

TINTINNABULA

TEACHERS NOTES

Written by Margo Lanagan
and illustrated by Rovina Cai

Published by Little Hare in October 2017

SYNOPSIS

In wild times and in wartime, in times of fear and illness, I go to Tintinnabula, where soft rains fall.

Tintinnabula, written by Margo Lanagan and illustrated by Rovina Cai, is exquisite. The lyrical narrative, soothing in its rhyme and repetition, explores the ways that we can find peace in 'a bright bare' world. When our physical landscape can't offer calm, we must turn to our inner landscape – 'It's my own self who rings and waits and sings.'

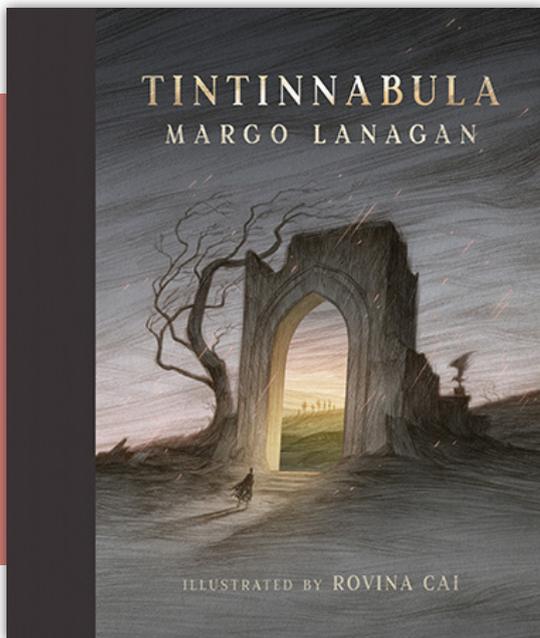
Rovina Cai's illustrations are mesmerizing – Romantic, Gothic, Medieval. They bring to mind the work of Caspar Friedrich and mythologies like 'The Wild Hunt'. She portrays the terrible times we experience as beasts, as ruins, as jagged landscapes. They're archetypal, and so students will feel a connection to them through dream and popular culture.

The book is a rich source of study in the classroom. Margo Lanagan has dedicated the book 'For war children everywhere' and the text offers a way into the impact of conflict on children and young adults.

But *Tintinnabula* is not only about or relevant for war children. The idea of finding a place of peace within us is critical for everyone. There's scope for much class discussion about identity, belonging, grief and hope.

The text provides opportunities to study literary techniques – rhyme, rhythm, repetition, alliteration, allegory and symbolism. (And much more!) The illustrations, rich with meaning, are wonderful jumping-off points for writing – creative, descriptive, personal and persuasive.

Tintinnabula is a book rich with ideas, perfect for classroom study, with activities across the strands.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margo Lanagan writes novels and short stories – mainly fantastic ones. Her work has won a slew of awards, including four World Fantasy Awards, two premier's awards and two CBCA awards, and been translated into many languages. The first two volumes of the *Zeroes* YA superheroes trilogy (written with Scott Westerfield and Deborah Biancotti) were *New York Times* bestsellers, and the series concludes in September with the third volume.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Rovina Cai is an illustrator from Melbourne. Her work is often inspired by the past; from fairytales to gothic novels, these stories resonate with her because they bring a little bit of magic and wonder to the present day. Rovina has exhibited and worked internationally with clients across a variety of genres, illustrating books, magazines, posters and even a video game.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

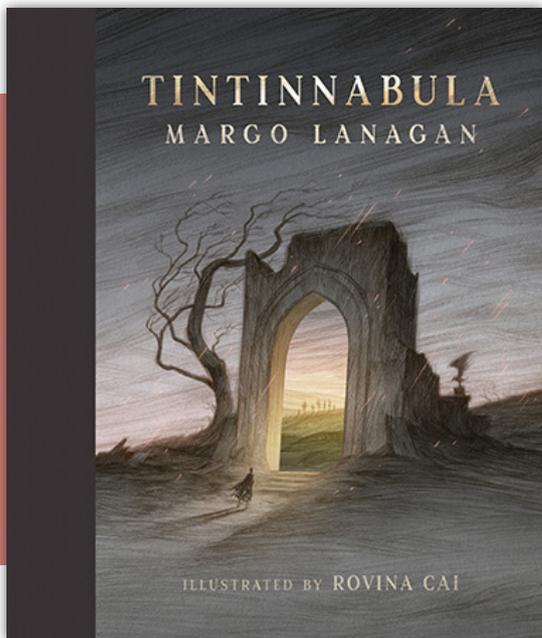
As a class, discuss the word 'Tintinnabula'. What do you *think* it might mean? What does it sound like? Create a list of possible meanings for this word.

