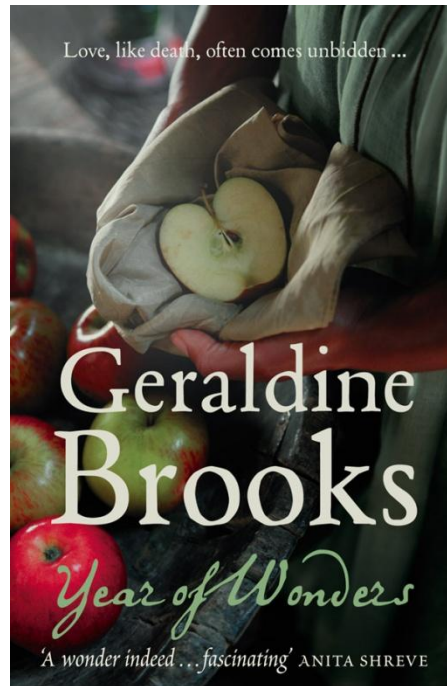


Year of Wonders

By: Geraldine Brooks

ISBN: 9781841154589

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Teacher's Guide

Notes by Mandy Newman

Includes: Summary, discussion questions and enhanced classroom activities

About the Book

In 1665, in the remote English village of Eyam — a small and close knit community of lead miners and shepherds, cobblers and weavers — the bubonic plague ("The Black Death") has taken the town hostage both literally and figuratively. In a decision brought about by Michael Mompellion, the radical but much-admired town minister, the villagers of Eyam quarantine themselves in their "wide green prison" and vow to suffer the scourge alone.

Believing that the plague is God's judgment on their sinful world, most of the devoutly Christian villagers beg forgiveness and look for ways to assuage God's ire — the most puritanical take up self-flagellation in an attempt to cleanse themselves. Almost completely cut off from the outside world (save for the ingenious "boundary stone"), and after panic has well and truly set in, the villagers turn

on one another. In episodes that illustrate both the best of human nature (ministering to the sick) and the worst (a gravedigger profiteering from the dead), the townspeople grapple with their grief and fear. It is up to the story's heroine — a young, widowed housemaid named Anna Frith — to raise the existential questions about the origins of the plague, and she therefore becomes the embodiment of the conflict at the center of the novel: God versus Nature.

*O let it be enough what thou hast done,
When spotted deaths ran arm'd through every street,
With poison'd darts, which not the good could shun,
The speedy could outfly, or valiant meet.*

*The living few, and frequent funerals then,
Proclaim'd thy wrath on this forsaken place:
And now those few who are return'd agen
Thy searching judgments to their dwellings trace.*

- From [//Annus Mirabilis, The Year of Wonders, 1666//](#) by John Dryden

About the author

Geraldine Brooks is one of Australia's greatest authors. She is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *March, Year of Wonders, People of the Book* and *Caleb's Crossing* and the non-fiction works *Nine Parts of Desire* and *Foreign Correspondence*. Previously, Brooks was a correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* in Bosnia, Somalia, and the Middle East. Born and raised in Australia, she divides her time between Sydney and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. She lives with her husband, the author Tony Horwitz, and their two sons, Nathaniel and Bizuayehu.

You can visit her website at: <http://www.geraldinebrooks.com>

To the Teacher

These notes and activities are generally suited to students in years 10-12 but could be used more widely. Please select and adapt according to your students' needs. Some websites have been linked to these classroom activities, but your school library or public library will have wonderful resources, too. Help students develop their information literacy skills by discussing other possible sources/places to access information.

Pre-reading activities

The 1600s were a torrid, violent time. The period was marked both the dawn of modern medicine and the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment all over Europe. In England, these years also brought the Restoration - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00547bx>—a revolution in every aspect of life against Cromwell's Puritanism - <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Exhibitions/Cromwell/cromwell.htm>. English physicians charted the circulatory system, and the invention of the compound microscope and identification of bacteria were together about to begin unravelling the mystery of infectious disease.

