

# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



Dear KS3 and KS4 teachers,

This resource pack is based on *Toffee*, the outstanding new novel from the incomparable, multi-award-winning and Laureate na nÓg Sarah Crossan; poignant, thought-provoking and incredibly moving, it explores mental health and friendship while asking what it means to be a family.

The four extracts included in this resource pack are linked to important themes in the story and accompanied by corresponding discussion questions and activities. Together, they provide the perfect resource for KS3–KS4 classes – developing literacy and writing skills, in particular, and stimulating PSHE debate around themes of unheard voices, identity, laughter, and memories.

A key objective is for students to engage with Sarah Crossan's free verse by using a wide variety of dramatic approaches – from reading poems aloud to performing certain scenes in groups – encouraging students' emotional interpretations followed by their analysis of stylistic features.

The final outcome is for each student in your class to let their creative talents loose and to give them the skills and confidence they need to draft, structure and write creative pieces of their own.

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*I am not who I say I am.*

*Marla isn't who she thinks she is.*

*I am a girl trying to forget.*

*Marla is a woman trying to remember.*

Allison has run away from home and with nowhere to live finds herself hiding out in the shed of what she thinks is an abandoned house. But the house isn't empty. An elderly woman named Marla, with dementia, lives there – and she mistakes Allison for an old friend from her past called *Toffee*.

Allison is used to hiding who she really is, and trying to be what other people want her to be. And so, *Toffee* is who she becomes. After all, it means she has a place to stay. There are worse places she could be.

But as their bond grows, and Allison discovers how much Marla needs a real friend, she begins to ask herself – where is home? What is a family? And most importantly, who am I, really?



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



## CONTENTS

- **EXTRACT 1:** Unheard Voices (taken from 'Her Name is Marla')

**Objectives:** Discuss the issue of whose voices are heard and listened to in society; create a poem entitled 'My Name is ...' written from another person's perspective.

**Subjects:** Design Art and Technology, PSHE, Creative Writing: Poetry, Writing in Role

- **EXTRACT 2:** Identity (taken from 'Fictional')

**Objectives:** Consider influences that have shaped your sense of identity; write a blog entitled 'Being Me' on the subject of what is most important to you in life.

**Subjects:** Design Art and Technology, PSHE, Speaking and Listening, Creative Writing: Writing to Explain

- **EXTRACT 3:** Laughter (taken from 'Single Ladies')

**Objectives:** Re-enact a scene from the text and consider its meaning; choose a song that is significant to you and reflect upon the relevance of its lyrics.

**Subjects:** Drama, PSHE, Speaking and Listening, Design Art and Technology, Literacy

- **EXTRACT 4:** Memories (taken from 'Forever')

**Objectives:** Explore how themes of forgiveness and forgetting relate to the main characters of the story; write a letter from the perspective of a character asking for forgiveness.

**Subjects:** Literacy, PSHE, Speaking and Listening, Creative Writing: Writing a letter, Writing in Role



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### EXTRACT 1: UNHEARD VOICES (Taken from 'Her Name is Marla')

Her name is Marla,  
and to her I am Toffee,  
though my parents named me Allison.

Actually  
it was Mum who made that decision;  
Dad didn't care about a bawling baby  
and her name  
the day I showed up.

He had more important things on his mind.

And now,  
Marla sleeps in a bedroom next to mine  
with forget-me-nots  
climbing the papered walls,  
snoring,  
lying on her back, lips  
parted.

Sometimes, at night,  
she wakes,  
wails,  
flails and begs the air to  
leave her alone, leave her alone.  
I scuttle in,  
stroke her arm with my fingertips.  
*I'm here. It's OK.*  
*You're just having a bad dream.*



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### EXTRACT 1: UNHEARD VOICES (Taken from 'Her Name is Marla')

That usually settles her:  
she'll look up  
    like I'm the very person she expected to see,  
    shut her eyes and  
    float away again.

The mattress on my bed is so soft I sink.  
The cotton sheets are paper thin  
    from too much washing.  
Nets, not curtains, cover my window:  
    streetlights blare in.

This is not my home.  
This is not my room.  
This is not my bed.

I am not who I say I am.  
Marla isn't who she thinks she is.

I am a girl trying to forget.  
Marla is a woman trying to remember.

Sometimes I am sad.  
Sometimes she is angry.

And yet.

Here,  
in this house,  
    I am so much happier  
    than I have ever been.



