

These notes are for:

- Grade 4–8
- Ages 9–13
- Middle Grade

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Geography
- Social Studies

Example of:

- Junior Fiction
- Historical Fiction
- Letters/Narrative
- Mystery

Experience of:

- Cultural Diversity
- Heritage & History
- Australian Literature
- Social & Cultural Perspectives

Values addressed:

- Doing Your Best
- Working Together
- Responsibility
- Care & Compassion
- Understanding & Inclusion

Themes:

- Heritage
- Identity
- Romance
- Mystery

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

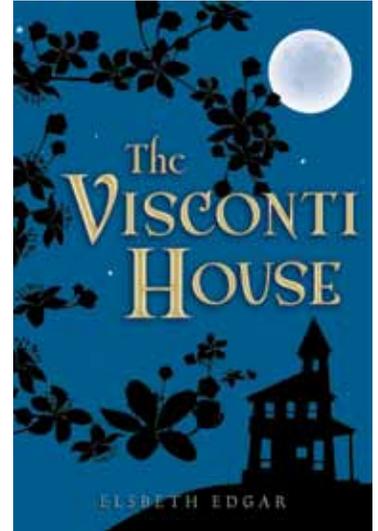
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The Visconti House - Overview

The Visconti House

By: Elsbeth Edgar
 ISBN: 9780763650193
 \$16.99 (\$19.00 CAN)
 No. of Pages: 304



Outline:

Laura Horton pretends a lot of things but she can't pretend about her house, an old, rundown Italianate villa overlooking the small country town below in which they live. To everyone at school, Laura Horton's just the girl from the "haunted" house. Everything changes with the arrival of Leon Murphy, a loner with a dark and tragic past. With Leon's help, Laura discovers there is more to her house than meets the eye. Together, they are drawn into the mystery of the Visconti House and soon begin to unravel its tragic secrets.

A unique tale of mystery, romance and tragedy that explores themes of identity and heritage.

Author Information:

Elsbeth Edgar has always written but, once she had children, began writing stories for them and in turn rediscovered her love of children's literature. *The Visconti House* is her first published book.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.



“While driving along the Calder Highway, we stopped at a town called Inglewood to stretch our legs. We came across a wonderful old house that captivated me and I began to weave a story around it in my mind. *The Visconti House* had its origins there.” – **Elsbeth Edgar**

Classroom Ideas for *The Visconti House*:

Before Reading *The Visconti House*

- View the front cover of *The Visconti House*. What do you think this story is about? Where do you think it set?
- Read the copy on the front flap of the jacket. What does the flap copy tell you about the story? View some book covers on the internet (without reading the description) and write flap copy for them.
- Think about the title of this book, *The Visconti House*. What do you think the Visconti house is like? What is the story of your house? Do you know when it was built or who has lived there? Find out some facts about your house to present to the class.

Guided Reading Activities for *The Visconti House*

- Read the first chapter. Identify the narrative style that the story is written in. Where are we placed as the reader? Are we an observer or part of the story?
- After reading the first chapter make a list of the characters in this story and what you already know about them. There are many mysteries in this book. What is the first mystery identified here? As you read *The Visconti House* list the different ‘mysteries’ as they happen.
- In Chapter 1 Leon is introduced as the new boy in class. Have you ever been new at something? In groups discuss what it means to welcome someone. How do you make someone feel welcome? If you were introducing someone new to your school what is the first thing that you would tell/show them? As a class write a ‘School Welcome Procedure’, detailing how you should deal with a new student at school.
- After reading Chapters 2 and 3 discuss Leon’s reaction to the boys taking his book. Do you think that Leon’s reaction was warranted? Discuss in groups how you would have dealt with this situation. What is respect? Why is this an important value to have?
- In Chapter 5 Laura dreams of her dragon book. She is documenting the dragons, drawing pictures and including species information. Try doing this yourself with something in your backyard/schoolyard. Draw a picture, write the size, weight, texture and overall description. Then try and do this with something imaginary.
- In Chapter 5 Leon mentions that he and Laura are alike. What do you think this means? Both Laura and Leon have things that are different about them? Have you ever felt that you are different or don’t belong? List the places and people you think you most belong to. List these in order.
- Laura’s father often quotes Longfellow to her. Who is Longfellow? Do your parents have any sayings or quotes? Do you know any? Make a class list of sayings/quotes that you have heard before.
- Read Chapter 6. Everyone wants to know what was on the paper that Laura tore up. In class discuss privacy. When should you respect other people’s privacy?

