

Creased up



Tickled pink



Gobsmacked

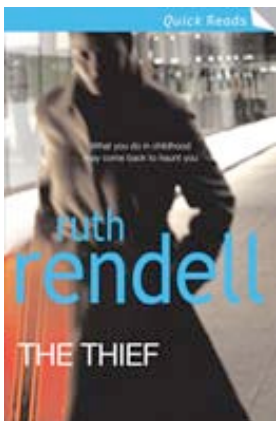


Swept away



Quick Reads

Get hooked on books.



The Thief Ruth Rendell



Contents

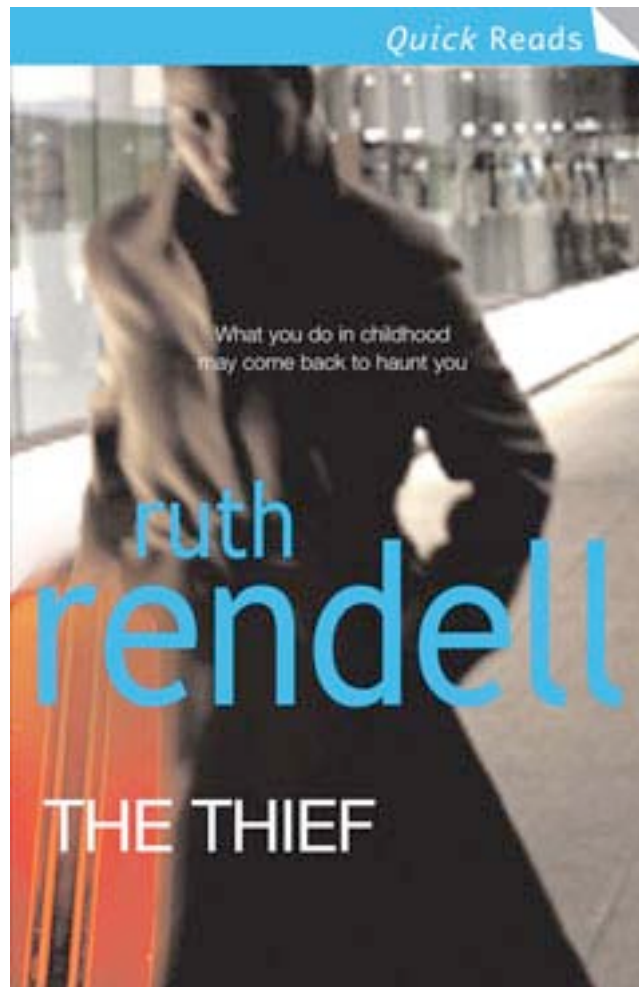
	Briefly about the book	3
	Information about Ruth Rendell	4
Activity 1	Crime writers	5
Activity 2	The characters	7
Activity 3	Why did the author do that?	9
Handout 1	Extract from Chapter 1	11
	Further development	12
	More Reading	13
	Adult Core Curriculum References	14

Acknowledgement

The learning materials to accompany the Quick Reads publications have been produced as part of The Vital Link's Reading for Pleasure campaign, funded by the Department for Education and Skills and in co-operation with World Book Day. Our thanks go to the writing and editorial team of Nancy Gidley, Kay Jackaman and Moreen Mowforth.

**The
Vital
Link**

www.vitallink.org.uk



Blurb

Stealing things from people who upset her was something Polly did... but she could never have imagined it could have such terrifying results.

Synopsis

Stealing and deceit were a way of life for Polly. But when she meets and falls in love with Alex, her life changes. Because he loves her and trusts hers, he believes her. And because she loves him, she wants to be truthful with him. Because she is happy, she also finds that people don't hurt her and she no longer needs to take things from them. She is convinced she has become a better person.

But when she travels to New York alone, she sits next to an offensive, rude man on the flight. Polly doesn't know how to respond to his rudeness; she nurses her growing hatred in silence and drinks to get him out of her mind. On the return flight, she spots him again. Although they are not sitting together this time, he continues to bother her by sending nasty notes through the staff. Polly's misery and hatred grow throughout the flight and she decides that she must do something to get back...

At first, after she takes his luggage off the trolley, she feels relief and joy: she has got her revenge. However, her action leads to a series of events that take her into a world of fear and deception. In the end, they destroy her new life with Alex.

This gripping story is told from Polly's point of view. It is not a traditional thriller (there is no mystery about 'who dun it?'), but it is an adventure about a problem that needs solving. And there is plenty of suspense about how Polly will solve her problem.

