



THE BURNING by Laura Bates

'The Burning' is the compelling YA debut from Laura Bates, founder of the 'Everyday Sexism Project' and bestselling author of 'Girl Up'.

Anna thinks that there's nothing to trace her back to her old life, until the whispers start up again. As time begins to run out on her secrets, Anna finds herself irresistibly drawn to the tale of Maggie, a local girl accused of witchcraft centuries earlier. A girl whose story has terrifying parallels to Anna's own...

Suitable for: KS3&4 – English, History, PSHE

Topics covered: Witch hunts, social media, bullying, sexting, friendship, & health and relationships

Before Reading

- Research St. Monans so the students develop an increased awareness of the setting in 'The Burning'.

While Reading – ongoing activities

- Keep a reading journal to record thoughts, ideas, viewpoints, themes, author style/technique, use of dialogue and examples of vocabulary.
- Explore literary devices used by the author and discuss the effect they have on the story e.g. symbolism, diction, imagery, personification, metaphor, simile
'in my opinion it would have made a lot more sense if he said that fire was like a rumour' (prologue)
'cold squeezes me like a fist' (page 18)
- Ask questions and explore answers through discussion, reading and research.
- Make regular predictions about what might happen next from the details stated and implied. Explore the text and find examples of the author techniques used which give the reader a clue as to what might have happened/will happen e.g. foreshadowing.
- Collect words and phrases used by the author to describe characters, settings, emotions, mood and atmosphere. Write sentences and descriptions in the style of the author and use these in own writing.
- Visualisation – at different parts of the story, use the author's description to create illustrations of the settings. Evaluate the effectiveness of the author's language in creating a vivid picture for the reader. What techniques did they use? Now have a go writing a description using similar techniques.



- Discuss the themes covered within the story (*bereavement, illness, friendship, trust, betrayal, hope, loyalty, forgiveness, addiction, bullying, peer pressure, social media, pride, prejudice, tolerance, harassment, abuse, sexism, revenge, power, religion, love, belief, regret, fear*)

Post-Reading

- How does the author hook the reader and create tension/suspense throughout the novel?
Explore the techniques used by the author to ensure the reader keeps turning the page.
- Discuss why the author uses repetition, short sentences, short chapters, italics, different fonts, lists etc
Find examples from the text to support your opinion.
- Finish the statement – I like the way the author....
- Find examples of sexism in the novel.
- Find examples of superstition in the novel.
- What does the novel teach the reader about class structure, social/gender inequality, law, order and justice in the 17th Century? How is this different/similar to today?
- Consider how the author jumps back in time to the 17th Century and between character viewpoint (Anna and Maggie). Is this an effective writing tool? Discuss
- Why does the author use actual historical characters and real places in her novel?
- The past can shape the world in which we live in? Discuss
- Think about how ‘The Burning’ is structured. What choices has the author made and why?
- Why has the author decided on ‘The Burning’ for the title? Find evidence from the text to support your answer.

Characters

- The main narration of the story is written in the first person from one character’s perspective. How does the author give the narrator a distinctive voice?
How does the author show the narrator’s emotions through their descriptions and other literary devices?
Find examples to support your judgement.
Give three or more reasons why the author has written the story from this character’s point of view. How would the story change if the story was written from another perspective or in the third person?
- How does the author develop the viewpoint of different characters?

There are 2 voices: the principle voice being the first person narrative giving Anna's point of view and the supporting voice giving an insight into what happened to Maggie from the same village during the 17th Century.

What are the benefits of having two voices in the book?

Why is the character voice from the 17th Century significant to the plot?

- How does the author show the feelings/emotions of the characters through their actions and dialogue? Are any of their actions/decisions motivated by their emotions? Use quotations from the text to support your answer.
- How does the author create empathy for the characters?
- Why are memories important to Anna?
- Why are Anna's dreams/visions significant to the plot?
- Why does the author include the historian Glenn in the novel?
- Compare Headmaster Greave and Thomas Browne, the ministerial apprentice.

Setting

- How does the author use the natural environment in the story? Find examples to illustrate your opinion.
- How and why does the author mirror Anna's feelings with the setting/weather?
- Why is the setting (*a remote village in Scotland*) important to the story? (*how is it significant to the key events, atmosphere, character feelings etc?*)
- What was St. Monans like in the past and how has the place changed across the centuries?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a small, remote, isolated coastal fishing village in Scotland? Use quotes from the text to support your answer.
- How important is the necklace found in the house?

Language

- Explore unfamiliar language used by the author...

Examples might include:

ominous, tarnished, threshold, precariously, indignant, traipsed, reverie, uproariously, surreptitiously, exasperated, nonchalantly, enigma, dilapidated, sporadically, sonorous

Beyond the Book

- Anna is given an assignment to write a *'project detailing the life of a local person of historical interest, living or dead.'* (page 38) Research and write own project/extended essay about a local person of historical interest. This could be someone from your local area or from the region of Scotland where Anna has moved to.
- As a group research different aspects of life in Scotland during the 17th Century and share findings.
- Write an information page about the witchcraft trials using information from the novel and other sources. What was the role of the church during the witch trials? How can fear influence ones actions?
- How has life changed for women over the last 400 years? How can we continue to change things for the better?
- Explore and research pioneers (both men and women) in history that have changed the world for the better.
- Debate the advantages and disadvantages of social media. Write a piece of persuasive writing debating the subject.