More activities for *The Visconti House*:

- Read the description of Mr Visconti on pages 71-72. Draw Mr Visconti from this description. Then modelling the writing style write your own description of someone you know.
- Read page 73. Laura can't think of a word to describe the smell of the freshly picked tomato. Can you think of one? Can you think of any other words to describe smells? Create a list.
- Read pages 75-76. Laura makes spaghetti. Bring in the recipe for one of your favorite dishes. Write out your recipe as though it is in a cookbook and provide a photograph or a hand drawn image to go with it. Create a class cookbook with your recipes and photocopy so that everyone has a copy to take home.
- Visit your local council/library and research your town/area. When were the houses first built? When was the local school built? Collect old photos and documents to help you with your research. Students can research different things in your area e.g. population, famous buildings, famous people, different time periods.
- There are references to different parts of Italy in this book. While reading *The Visconti House* have a map of Italy displayed so that the areas can be marked up as they appear in the book.
- In Chapter 9 Laura questions Mrs Murphy and Miss McInnes as part of her investigations. Have a conversation with someone who is older than you about their childhood. Prepare your questions beforehand and interview them.
- Read pages 99-100. Sketch your own house. Do you notice anything that you haven't seen before.
- Leon is very good at math. He wins a school competition and on page 107 he mentions that he would like to build "mathematical houses". Laura however, is very good at writing. What different occupations can math and writing be applied to? You obviously need writing to create a book, but how might you need math? Draw an example of what you think a "mathematical house" might be.
- As you read *The Visconti House* write down the clues that Leon and Laura discover about Mr Visconti. Create a fact file on him which includes your drawing and a character profile.
- Chapter 12. Leon and Laura discover that Mr Visconti had a concert in his house in 1898. The music was opera. What is opera music? Research this genre of music and a famous opera singer. Can you find any opera singers that were famous in the late 19th Century?
- Read Chapter 14. Rewrite some of this chapter from the point of view of Samson. He accompanies Laura and Leon on part of their search for the cellar. Do you think that Samson is interested in what they are doing? What would he be thinking?
- In Chapter 15 Leon acts very shy around Isabella. Why do you think Leon is shy? Have you ever felt like this? Is there anything you can say or do to help yourself have more confidence? Discuss in groups.
- Read page 162. Mrs Grisham has asked the students to write descriptive paragraphs "I want every noun to have an adjective". Write a descriptive paragraph about Laura's discovery of the metal box in the cellar (from the previous chapter). Describe the smell, color and feeling of the room.
- In the descriptive paragraph that Laura writes she uses the word 'black' many times to "emphasise the lack of color, the darkness, the secret nature of the sorrow". Create a list of colors and write a descriptive sentence as to what you think they represent.
- In Chapter 21 Laura and Leon go to visit Miss McInnes again. She describes Mr Visconti as having been "a most unsuitable suitor", because he was a foreigner. What does she mean by this? What is prejudice? Is Miss McInnes being prejudiced towards foreigners? Prejudice is often directed at aspects of a person identity. What might some of these aspects be?
- In Chapter 22 two famous Italians are mentioned Vivaldi and Dante. Who were these people? From what period of history are they from? Research. Ask students in groups to research a famous Italian and present their findings to the class.
- There are several instances throughout the story where Laura wants to give up but Leon perseveres e.g. searching for the cellar, writing to Gabriele Visconti in Milan. Have you ever wanted to give up trying? Have you ever persevered with something? In groups discuss the value of 'doing your best'. What are some useful tactics for encouraging yourself to continue?

Guided Reading Activities for *The Visconti House* cont ...

- Read Chapter 24. Laura and Leon decide to write to the Visconti family in Milan. They get some nice writing paper from Laura's father. Try writing this letter yourself. What would you write? What facts would you pass on? Make sure you employ conventional letter writing styles for your letter.
- Read page 240. There is a description of some of the posters for the school dance. The school dance is a 60s theme. Create your own poster for the dance. Create a poster for other eras e.g. the 30s, the 50s, the 80s.
- In Chapter 7 Leon and Laura read Veronica's letters to Carlo. Leon suggests that part of Veronica's father's dislike may have stemmed from Carlo being a Catholic and Veronica being a Protestant. Who are the Catholics and the Protestants? How do they/don't they differ? Research the history of these two religions.
- Mr Visconti came to Australia because of his love for Veronica. Many people migrate to Australia, but for different reasons. Research what some of these reasons might be. Has anyone in your family migrated from another country? Mark the different places on a world globe that students' family members are from.
- Read Chapter 28. Leon remarks that "all interesting people are different". Who interests you? Write a newspaper article on an interesting person (it could be a celebrity or someone you know personally) and what makes them different. Then write a brief paragraph on what you think makes you different.

After Reading *The Visconti House*

- This story has involved a mystery, a different time period and a romance. What other books do you know that use these different genres, if not all of them? Search for these genres in your school library and create a book display.
- Write a review of *The Visconti House*. Include information about the author and why she wrote this story (the authors' note at the back of the book may be helpful).
- Write a letter to the future about the time that you live in. Perhaps you can create your own future mystery.
- Read the note from Elsbeth Edgar at the beginning of this resource. Start your own story about a building in your neighborhood. Imagine who lives there, when it was built, why was it built. How can this building inspire you to write a story?