As a class, discuss the cover illustrations.

- What feelings does the cover evoke? How does it evoke these feelings?
- How does the illustrator use light and shade on the cover? How does the light and shade on the cover make you feel?
- Discuss the figure in the illustration. How does the figure's size make you feel?

This is an incredibly beautiful and evocative illustration. Spend ten minutes brainstorming some ideas for a short story, based on the cover.

Find the definition of 'tintinabulum'. Sounds can often be sources of peace. As a class, brainstorm sounds that make you feel calm.



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READING ACTIVITIES

'*Tintinnabula* is a story about moving from discomfort to peace.'

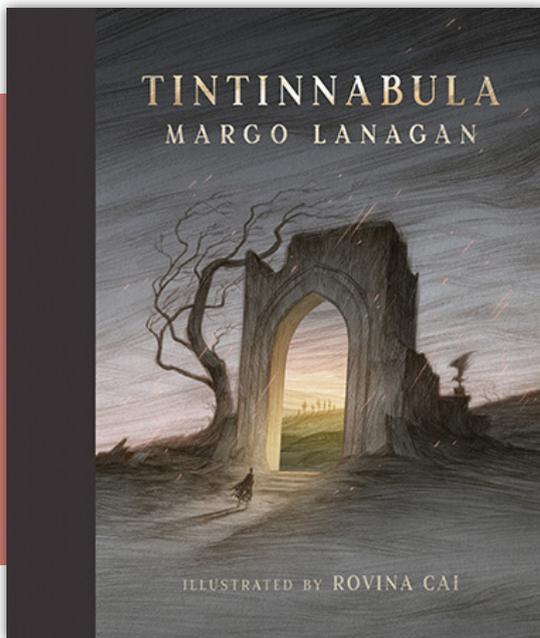
Create a mood board to illustrate the people, places, colours, songs or activities that make you feel at peace. Share this with the class.

Read over the text again, locating examples of alliteration. Read these aloud. How does this repetition make you feel? Why might Margo Lanagan have chosen to use this technique? (Consider the soothing effect of words such as *cool* and *calming*. Consider too, how repetition and lyrical language can be calming – how we speak softly to those in anguish, or sing soft lullabies to children.)

Is there a rhyming scheme? As a class, read through the text and mark where the rhymes occur. Is there a pattern? How does the rhythm make you feel?

Find one example of personification in the text. Find one example of personification in the images.





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ILLUSTRATIONS

Choose one illustration and describe the mood, giving reasons for your answer.

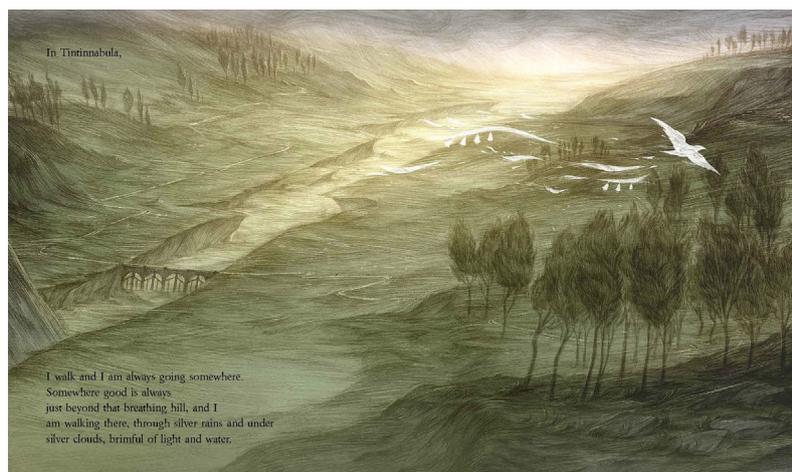
If the illustrations in this book had a soundtrack, what would it be? Make a list of songs that reflect the tone of each picture.