In 1662, King Charles established the Royal Society -<http://royalsociety.org/about-us/history/?from=welcome> in order to promote the study of natural science. The world was changing rapidly, and its central focus shifted from God to man. Women, who had always had a role in healing and medicine, were excluded from the study of medicine, yet continued to provide a range of paid healing services such as midwifery and wet nursing. The 1660s were a particularly savage time. England was ravaged by the Black Death in 1665 and London was razed in the Great Fire of London in 1666. Life was fragile. Death imminent.

1. Discuss or brainstorm students' prior knowledge of the time in which the book is set.

To assist discussion, you could play some of the Horrible History videos:

The Plague song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkIcFeh6AiE>

English civil war

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4b0G_auKCI

Oliver Cromwell

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWPbnWMpMiA&feature=related>

Monty Python on Oliver Cromwell

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJ1yPz14LrU>

Questions to encourage discussion:

- The Plague – what it was, how many people died?
- What was life like in England in 1665?
- Who was Oliver Cromwell?
- Who were the Puritans and what did they believe in?
- What was the Restoration? Were there doctors or healers at this time?

- What was the role of science at this time?
- What was the relationship between God and men and women?
- Do you think that people are inherently good or evil?
- Should people act in the interests of themselves as individuals or for the good of their community?
- Looking at the cover of the book, what do you think it is about? Does it remind you of any other books you have read?

2. Research and presentation activity

Set students the following research topics. Divide the class into pairs or small groups and assign one topic per pair/group. Ask them to research a list of questions and then to prepare a five minute Powerpoint/Prezi presentation or poster/glogster on the topic. Class members listen and write down the key points in their notebooks so you can check to make sure they have taken down the notes! Please see Attachment One for research prompts that could be used in class.

The Plague of 1665

- What was it?
- How many people died?
- How was it transmitted?
- What happened to people who got it?
- What did people do to try and prevent its spread?

Oliver Cromwell and Puritanism

- Who was Oliver Cromwell and what did he do?
- What was Puritanism? Why was it significant?
- What changed in English society as a result?
- Was Christmas celebrated and were theatres closed during this period?

The Restoration

- What was it?
- What were the key events?
- What happened as a result? Why was it significant?
- What changed in English society as a result?

The role of women in medicine in England

- What was the Age of Enlightenment?
- What did it mean for women?
- What kind of roles had women played in healing and medicine?
- Were women excluded from medical studies? What happened as a result?

***Year of Wonders* is based on a true story**

Year of Wonders is based on a true story about how the Plague affected the villagers of Eyam – a small village in the middle of England in 1665. It is a fictionalised account of a historical event. Over a period of 14 months, 274 people died out of a total of 350 people.

In early September 1665, the local tailor, George Viccars, died of bubonic plague. It is believed that he brought the disease to the village with a bolt of cloth. Over the following weeks other members of the village succumbed to the disease. To prevent the disease spreading to other villages the local rector, William Mompesson convinced the people of Eyam to quarantine themselves within the village boundary. A few inhabitants fled, but most stayed. There is a museum in Eyam which contains detailed displays and accounts of when the village went into voluntary quarantine when "The Plague" was imported in infected cloth from London in 1665.

Geraldine Brooks — author of *Year of Wonders*

Geraldine Brooks chanced upon the story of Eyam and its terrible history while living in England in 1990.

“The written record of what happened in Eyam during the plague year is scant. Apart from three letters by the rector, no narrative account from the year itself actually exists. The "histories" that purport to record the facts were actually written many years later, and historians have found inconsistencies that cast doubt on their accuracy. Therefore, there was no way to write a satisfying nonfiction narrative. And, since the story had taken root in my imagination, the only way to indulge my impulse to tell it was to take the leap into fiction. The factual basis of the story was actually very helpful to me: it was like having the framing of the house already erected — I could see the shape from the beginning.”

<http://www.harpercollins.com.au/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=50017902&displayType=interview>

Reading the story

The first page

Look at the extract from Annus Mirabilis on the first page. Define Annus Mirabilis. What happened in 1666? Why is the poem called Year of Wonders?

