerous' aspects

of the house. What other incidents or events demonstrate the strength of this community?

**Discussion Point:** Festivals are celebrations of communities. 'Annie and Indigo imagined an art exhibition. Layla imagined a fairy-floss machine, toffee apples and donkeys pulling children in brightly painted carts. Others saw a lucky dip, a merry-go-round, egg and spoon races.' (p 39) What would you have at a local festival if you were organising one?

## B. WRITING STYLE ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Metaphor**

*Activity:* This novel is full of elaborate and often extended metaphors such as: 'A wink is like a smile: a song with no sound, a dance with no steps, happiness without words. Stars wink because they are too far away for us to hear the sound of their happiness. They are happy simply because they are stars.' (p 17) Here we are asked to imagine that a star has feelings. Create a piece of metaphorical writing like this.

- **Simile**

*Activity:* One of the beauties of this series is that the figurative language used is so inventive and imaginative, just like the Silks themselves! Instead of using clichéd similes such as 'as hot as hell' the book contains interesting similes like these:

'Steam from the hot tea curled like drakes' tails in the cold air.'(p 15)

'The mist lifted late and returned early in the Valley of the Unicorns. It tasted like a baby's kiss, felt like damp velvet and smelt like the beginning of time. It hung like a magic cloak from ghostly gum trees and floated like an angel's wing above the crystal stream.' (p 35)

'The children, who had gathered beside their parents, linked hands like a small and crooked picket fence, protecting the home they loved.' (p 101) Try to write like this in a story you are creating.

- **Poems**

*Activity:* 'Nell is teaching Perry about poems called haiku. She says that if Perry listens carefully, his music will help him write poetry. Sometimes the notes Perry hears are sad, sometimes they are peaceful and other times happy, but always they are beautiful. He wants to write poems about old dogs, woolly jumpers, pussy willows and red galoshes. He will make a book of them to have and to hold and he will call it *Little Love Poems to the Kingdom of Silk.*'(p 22) Invite your students to create their own collection of love poems to the Kingdom of Silk.

- **List Making**

*Activity:* When Saffron and Perry call a meeting with Scarlet, Mr Kadri and Anik they create lists of things to do, people to invite, people who might help. What other lists might be useful in organising the festival? A list can also be great story starters or poem starters too. eg. Make a list of all the words which might describe what happens at a dance. Then create a poem using those words.

*Activity:* 'Red galoshes, crunchy footsteps, frosted grass and fence diamonds were just a few of Nell's favourite things.' (p 43) Make a list of your own favourite things. Listen to the song 'These are a Few of My Favourite Things' on YouTube <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfbB0p-yyLAand>> to get students into the mood for this activity!

- **Story Starters**

*Activity:* When Nell is hurt and taken to hospital, it is described as 'The last of the golden days' (p 28 ). Start a story with this phrase and see what you come up with.

- **Author Study**

*Activity:* Study Glenda Millard's other works, and discuss and compare her writing style.

## **C. INTERPRETATION AND READING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:**

- **Series Writing**

*Discussion Point:* When Glenda Millard begins each book in the series, how much does she need to tell the reader about what has gone before, in case they haven't read the rest of the series? How does she inform the reader about what has happened in previous books, in this latest one?

*Activity:* This is the final book in the series. But try to imagine what might happen in a sequel. Write a synopsis of that sequel. Make up your own title for the sequel too.

- **Series Illustration**

*Discussion Point:* How important is the continuity provided by the illustrator who has illustrated the series? Why do you think Stephen Michael King's illustrations work so well with Glenda Millard's text? How might it have changed if, for example, someone else had illustrated the series in a different style? Create your own drawing of Perry, for example?

- **Characters**

*Activity:* There are several things which happen in the book which show how much Nell is loved by people in this community and her family. How does Ben feel about her, for example, or Henry Jenkins?

*Discussion Point:* The characters in the Silk family are each very distinctive. Make a list of each of them and what makes them unique.

- **Naming**

*Activity:* Layla invented the 'Day of Cake and Thankfulness' for Perry, and Perry invents 'Nell's Festival of Crisp Winter Glories.' Make up your own title for a special day in your life.

- **Chapter Headings**

*Discussion Point:* Discuss the titles of these chapters. How do they relate to the action in each chapter?

*Activity:* After reading the story, imagine another event or character development which might have been included in it, and create a new short chapter to be included in the story. Make up a title for the chapter as well.