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

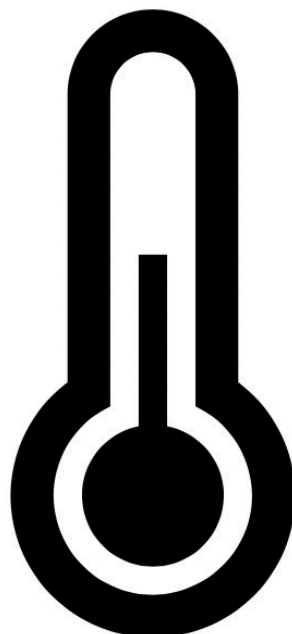
- What is unusual about the narrative voice in the opening pages of the story?
- What stylistic choices has the writer made to engage the reader?
- Which characters are we introduced to and what do we learn about them?
- How does the writer convey Allison's (Toffee's) relationship with Marla?
- What do you understand by the phrase 'unheard voices'? How does this relate to Allison (Toffee) and Marla?

### ACTIVITIES:

#### ACTIVITY 1: NOT BEING HEARD *Subjects: Design Art and Technology, PSHE*

- The issue of not being heard is crucial in *Toffee*. Think about a time when you felt like you weren't being listened to. What caused you to be silenced and how did it make you feel? On the right-hand side of your thermometer worksheet, write down feelings and emotions that people experience when they are ignored by society. Your emotions should get stronger and more powerful the higher up the thermometer you go.
- Allison (Toffee) and Marla are not heard, partly because of their ages and gender amongst other things. On the left-hand side of your thermometer, can you think of other people or groups in society who are also likely to be ignored? Think about whose opinions and voices seem to be valued most and why.

**Unheard voices in society**  
who are we?



**Emotions**  
how does it make us feel?



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### EXTRACT 2: IDENTITY (Taken from 'Fictional')

I blink and think.

My name?

Am I Allison or Toffee?

And what about this girl with Lucy?

Who is she?

I could take a name from history –

a woman who stepped into herself  
without asking permission.

I could be Coco Chanel or Rosa Parks.

I could be my mother,

Davina Daniels.

But all these people are dead  
and I usually want to be alive.

I try to imagine a living woman –

someone strong –  
but my mind is a blank,  
filled only with pictures of  
people running away  
or struggling to stay put.

*Juliet*, I tell her,

deciding on someone fictional,  
dead because her dad was an asshole.

The Labrador is pulling at the lead,  
tugging on Lucy's arm.

She doesn't resist.

Soon she is far ahead.

*Juliet!* she shouts.

Like from Macbeth?

I laugh,

though I can't be sure she is joking.



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How many names does Allison possess in this extract? What does this reveal about her identity?
- Which names does Allison (Toffee) consider taking 'from history'? What do these women have in common?
- Why do you think she chooses the name 'Juliet' in the end?
- What causes her mind to go 'blank'? What does this tell us about the women in her life?
- How is Allison's (Toffee's) identity shaped by her relationship with her father?

### ACTIVITIES:

#### ACTIVITY 1: MY IDENTITY *Subjects: Design Art and Technology, PSHE, Speaking and Listening*

- As a class, discuss what is meant by the term 'identity'. Consider issues such as: Why is it important to have a sense of identity? What happens if we don't? Is identity fixed or can it change over time?
- Cut out the boxes on your worksheet. Re-arrange them on a coloured piece of card according to which are most significant to you in terms of your identity. Are there any boxes that you would add? Consider why you have ordered them this way. When you're happy with the order, glue them down and write your name on the back of your sheet.
- On your tables, mix up all the sheets. Then, swap them with another table. Both tables should now try to work out whose sheet belongs to who. Make sure no-one cheats by turning the sheets over! Decide as a group which sheet belongs to which classmate, then write the name of that person on it in pencil.
- Check the names on the back of the sheets to see how many you got right! Feedback to the other table.



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



Fashion	Books	Sport
Religion	Food	Music
Family	Nationality	Travel
Film or Theatre	Technology	Friends

### ACTIVITY 2: BEING ME *Subjects: Creative Writing: Writing to Explain*

- Write a blog entry entitled 'Being Me'. In it, explain why your top 3 boxes from Activity 1 are so important to you and why they have had such a big role in shaping your identity.
- In your blog, you could include any challenges that you have faced and times when your identity has felt under threat. You also may wish to include inspirational or supportive people in your life who have given you the confidence to be yourself.





# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### EXTRACT 3: LAUGHTER (Taken from 'Single Ladies')

Marla and I are giggling,  
clinging to one another,  
swaying, spinning to  
Beyoncé singing out  
from the radio's tinny speakers.

*Now like this! Like this!* I tell her.  
I hold one hand aloft and twirl it  
like any single lady would,  
and Marla copies the choreography –  
    hands in the air,  
    hands on hips,  
    fists punching forward,  
    hair flicked back.