*O let it be enough what thou hast done,
When spotted deaths ran arm'd through every street,
With poison'd darts, which not the good could shun,
The speedy could outfly, or valiant meet.*

*The living few, and frequent funerals then,
Proclaim'd thy wrath on this forsaken place:
And now those few who are return'd agen
Thy searching judgments to their dwellings trace.*

- From [//Annus Mirabilis, The Year of Wonders, 1666//](#) by John Dryden

Play the students the video of the Queen's Speech in 1992

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHIEzh5ky1A>

Read out and examine this extract from the Queen's speech:

"1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure. In the words of one of my more sympathetic correspondents, it has turned out to be an 'Annus Horribilis'. I suspect that I am not alone in thinking it so. Indeed, I suspect that there are very few people or institutions unaffected by these last months of worldwide turmoil and uncertainty. This generosity and whole-hearted kindness of the Corporation of the City to Prince Philip and me would be welcome at any time, but at this particular moment, in the aftermath of Friday's tragic fire at Windsor, it is especially so."

- What happened to the Queen and the Royal Family and England in 1992?
- Why did she refer to it as Annus Horribilis?

Think about a year in your lives.

- Has there been one year that was the best year of your life? What happened? Did you get a bike or move to a house with a swimming pool? Did your Mother have a new baby?
- Or, have you ever had a really terrible year, with a Grandparent or beloved pet dying?

- Looking back is there any part of that terrible year that turned out to be a positive? Did you learn something about yourself that you didn't know? Did you become closer to someone who proved to be a dear friend?

Chapter One – Apple picking time

- Why is this chapter called Apple-picking Time?
- What part of the story does this chapter discuss?
- It is at the beginning or near the end of the story?
- Who is the narrator? What has happened to her husband? What impression do you get of what she thinks about her husband?
- What is the relationship between the narrator and the Rector?
- What does Anna think about Mrs Mompellion? Are they good friends or enemies? What makes you think that?
- Why is Anna so kind to the horse?

Chapter Two – Ring of Roses

- What does the title mean? What kind of clue does this give the reader as to what is to follow?
- Who is George Vickers and what is his occupation?
- What does George bring into Anna's life?
- Can you see a change in Anna with the arrival of George into her home?
- Describe what Elinor Mompellion looks like when Anna first sees her.
- What do we learn about herb knowledge? What does Anna think happens to women who partake in it?
- What role does Mem Gowdie play in the village?
- Describe what happens to George Vickers – what happens to his face and body?
- What impression do you have of the Rector and his horse?

Chapter Three - The Thunder of His Voice

- What does the title mean? Whose voice does it refer to?
- What does Anys do? How does she help the villagers?
- Describe and draw a picture of the Gowdies' cottage and garden.
- How did you feel when you read of what George's intentions were for Anna? If you felt sad for her, why?
- Why does Anys not want to marry?

- What did the Puritans consider to be dark and light?
- Is Anys good or bad?
- When is the Plague first mentioned?
- What is the Rector's response to the idea of running from the Plague? What role does God play in his belief? Would you run from the plague?
- How would you describe Anna? Is she forthright or docile?

Chapter Four - Rat-fall

- What does the title mean?
- Describe how Anna feels about her children on pages 66 and 67.
- Why has the author written about the children so tenderly?
- What do you think is going to happen?
- What does Mem think of the barber-surgeon?
- Does the barber-surgeon provide relief for Edward?
- Does Anna do something that she hasn't done before?
- What happens to Tom?
- How did you feel reading about what happened to Tom? Why?

Chapter Five – Sign of a Witch

- What does the title suggest is going to happen?
- Who manages to provide relief to Jamie?
- What does Anna think about Anys Gowdie's herbal remedies? Do you think she is beginning to question the existence of God?
- How did you feel when Jamie died? Describe in detail his final day. What has the author done to make you feel sad when Jamie dies?
- Do you agree "in the midst of life, we are in Death?"
- Does Anna defend Mem? Why does she come to her aid?
- Were the villagers justified in their belief that the Gowdies are witches?
- What does the Rector do? Why is he called Michael Mompellion in the last pages of this chapter?
- Who is right and who is wrong?
- What is the significance of the last sentence?

