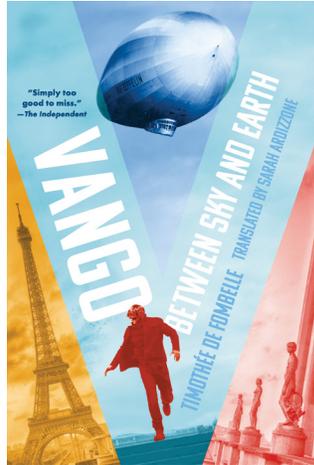


Candlewick Press Classroom Ideas



Vango: Between Sky and Earth

Author: Timothée de Fombelle
PB ISBN: 978-0-7636-8781-6
\$9.99 / \$13.00 CAN

Also available as an e-book and in audio

Summary

A gripping mystery-adventure set in the 1930s interwar period about a character desperately searching for his identity. Raised by a strange nanny in Sicily, Vango grows up with one friend, a priest named Zefiro, who lives in a monastery hidden from sight. On reaching adulthood, Vango decides to follow in Zefiro's footsteps, but at the moment he is taking his holy orders at Notre Dame in Paris, he is falsely accused of a crime and has to go on the run. This is a breathless and highly cinematic story that follows Vango traveling by zeppelin across Europe from Nazi Germany to Stromboli, from Scotland to the Soviet Union, climbing the rooftops of Paris, crossing the paths of arms traffickers, crooked policemen, Russian spies, and even Stalin.

About the Author

Timothée de Fombelle is a popular French playwright who has achieved international success as a novelist with his debut, *Toby Alone*, and its sequel, *Toby Alone and the Secrets of the Tree*. He has worked as a teacher and in 1990 set up his own theater company. Timothée de Fombelle lives with his family in Paris.

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.

These notes are for:

- Grade 7
and up
- Age 12
and up

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Novel
- Fiction

Themes/ Ideas:

- Trust
- Justice/
Injustice
- Freedom
- Family
- Historical



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Discussion Questions and Activities

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Where and when do you think it is set? What genre do you think it fits into? Once you have finished reading the book, revisit your answers to these questions and compare your judgments based on the cover to the actual story. Have a class discussion about whether you should judge a book by its cover.

In media res is a Latin term used for when a story starts at a midpoint or at the conclusion rather than at the beginning. Why do you think the author has used this technique with *Vango*? How would the novel be different if it was told in chronological order (starting with Vango and Mademoiselle washing up on the shore of the island)?

Besides Vango, who are the main characters in this story? Write a character assessment for each character. What purpose do they serve in the story?

What are the themes of this novel? Write a statement of belief for each theme, then assess how Vango's treatment of these themes makes you feel.

What is the significance of the subtitle of this book (*Between Sky and Earth*)?

Keep a vocab journal while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar and look up their meanings. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and write a note next to each explaining why you like that word/phrase.

Write a book review on *Vango*. What did you like/dislike about it and why? Who would you recommend this book to? Is it similar to any other books you have read?

The concept of belonging is often revealed by exploring alienation and isolation. Discuss this statement in relation to *Vango* by finding examples of how people are alienated and isolated. Consider Vango not knowing about his past, Ethel and Paul living in their mansion without their parents, and Zefiro running an invisible monastery where people can escape from peril. How does not belonging affect individuals and the wider society? What factors influence or determine whether a person belongs?

In small groups, construct a mind map, drawing out the major aspects of and issues in the text. Make links between these to show the complexity of the narrative structure and the relationships between individuals and groups. Have groups join together and discuss each group's mind map to refine their ideas about the text.

Discuss the significance of the names the Bird and the Cat. What traits do these characters share with their namesakes? What do the names signify about the relationship between these two characters? How do you think their relationship will continue to develop in the second volume of *Vango*?

Vango travels far and wide in his adventures. Plot his travels on a map of the world in chronological order. The timeline at the beginning of Part Two would be a good starting point.

Research the real *Graf Zeppelin*. Is it described accurately in the novel? Why do you think the author chose to incorporate the *Graf Zeppelin* in the story?

A storyboard is a series of panels of rough sketches outlining the scene sequence and major changes of action or plot in a film. You can use this technique with a novel as well. There are many exciting action and chase sequences in *Vango*. In a storyboard, capture a key action sequence in *Vango*, such as Vango's escape from Notre Dame in chapter 1 or Vango's escape from the *Graf Zeppelin* in chapter 12.

Vango is set in Europe during the 1930s, in the buildup to World War II. Why do you think the author chose to set the novel during this time?

Freedom is an important theme in *Vango*. Have a class discussion about how this theme is explored in the book and how it applies to each of the main characters and their motivations.

Using all the information that Boulard gathers in the novel, create a Wanted poster that could be used in the search for Vango. Make the poster as persuasive as possible to inspire anyone who has seen Vango to contact the police.