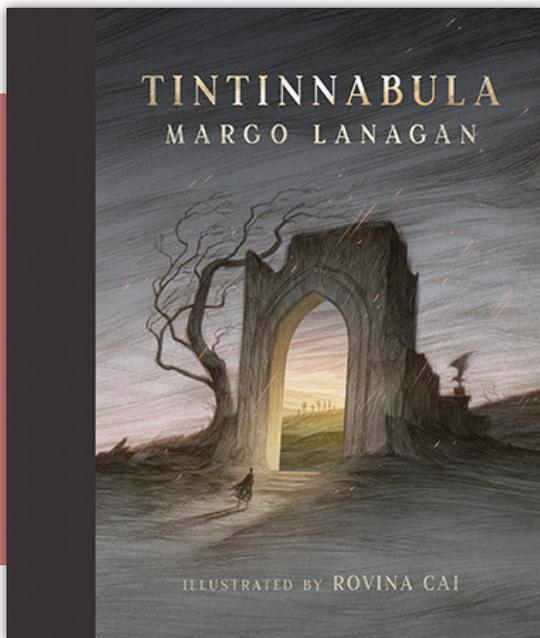
Research Caspar Friedrich, finding answers to the questions below.

- In what time period was he painting?
- What type of paintings is he most famous for? Find some examples.
- Find and note the definition of Gothic architecture.
- Friedrich is best known for his allegorical landscapes. What is an allegory? What is an allegorical landscape?

In what ways are the illustrations in *Tintinnabula* allegorical? (What ideas do the illustrations present to the reader?)

- Compare and contrast Friedrich's work with the illustrations in *Tintinnabula*.
- Why might the illustrator have used images such as ruins, bridges, birds and demons? Why might she have referenced monuments that are massive or monolithic? What might these things symbolise?





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THEMES

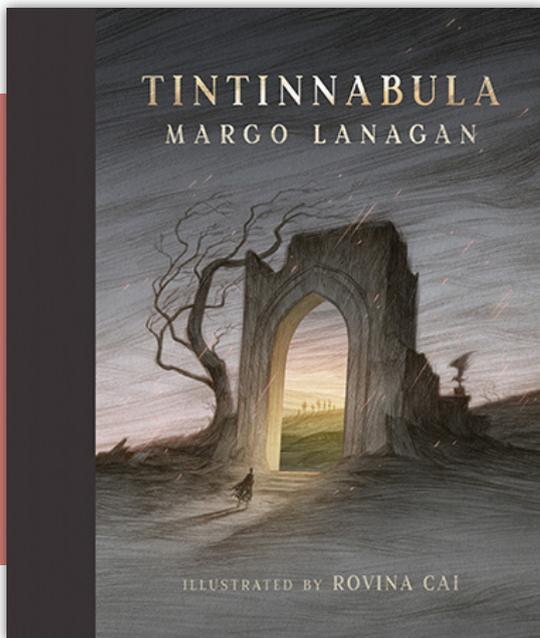
The text and the images of *Tintinnabula* combine to make a powerful story. As a class, brainstorm the themes of this picture book. Some key themes are listed below.

- Peace
- War
- Fear
- Isolation
- Independence
- Depression
- Hope
- Flight
- Freedom
- Violence
- Guilt
- Seeking asylum

Both the text and the images combine to explore these themes. Choose one page of the book and make notes on how the images and text highlight a particular theme or themes.

You might comment on some of the questions listed below.

- How do the colours reflect and highlight the theme/s?
- How does the placement of text highlight or reinforce the theme/s?
- What lines in the text are the most powerful examples of the theme/s?



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CHARACTER

This picture book is much shorter than a story, but it still follows the familiar story structure.

- What does the main character need?
- What are the obstacles that prevent the character from getting what they want?
- How does the main character find the peace that is needed?