Chapter Six – Venom in the Blood

- What is the snow a metaphor for?
- What does the village lose when Mem and Anys are gone?

- Why do you think the Rector suggests that this is the time to quarantine themselves?
- What role does the killing of Anys have? What arguments does he present?
- What role does Mr Stanley have in persuading the villagers?
- Why do the Bradford's depart?
- Why does Anna decide to stay?
- Why do the villagers listen to the Rector?

Chapter Seven - Wide Green Prison

- What arguments does the Rector put forward for the Bradford's to stay?
- What does Colonel Bradford argue?
- What does Anna think? Why does she stay?
- Why is the Rector so furious with the actions of the Bradford family when they decide to leave the village before the quarantine is put into place? Is his anger justified?
- Why do Maggie and Brand leave?
- What is Anna asked to do, that she has never done before? Whose knowledge does she draw upon? Why does she start calling Mrs Mompellion, Elinor Mompellion? Why does she take the phial of poppy?
- What does the birth of a newborn symbolise?

Chapter Eight - So Soon to Be Dust

- What does the return of Maggie and Brand show?
- What do the actions of Joss Bont make Anna think?
- What is happening to Anna's faith in God by the end of the chapter?

Chapter Nine - The Poppies of Lethe

- Why doesn't Anna return the poppy?
- Why is there so much focus on death in this chapter?
- What is happening to the villagers?
- What is the significance of Anna going to the Gowdie's cottage?
- Why does Elinor insist that Anna call her Elinor? What kind of relationship do Elinor and Anna have?
- Why does Elinor reveal her past to Anna?
- How does it make you feel about Elinor, Michael and Anna? What does the poppy symbolise in this chapter?

Chapter Ten - Among Those That Go Down to the Pit

- How has Anna changed from before the Plague?
- Why is digging graves an important job?
- What kind of work does Anna do?
- What is the significance of the Church closing?
- Has God left the village of Eyam?
- Why do Elinor and Anna help Merry? How do they help Merry?
- Were women permitted to work in mines in the 1600s?
- Why does Anna find some peace in helping Merry?

Chapter Eleven - The Body of the Mine

- Do you think what Bont is doing is wrong? If so, why? Why do the villagers turn against him?
- Why do you think Brooks included this as part of the story?
- What happens to Anna as a result of the actions of her Father? What do you think the break she has with her Father symbolises? Why doesn't she save him?

Chapter Twelve - The Press of Their Ghosts

- Why does Anna cry for her Father?
- Why do some of the villagers turn to magic?
- What is the difference between what the villagers are doing and Anna and Elinor's work?
- How does Anna feel about the role of God in her life?
- What happens to the villagers as they deal with the enormous death toll?
- What is flagellation?
- What does the Rector do and how would you characterise his behaviour?
- Why is Anna jealous? Why does she smash the dishes? Is she in love? With whom?

Chapter Thirteen – A Great Burning

- Describe the relationship between Elinor and Anna.
- Do you agree with Elinor that the year was a year of Wonders?
- Why does the Rector want everything burnt?
- What did Elinor mean about Anna being a friend to Michael?

Chapter Fourteen – Deliverance

- As Elinor has survived the Plague, is that a symbol of the community surviving?
- What made Aphra go mad?
- Why did the Rector think it was not time to remove the quarantine?
- What is ironic about Elinor's death?

Chapter Fifteen - Apple-picking Time

- Why is Aphra buried on the moors?
- What is the significance of Anna riding Anteros?
- What do you think Anteros symbolises?
- Are Michael and Anna in love?
- Why are Anna and the baby in danger?
- After the death of Elinor, the Rector reveals the truth about his marriage. How does it make you feel about him?

Epilogue – The Waves, Like Ridges of Plough'd Land

- What does Anna learn to become?
- Was it a Year of Wonders?
- Was the Plague God's wrath made manifest?