*It's too quick.* She is breathless,  
stepping up to the mantelpiece and  
pouring more gin into her glass.

*Show me again!*

I fall to my knees laughing.  
Her Beyoncé is appalling.

But she is beautiful.



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think the writer chooses 'Single Ladies' as the song for this chapter?
- What do Allison (Toffee) and Marla separately and collectively gain from their relationship? How is this portrayed in this extract?
- How does Marla in particular challenge society's expectations throughout the story?
- What other instances of humour are there in the story? Why is it so important to laugh?
- Can you think of any other 'single ladies' in the text? What are their relationships with Allison (Toffee) and/or Marla?

### ACTIVITIES:

#### ACTIVITY 1: ALL THE SINGLE LADIES *Subjects: Drama, PSHE, Speaking and Listening*

- In pairs as Allison (Toffee) and Marla, discuss how both characters may be feeling in the pages building up to their 'Single Ladies' dance. Then, re-create the scene of them dancing drunkenly to 'Single Ladies'.
- Afterwards, reflect on how your characters' moods and outlooks may have changed. How has this scene brought your characters closer together? Why are music and laughter so powerful when shared or experienced in this way?

#### ACTIVITY 2: YOUR SONG *Subjects: Design Art and Technology, Literacy*

- Think about a song that is meaningful to you and brings you happiness or laughter. It could be a current song you love listening to, or it could be a song that makes you nostalgic, reminding you of a person or a happy time in your life.
- Write out the lyrics to your song on a coloured piece of card. It could be the whole song, the chorus, or even just a few lines that are special to you. Decorate around the lyrics with emotions, memories, and names of people you associate with this song. Take it home to put it on display to remind you to play it, dance to it, and most importantly to laugh.



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### EXTRACT 4: MEMORIES (Taken from 'Forever')

No goodbye is forever  
unless you can  
erase everything you ever  
knew about a person and  
everything you once felt.

I left Dad a few months ago  
and decided

that was it –

I was drawing a line under  
knowing him.

But sometimes I wake with his voice in my ears  
and his maybe-love in my guts  
and I remember everything good about  
him which has been left behind  
and forget the bad,  
and it makes me so sad  
I wish I had the courage to call him  
and beg for him to be better.

Mum has been dead my whole life  
and not a day goes by when I don't think  
about how we would have been together –  
all the spaces left empty where  
she should have stood.

No goodbye is forever  
unless you can  
erase everything you ever  
knew about a person and  
everything you once felt.



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why do so many of Allison's (Toffee's) memories in the story cause her pain?
- How does Marla's relationship with the past differ? What role does her dementia play in this?
- What do the words 'No goodbye is forever' mean to Allison (Toffee)?
- Why are the themes of forgiveness and forgetting central to the story?
- Why is Allison's (Toffee's) and Marla's goodbye particularly sad?

### ACTIVITIES:

#### ACTIVITY 1: FORGIVENESS AND FORGETTING *Subjects: Literacy, PSHE, Speaking and Listening*

- Draw a line down the middle of your book. On one side, write 'Needs Forgiveness' and on the other side 'Wants to Forget'. Then, in the margin, write the name of every significant character in the story.
- In bullet point form, write down examples of when each character needs forgiveness for something they have done wrong. On the other side, note down things that have happened that they would like to forget. Use the whole text to find examples.
- As a class, go through both sides of the table, re-visiting how the themes of forgiveness and forgetting are central to the story and the words and actions of every character.

#### ACTIVITY 2: A VOICE FROM THE PAST *Subjects: Creative Writing: Writing a letter, Writing in Role*

- Write a letter from the perspective of one character, writing to another, asking for forgiveness for something they have done or said. In it, you may express the painful nature of this memory both for you and the character you are writing to. Consider the notion of wishing you could erase or forget the past but also how it is vital to remember and learn from our mistakes in order to become stronger and better people.



# TOFFEE

## TEACHING RESOURCE PACK

#ToffeeBook @SarahCrossan



# CONGRATULATIONS!

YOU'VE COMPLETED THE **TOFFEE RESOURCE PACK**

We would love to read the poems and see the work that your class has created, so please do email them over to us on

[childrensmarketing@bloomsbury.com](mailto:childrensmarketing@bloomsbury.com)

or share on Twitter tagging us at

[@KidsBloomsbury](https://twitter.com/KidsBloomsbury)



Visit [www.bloomsbury.com/childrens](http://www.bloomsbury.com/childrens) for more reading guides

[@KidsBloomsbury](https://twitter.com/KidsBloomsbury)