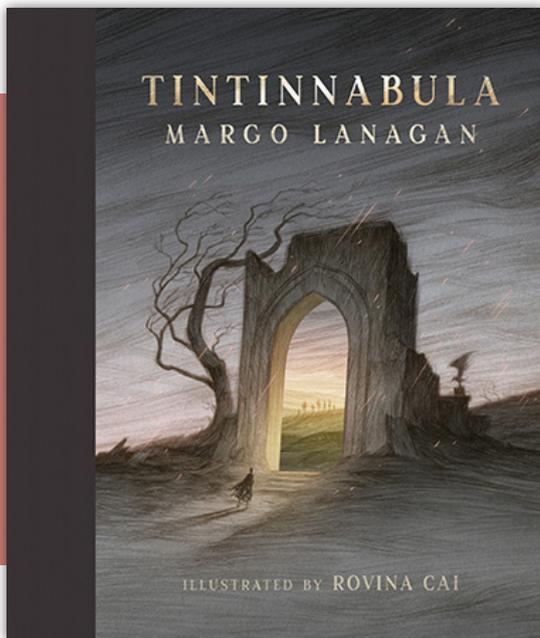
Why might Margo Lanagan have chosen to keep her main character nameless? How does this affect you as a reader?

The book presents the inner landscape of a character. We see how the character feels inside. Choose a character from the novel you're reading, and show, through pictures or newspaper and magazine clippings, how they are feeling at one point in the novel.

SETTING

As a class, discuss the questions below.

- Where is the story set?
- How are the settings in the book presented as both physical and emotional places?
- The book's setting vividly evokes how the main character feels, at times. The settings are contrasts, showing anguish and peace. Choose two contrasting emotions (happiness/sadness, fear/safety, love/hate) and illustrate them with contrasting images, music or words.



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LAYOUT

Study the layout of the book, and use the information to help you with the creation of your own picture book (see the 'Seeking Asylum' activity below).

Questions to consider in your study:

- Who would you say is the audience of this book?
- What is the word count?
- How many pages are there?
- How many pages have story text on them? (Consider how many pages are needed for endpapers, copyright information and the title page.)

SEEKING ASYLUM

In groups, choose a region of the world where children are damaged by war. Research the impact of conflict on the children in this area, noting how things such as physical health, mental health, education, family life and social life are impacted by conflict.

Margo Lanagan has dedicated this book 'For war children everywhere'. Design and create your own picture book that raises awareness of the impact of war on children.

OR

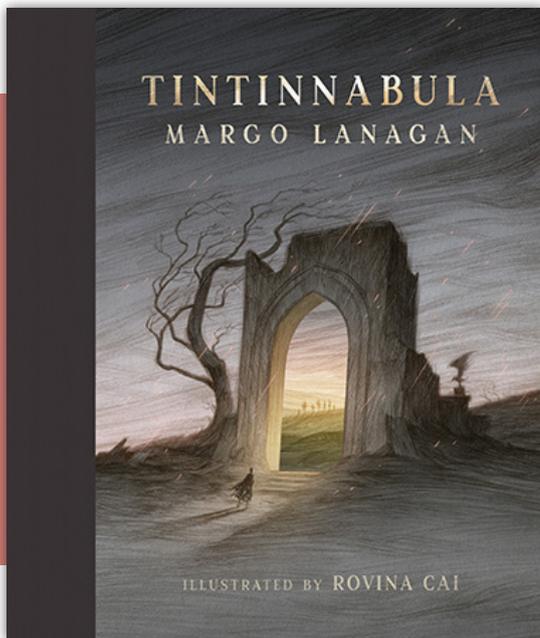
Choose one of the themes in the book, and use this as the basis of your own picture book. Use the format of this book as a guide. (See the above section on layout.)

EXTRA WRITING ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the illustrations in the book and use it for the basis of a short story.

Write about a time when you felt afraid or lost.

Write a review of this picture book, explaining why it is an important book for children and adults to read.



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COMPARISON TEXTS

Picture Books

Tan, Shaun. *The Red Tree*, Hachette Australia, 2001 (Depression, peace, anxiety)

Marsden, John and Ottley, Matt. *Home and Away*, Lothian Australia, 2008 (Courage, seeking asylum, war)

Foreman, Michael, *A Child's Garden*, Walker Books, Australia, 2010 (Nature, hope, war, courage, finding hope in bleak landscapes)

Novels

Fraillon, Zana. *The Bone Sparrow*, Hachette Australia, 2016 (seeking asylum, imagination, freedom, courage)

Gleitzman, Morris. *Once*, Penguin, Australia, 2005 (War, courage, bleak landscapes)

Betts, A.J., *Zack and Mia*, Text Publishing, Australia, 2013 (Dealing with illness, depression, hope, courage)