Major themes and moral dilemmas in the novel

Even though events in *Year of Wonders* take place in 1665, the book raises many issues and questions that are relevant to our lives today. Some of the themes and moral dilemmas raised in the book are:

Should I stay or should I go? Should I act in the interests of myself or my community?

This is a question that we are all faced with at many points in our lives. Should I stay with the sinking ship or save my own life? Should I stay with the person I love who treats me badly or should I go?

1. Play the video of The Clash singing – Should I stay or Should I go?:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1Gn0e7kvTA&feature=related> -

2. Discuss the opinion piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald* regarding the decisions made by the Captain of the Costa Concordia.

Courage untested until ship goes down by Theodore Dalrymple in the Sydney Morning Herald, January 20, 2012 at <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/courage-untested-until->

[ship-goes-down-20120119-1q8cn.html#ixzz1jwPoXc9L](http://www.ship-goes-down-20120119-1q8cn.html#ixzz1jwPoXc9L)

This idea of staying or going is one of the major themes of *Year of Wonders*. What made the village of Eyam so unique, was the decision by the villagers to isolate themselves from the rest of the world so that the disease would not spread to other communities. Geraldine Brooks says, "The unique thing about Eyam's quarantine was that it was voluntary. I was able to find no other examples of such communal self-sacrifice. In London, Samuel Pepys writes in his journal of the terrible treatment meted out to plague victims: "We are become as cruel as dogs one to another." There, the houses of plague victims were sealed and guarded, locking in the well with the ill, with no one to bring food, water, or comfort of any kind. Pepys writes that you could hear the cries of the afflicted coming from the houses, which were marked with large red crosses and the words "God Have Mercy."

<http://www.harpercollins.com.au/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=50017902&displayType=interview>

In the novel Brooks, outlines multiple arguments to stay or to go.

"Greater love no man hath than this, that he lay down his life for a friend," p. 101 Mr Mompellion

"But how would we repay the kindness of those who received us, if we carried the seeds of the Plague to them? What burden would we bear if, because of us, hundreds die who might have lived? No! Let us accept this Cross. Let us carry it in God's Holy Name!" p.104 Mr Mompellion

"I said then, and I say now, that my life and the lives of my family are of more consequence to me than some possible risk to strangers." Colonel Bradford p.112

"Think of the good that you might yet do here...Your courage has long been celebrated. Why not add a new chapter? ...I could learn much from your counsel as to how best go on as events unfold here." p.113 Mr Mompellion

"I did not raise my daughter to have her play wet nurse to a rabble. And if I desired to succour the afflicted I would have joined you in Holy Orders." p.113 Colonel Bradford

"The people will not forgive you for abandoning them." p.114 Mr Mompellion

"And you think I care for the opinion of a few sweaty miners and their snotty-nosed brats?" p.114

Colonel Bradford

"I...do have a choice. And I propose to exercise it." p.115 Colonel Bradford

"Enjoy your books. Enjoy them now! For their are no pockets in a shroud!" p.116 Mr Mompellion

The Bradford family bears the brunt of Mompellion's rage when they leave town to save themselves. However, weren't they only doing what every other noble family did in those days: run because they had the means to run? Can you really blame the Bradfords for running?

How much of Mompellion's push for the quarantine had to do with the secrets he shared with Elinor? How much of his desire to quarantine to do with his own self-hatred or was he really acting out of everyone's best interests?

Would you have stayed? Or would you have gone? Who has the ability to choose? What do you need in order to leave? Can we relate the story of this town's extraordinary sacrifice to our own time? Is it unrealistic to expect a village facing a similar threat to make the same decision nowadays? What lessons might we learn from the villagers of Eyam?

Should people take justice into their own hands?

One of the most powerful and gruesome scenes in the novel is when the villagers decide to determine if Mem and Anys Gowdie are witches. Keeping in mind that this story takes place a good twenty-five years before the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts, what is the role of the Gowdie women in the novel? What is it about these women that drives their neighbours to murderous rage? How does their nonconformity lead to their becoming scapegoats?