It is also a thoughtful story of life and relationships. The reader is presented with moral issues and encouraged to think about the result of the immoral or inconsiderate actions of the characters.

Readability

9/10 Level E3

Ruth Rendell

Ruth Rendell says of herself:

'One is either a story-teller or one is not. And if you are a story-teller, and it is possible for you to write, you will start writing stories.'

Ruth Rendell was born in 1930. She first worked as a journalist before becoming a novelist. Her first crime novel, *From Doon with Death* was published in 1964 and introduced Detective Chief Inspector Wexford. She has since written over 17 novels featuring Inspector Wexford.

However, she never wanted to be pigeon-holed into only writing one kind of novel. She has written over 50 crime novels and collections of short stories.

Her books, which can often be macabre, fall into three categories: police procedurals featuring Inspector Wexford, studies of abnormal psychology and psychological suspense novels that she began writing in the 1980s under the pseudonym of Barbara Vine. As Barbara Vine, she is interested in the shadows cast by the past. In these novels, sense of place is as important as the characters themselves.

Every day she writes for four hours and each year she produces two novels. Her books have been translated into 22 languages. She lives in London, where she is a Life Peer in the House of Lords.

She has won many awards for her work, including the Crime Writers' Association Cartier Diamond Dagger (lifetime achievement award) and the Mystery Writers of America Grandmaster Award.

Val McDermid, in an essay about Ruth Rendell, has said:

'British crime writing owes much to a writer who has over her 34 year career consistently demonstrated that the genre can continually reinvent itself, moving in new directions, assuming new concerns and exploring new ways of telling stories.'

Ruth Rendell has said:

'I would think that the old-fashioned detective story which is so much a matter of clues and puzzles is certainly on the way out if not already gone. Crime novels now are much more novels of character, and novels which look at the world we live in.'

Activity 1

Crime writers

<p>Purpose</p>	<p>→ To learn more about a specific author.</p> <p>→ To find out about a specific writing genre.</p>
<p>Resources</p>	<p>Flipchart, paper, pens Website addresses Internet access</p> <p>There are many websites with information about Ruth Rendell. A good starting point is her official website. It gives information about her life and her books and also lists links to her publisher, the Crime Writers' Association and several other websites about crime and mystery fiction.</p> <p>Ruth Rendell's official website: http://www.inejacet.nl/RuthRendellenglish/start.html</p> <p>Links to Ruth Rendell sites http://www.inejacet.nl/RuthRendellenglish.links.html</p> <p>Crime Writers' Association Dagger Awards http://www.thecwa.co.uk/daggers/index.html</p>
<p>Activity</p>	<p>Use the author's information provided at the beginning of this activity to introduce Ruth Rendell briefly to the group. One of the hallmarks of her work is her interest in psychological aspects of crime.</p> <p>Introduce the idea of 'psychological suspense'. What do the group think this means?</p> <p>Record their responses on a flipchart to use later when discussing <i>The Thief</i>.</p> <p>Read Handout 1: Extract from Chapter 1 with the group. In pairs or small groups ask readers to decide (1) what sort of family Polly comes from (2) what sort of little girl Polly seems to be.</p> <p><i>continued</i> →</p>

Activity <i>continued</i>	Ask readers to be prepared to share their ideas with the group, indicating what in the text gave them these views. Do they have any sympathy with the little girl? How would they expect a story with this sort of beginning to develop? Look back at the notes on psychological suspense and decide whether this book might fit into that crime genre.
Reflection	The title of the book makes it quite explicit that this is likely to be a crime novel, but it is not the crime but the criminal who will be the main subject. Would the book have the same initial impact if it were called 'The Liar'?
Development	<p>Because Ruth Rendell is such a popular and prolific writer, some readers will have heard of her. Many of them will have seen The Inspector Wexford Mysteries on television, although they might not know that Ruth Rendell wrote these stories.</p> <p>Have members of the group seen this series? Encourage individuals to recall specific stories if they can. Where are they set? What are they usually about? What do they know about Inspector Wexford? Are there any similarities in the way Ruth Rendell presents her detective there and her criminal here?</p> <p>Some readers might like to look at the linked sites to find out more about the genre of crime writing. Suggested topics might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Dagger Awards from the Crime Writers' Association • Who is Barbara Vine? • Some other authors