Further Questions

- Why does the narrator compare fire to a rumour? Why do you think this is going to be significant to the story? Once finished reading, explore the same question and compare responses.
- What other images are connected with fire – power, death, new life, heat....etc?

Chapter 1-6

- Compile a list of questions that the reader is left with after the first chapter.
- Find examples of how the narrator's new environment reflects her feelings.
- Why do you think they need a fresh start?
- Anna is the *'new'* girl – how do you think it would feel to move to a new place where you didn't know anyone? Why does Anna want to become *'invisible'*?
- Allusion – why does the narrator make a reference to the *'Wizard of Oz'*?
- Foreshadowing to create suspense – What hints does the author give the reader to explain why Anna and her mum have travelled to St Monans?
- What are your first impressions of the narrator Anna? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Explore her relationship with her mother. Does her relationship change as you progress through the novel?

- Find examples of vivid descriptions which help to create a picture of Anna's new surroundings. What literary techniques have been used? How effective are they? Why does the author compare Anna's new surroundings with where she used to live? What effect does this have for the reader?
- Is it possible to have a fresh start? Discuss
- *'...often our true selves remain hidden in plain sight.'* (page 33) Discuss
How does this statement relate to the main character Anna?
- Why does Louise describe Anna as an 'enigma'? Was this the right thing for Louise to do? How does this make Anna feel? What are your impressions of Louise? What are the implications of Louise's actions?

Chapter 7-12

- How do you think Anna's friends in Birmingham feel now she has gone? Do you think these feelings will change as they grow older/move away from school/find new friends?
- Should we judge someone without knowing them or the facts? Discuss.
- What starts to give Anna hope? Can you find any other signs of hope in the novel?
- How does the author create suspense throughout the chapters?
- How could Anna's new house be significant to the story from the past?
- Why does Anna feel both fear and fascination whilst in the attic? Write a sentence for each word showing the emotion of the character being displayed through their actions.
- What would the world be like with no phones or technology?
'It's actually pretty-liberating. You know, switching off, living in the moment.' Discuss
- What are the dangers of starting a rumour and gossiping about someone?

Chapter 13-24

- Why does the author use italics in chapter 13? How does the author show a new voice? How is it different? How does the author show that the voice is from the past?
- Do you agree that girls are like marshmallows? Should there be different rules for girls and boys?
- How has Anna's relationship with Cat and Alisha developed? Why and how does their relationship change? Why is friendship important?
Alisha and Cat have a strong friendship despite being different. What do you think makes their relationship so strong?
- What should Anna do when the rumours start up again? Should she 'suffer in silence'?
- What is the impact of bullying?

- Emily Winters tries to help Anna but doesn't want to be seen with her. Why?
How do you think the girls were feeling after their conversation? How would you feel if no-one would speak to you? How could Emily have acted differently?
- How is Robin portrayed in the text? Find examples in the text to support your answer.
- Discuss the importance of words, both spoken and written in everyday life. How can they be used in a positive and negative way? How and when can words be misinterpreted?

Chapter 25-40

- *'Sacrificing me at the altar of their own social acceptability.'* (page 191) Discuss
- How does the story in the present day connect with the parallel story from the 17th Century? What are the main similarities and differences between their experiences?
- Why has the author chosen to make parallels with a time in history engulfed in superstition and witchcraft?
- Robin experiences homophobic bullying at school for supporting Anna. What pressures do young men face in modern society?
- Should Anna's mum have confided in Pat?
– discuss the themes of friendship, loyalty, trust, betrayal and forgiveness.
If Anna's mum could do things differently, what do you think she would do?
- Glenn states *'it's worth knowing that sometimes people see you as a symbol of something instead of a person. And, when they do, it reflects on them, not on you.'* (page 297) Discuss.
- Faith – *'Just because people believe different things, it doesn't necessarily mean somebody is right and somebody is wrong. They've just had different experiences. Who am I to say that something doesn't exist just because it hasn't personally revealed itself to me?'* (page 296)
Discuss

Chapter 41- end

- Why does Headmaster Greaves react in a particular way to Anna's situation? Do you agree with his outlook? How does Anna's mum react to the headmaster's solution/decision? What do you think he should have done?
- How does the school fail Anna? Is there anything the teachers could have done differently to support Anna?
- Is it important to teach individuals 'the importance of taking responsibility for their own actions'?



- Find examples in the text where different characters show bravery and strength in character.
- Does the past shape the present and future? Discuss
- Do experiences change people? Discuss
- Should our decisions and actions define us?
- How can you take action to change the future for the better?