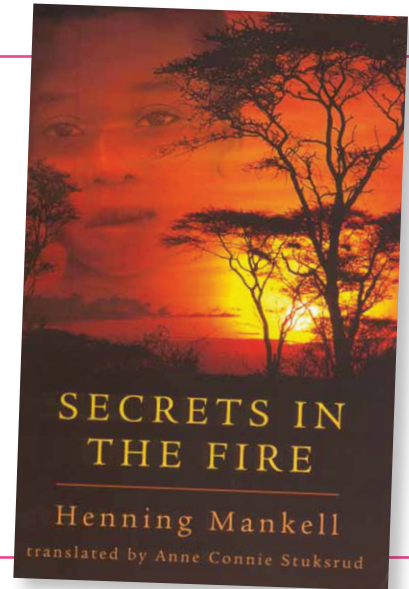


SECRETS IN THE FIRE

by Henning Mankell

Allen & Unwin
(Secondary)



Secrets in the Fire is based on the true story of Sofia, an indomitable young girl in war-torn Mozambique, who strays from a path while playing and steps on a landmine. She manages to transcend the brutality and horror that have shattered her childhood, and builds a new future out of the ruins of her life..

BACKGROUND

Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975, but was then torn apart by civil war which lasted about 16 years. About a million people died in the war, and millions more fled abroad or were displaced.

During this time, up to 500,000 landmines were planted. Although peace was agreed in 1992, many landmines still remain hidden in the ground and continue to pose a grave threat to ordinary people, including children.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the novel, landmines are described as 'armed soldiers that no one can see'. What damage is done by landmines in the book? Think also of the impact on characters such as Dr Raul and Jose-Maria.
2. Of all Sofia's sufferings, which do you think is the hardest to bear? **Possible answers:** Losing her father and Muazena, leaving the village, losing her legs, thinking she is responsible for Maria's death, meeting Isaias
3. Where does Sofia draw her strength from? **Possible answers:** Muazena, Maria, Fatima the nurse, Dr Raul, Hermengarda
4. What have you learned about courage and determination from *Secrets in the Fire*?

ROLE PLAY

In pairs interview one of the following characters about what they think of Sofia:

Dr Raul / Totio / Hermengarda / Jose-Maria

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 3: We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.

FOLLOW UP WORK

Find out more:

You can find out about the international campaign to ban landmines at this website www.icbl.org

FIND OUT MORE

Further resources for teaching around human rights can be found at: www.amnesty.org.uk/education