Activity 2

The characters

Purpose	→ To help readers identify the main features of Polly's character and to use this information to evaluate her behaviour and influence on other characters.
Resources	Copies of <i>The Thief</i>
Activity	<p>This story is told from the point of view of Polly. Much of our knowledge of the events of her life and our view of the other people with whom she interacts comes from her responses to them.</p> <p>→ Ask the group to think about words they would use to describe Polly, e.g. is she confident, friendly, lonely, angry, timid, nervous? Why do they think these words apply to her?</p> <p>→ What do the group think is Polly's main weakness? How does this aspect of her character influence her behaviour towards others? Does it distort her version of events? Ask individuals to give specific examples from the text to support their statements.</p>
Reflection	Before Polly goes on her trip to New York, she seems to have turned her life around. She has found happiness with her boyfriend and no longer lies or steals. However, once she is on her own and has to confront an unpleasant situation, she reverts to her old ways. Why do the group think this happens? What does this tell the reader about her?
Development	<p>At which points in the story could Polly have behaved differently?</p> <p>Could she have saved her relationship with Alex once she had taken Lant's luggage?</p> <p><i>continued</i> →</p>

Development <i>continued</i>	<p>Ask readers to form pairs for a role play, in which Polly really has changed. They can choose either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Polly and Lant: On the plane, Polly finds that she is sitting next to Lant. She decides that she must stand up for herself.→ Polly and Alex: Polly has not been able to confront Lant on the plane. However, when she gets home, she is frightened by what she has done and confesses the story to Alex.
--	--

Activity 3

Why did the author do that?

<p>Purpose</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → To develop readers' ability to reflect critically on their reading. → To encourage them to engage in discussion and ask questions about what they have read. → To improve their confidence in expressing their own views.
<p>Resources</p>	<p>Address of Ruth Rendell's official website Access to Internet Printed copies of existing comments in the Write2Me guestbook (see comments under 'Development' below)</p>
<p>Activity</p>	<p>When the group have finished reading <i>The Thief</i>, readers may have unanswered questions about why characters acted as they did. Group discussion may reveal different views of the story and of what the author really meant.</p> <p>To initiate the discussion, encourage each reader to think of a question he or she would like to ask or a comment he or she would like to make to the author.</p> <p>As each reader tells the group his or her question, jot the main points on a flipchart. You may wish to do this as a whole group exercise, combining individual points into single comments or questions.</p> <p>In pairs or small groups, readers can then prepare their written comments. The group can then decide which ones to post to Ruth Rendell's guestbook.</p>
<p>Reflection</p>	<p>Were the comments and questions raised along similar or dissimilar lines? What does that indicate?</p>

continued →

Development	<p>Ask readers to find Ruth Rendell's website and look for her Write2me guestbook. Click on the icon to open the guestbook and look at some of the questions and comments from other readers.</p> <p>NB: Unfortunately, most of these are in Dutch, so you will need to scroll down to find the English entries. You can do this yourself before class and print out the English comments for the group. Alternatively, you could look for examples of comments or questions from another website or write one or two of your own. Type, post and wait for a reply...</p>
--------------------	---

Handout 1

Extract from Chapter 1

THE FIRST TIME SHE stole something Polly was eight years old. She and her mother had gone in the car to have tea with her aunt, so that she could play with her cousins, James and Lizzie. It was a fine sunny day in the middle of summer.

Chairs and tables were out in the garden under a big sunshade. There was a blow-up pool and the hose was on. James and Lizzie were in swimsuits and Polly put hers on. They splashed about in the water. Polly got very excited, splashed water over her mother and Auntie Pauline and took hold of Lizzie, holding her head under the water. Her mother told her to stop and then, when Polly didn't stop, she told her again. 'Stop that at once, Polly. You're spoiling the game for the others!' Polly had stopped for a while, then begun again, splashing with both hands. Her aunt got up, said to her, 'Come into the house. I've got something I want to show you.'

So Polly got out of the water, dried herself on a towel and followed Auntie Pauline into the house. She thought she was going to get a present. Auntie Pauline had said that once before and had given her the thing she had shown her. Not this time. As soon as they were inside and the door was shut her aunt put her over her knee and smacked her hard, ten sharp blows across her bottom. Then Auntie Pauline went back into the garden.