## **D. VISUAL LITERACY AND ILLUSTRATION ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:**

- **Drawing**

*Discussion Point:* Ben is an artist and Perry loves to draw as well. Look at some of the drawings in this book. The artist Stephen Michael King uses watercolour overlaid on very fluid suggestive drawings. How does the artist create a sense of movement and what is the central focus of each drawing?

*Activity:* Invite your students to interpret one of the images in the book in a new way, by changing the perspective, focus, foregrounding or some other aspect of the image.

*Activity:* The wedding at the end of the book is described beautifully. Draw your own pictures of the wedding party including the gorgeously dressed bridesmaids and pages.

- **Colours**

*Discussion Point:* 'Its name was Bluephyre and it was the colour of a fairy wren.' (p 18). Colours can have very interesting names and can remind us of all sorts of favourite things. They are also related to our feelings or moods. They can be symbolic too. eg Green is for growing things; red is for royalty; black is for despair etc. Make a list of your favourite words for colours and what they mean to you.

*Activity:* Colours are referred to often in this text, in the names of the Rainbow Girls and in many lovely descriptions. eg 'eyes bluer than starlings' eggs' (p 18 ). Make a list of some of the lovely phrases which use colour suggestively.

*Activity:* Flowers are mentioned often in this text as well. Paint a picture of some of the blooms which are named or described (eg tulips or freesias), making sure to use colours which are appropriate to them.

- **Book Cover**

*Activity:* Covers need to convey a lot about a book's contents. Examine Stephen Michael King's cover image of Nell, Perry and Blue the dog on a hilltop

joyfully enjoying the wind, and the views of the Kingdom of Silk behind them. Then design a new cover for this book.

- **Design a Label**

*Activity:* Design a label for the bottles of 'magic' water which Ben collects regularly from Tipperary Springs.

- **Draw the Silks' Home**

*Activity:* Create an image of the house in which the Silks live based on the descriptions in the book. (Don't forget to include the garden and the new extension!) This does not have to be a faithfully designed plan, but rather a creative response to the text. It will be interesting to see how individual students interpret this image.

- **Illustrator Study**

*Activity:* Study Stephen Michael's King's other works, and discuss and compare his illustration style.

## **E. CREATIVE ARTS ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS:**

*Activity:* **Organise an ‘old-fashioned’ dance.**

*Activity:* **Decorate the ‘hall’ or room or any other space, in the fashion of previous or olden times.**

*Activity:* **Make paper chains and Japanese lanterns from butchers’ paper to decorate** the hall, and **create floral arrangements** out of flowers which people bring from their gardens.

*Activity:* **Have everyone in the class bake some of the things Nell remembers from her youth** such as ‘butterfly cakes, cream kisses and ginger fluff sponges. Fruit punch was ladled from large cut-glass bowls into tiny matching cups.’ (p 9) or some of the things the organising committee decide to make such as pinwheel sandwiches.

*Activity:* **Learn some of the old-fashioned dances** such as the Tennessee Waltz, Gypsy Tap, or the Pride of Erin.

*Activity:* **Make costumes and posies of flowers to wear.**

*Activity:* **Organise music played on a squeeze-box, harmonica, violin and or bagpipes.**

*Activity:* **Design an invitation to the dance** (see Perry’s invitation p 18) **and a poster advertising the festival.**

*Activity:* **Create a Classroom Display of some of the stories and pictures you’ve created**, inspired by the *Kingdom of Silk* series.

*Activity:* When Nell goes to hospital the Cameron’s Creek community send her a book full of messages. **Make your own Message Book.** What would each member of the community write in this book? Create a visual display, too, of what people in Cameron’s Creek would write to her, and use any possible technique such as pop-ups, origami, or any medium which you are inspired to create with.

## CONCLUSION

This last instalment in the *Kingdom of Silk* series is such an exquisitely moving conclusion that it is hard to accept that this will be the last we will read of the Silks. But it is a series about feelings, memories and histories which will never end, since they will stay in the reader's imagination. Like the earlier books, this one is a skilful blend of the imagination and of reality; of whimsical charm and old-fashioned common sense; of family loyalty; of community spirit; of grief and loss – and most of all it's a celebration of love. At the end of each book, one is left with an enormous sense of contentment and peace.

'And Perry Angel knows, without being told, that the world is as it should be.'

(p 133)