When her aunt had gone and left her crying, Polly had hated her. She would have liked to kill her. Rubbing her eyes, she had walked slowly through the rooms. In one of them was a desk and on the desk, lying face-down, the book Auntie Pauline was reading. Polly took it. She put it in the big bag her mother had left in the hallway. It wasn't her aunt's book but one from the Public Library. If it was missing Auntie Pauline would have to pay for it ...

When it was time to go, she and her mother got into the car and while her mother was driving Polly took the book out of her bag and hid it under her jacket. She meant to destroy it. But how? There was nowhere to burn it. She found her mother's scissors and while her parents were watching the news on TV she went up to her bedroom and cut the book into a hundred small pieces.

Polly's mother and Auntie Pauline had a lot of talks about the missing book. Polly was always there and heard what they said. Where could the book have gone? Auntie Pauline had asked everyone, Uncle Martin and Lizzie and James and the lady who came to clean. No one knew anything about it. 'You haven't seen it, have you, Polly?' her mother asked. Polly looked her right in the eyes. 'Oh, no, Mummy, of course I haven't.'

She was a good liar. It seemed too that she was a good thief.

Further development

Other possible activities

Readers might like to plan and write another chapter for the book, leading to a different ending. What happens when Alex comes back to the house or when Polly comes to her senses after smashing up the room?

Ruth Rendell uses colour a great deal in connection with Lant – his clothes, his luggage, his car and his front door. Readers might like to discuss how this contrasts with other character descriptions, and how this contributes to the build-up of tension in the book.

Readers could write a section of Polly's diary, either as a little girl or as the young woman living with Alex, to practise using the direct voice and reflecting their understanding of her character and the events which formed it.

More reading

March title	Author	ISBN
The Thief	Ruth Rendell	0091796865
Woman Walks into a Bar	Rowan Coleman	0099492288
Blackwater	Conn Iggulden	0091907039
Star Sullivan	Maeve Binchy	0752879545
Hell Island	Matthew Reilly	0330442325
The Book Boy	Joanna Trollope	0747582114
Don't make me Laugh	Patrick Augustus	1902934466
Someone Like Me	Tom Holt	1841494461
Screw It, Let's Do It	Richard Branson	0753510995
How to change your life in 7 steps	John Bird	0091907039
Chickenfeed	Minette Walters	0330440314
The Team	Mick Dennis with the Premier League	0552153729
May title	Author	ISBN
Danny Wallace and the Centre of the Universe	Danny Wallace	0091908949
Desert Claw	Damien Lewis	0099493535
Cleanskin	Val McDermid	0007216726
Name You Once Gave Me	Mike Phillips	0007216718
Grey Man	Andy McNab	0552154334
I Am a Dalek	Gareth Roberts/Dr Who	0563486481
Poison in the Blood	Tom Holland	0349119643
I Love Football	Hunter Davies	0755314700
Winner Takes All	John Francome	0755329481
The Dying Wish	Courtia Newland	0349119635
Secrets	Lynne Barrett-Lee	1905170300
The Corpse's Tale	Katherine John	1905170319

See www.quickreads.org.uk for information on these and future Quick Reads

See First Choice library booklist at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk for mainstream books selected against criteria for their suitability for emergent readers

Audio version of the Quick Reads are available from W F Howes Ltd as part of their Clipper Emergent Reader programmes (www.wfhowes.co.uk/cerp/)

Other publications for emergent readers include those from Sandstone Press (www.sandstonepress.com) and New Island's Open Door series (www.newisland.ie)

Adult Core Curriculum References

Activity 1

Crime writers

Rt/E3.1-.9
Rt/L1.1-.5

SLd/E3.1-.3
SLc/E3.1-.4
SLd/L1.1-.3
SLc/L1.1-.4

Speaking and listening

SLIrE3.1-.6
SLIr/L1.1-.6
Highlight SLc/L1.4 important element required for reflection and feedback activities

Activity 2

The characters

Rt/E3.1, .2, .4, .7, .8
Rt/L1.1-.5

SLd/E3.1-.3
SLc/E3.1-.4
SLd/L1.1-.3
SLc/L1.1-.4

Speaking and listening

SLIrE3.1-.6
SLIr/L1.1-.6
Highlight SLc/L1.4 important element required for reflection and feedback activities

Activity 3

Why did the author do that?

Wt/E3.1-.4
Ws/E3.1-.3
Wt/L1.1-.6
Ws/L1.1-.3

Speaking and listening

SLIrE3.1-.6
SLIr/L1.1-.6
Highlight SLc/L1.4 important element required for reflection and feedback activities