God versus nature and faith versus futility

One of the major themes in the book is the role of God in determining what happens in our lives. Faith is questioned.

Medicine versus herbal knowledge versus magic

There is an ongoing argument between pages of the novel between the herbal knowledge practiced in the village by the Gowdies and the developing field of Medicine as well as the magic practices employed by desperate villagers. Which one is right? Which approach is the most effective?

Characters and character development

The characters in *Year of Wonders* are complex and contradictory. Describe in detail the characters of Anna, Elinor and the Rector at the beginning of the novel compared with what they are like at the end of the novel. Which people and events shaped and changed them throughout the course of the novel? What have they experienced over the course of the novel?

Anna

- Anna is the narrator of the story – we see the story through her eyes. Is what she tells us, as readers, the truth?
- What has happened to her?
- What did her husband do? What happened to him?
- What happened to her children?
- Was George Vickers her lover?
- What was her relationship to Elinor and Rev Mompellion?
- What work did she do? What kind of work did she do over the course of the novel? How did it change?
- How did her relationship with Rev Mompellion and Elinor change over the novel?
- Describe the relationship Anna has with her Father and how it changes.
- How did her relationship with God and understanding of God change over the course of the story?

The Rector

Find and write down physical descriptions of the Rector in parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the book.

- When Anna first meets him – he is the Reverend, then he becomes Mr Mompellion then he becomes Michael – what does this tell us, as readers about what Anna thinks of him?
- Explain the relationship the Rector has with his horse – Aphra?
- Are Elinor and Michael in love?
- Is the Rector a man of principle?

How an author tells their story — using structure

Great writers create tension on the page and through the power of their writing and the choices they make in how they tell the story make the reader want to know more and keep turning the page.

Geraldine Brooks makes some very interesting choices in how she chooses to tell this story. It is not told in a linear way. The book starts after the Plague has ravaged the village. Why?

Further, we know from the cover that this is a novel of the Plague. However the word plague is not mentioned specifically in the text until page 60. As readers we are drip fed information and this creates the necessary tension to make this a work of great fiction. The extract from *Annus Mirabilis* mentions spotted deaths and poison'd darts — powerful images of a savage death. The first of the four sections of the book is entitled *Leaf-Fall 1666*, yet we know that the Plague occurred in 1665. So someone, the narrator of this story, we can conclude has survived the spotted death. The first line of novel is, "I used to love this season." This is in the past tense — so a question is raised in the reader's mind — what has happened to the narrator? In the first chapter the narrator talks about the present day, the devastation that something has wreaked on her community and as readers we are left to question — what was the terrible thing that has ravaged this community — what was the contest between faith and futility?

The next section of the novel is entitled Spring and we go back to the year 1665. Spring is a powerful metaphor for new life. But again as readers, we know that a terrible tempest is coming. The first mention of the Plague occurs on page 42, just after the narrator the widow Anna has had a romantic encounter with her lodger George.

I almost dropped the pitcher in my shock. The fair young face of the evening before was gone from the pallet in front of me. George Viccars lay with his head pushed to the side by a lump the size of a newborn piglet, a great, shiny, yellow-purple knob of pulsing flesh. His face, half turned away from me because of the excrescence, was flushed scarlet, or rather, blotched, with shapes like rings of rose petals blooming under his skin. His blond hair was a dark, wet mess upon his head, and his pillow was drenched with sweat. There was a sweet, pungent smell in the garret. A smell like rotting apples.

As readers we are provided with graphic and powerful images of the Plague, but the curse is not

mentioned specifically until page 60 when Anna is serving at a Formal dinner, when a guest from London names it.

no reason to tarry. The city is emptying so fast that there is little worthwhile society to be had. One rarely sees a wigg'd gallant or a powdered lady, for wealth and connection are nō shield against **Plague.**"

The word dropped like an anvil among the tinkling silver-ware. The bright room dimmed for me as if someone had snuffed every candle all at once. I clutched the platter I carried so that I would not drop it and stood stock-still until I was sure of my balance. I gathered myself and tried to steady my breath. I had seen

For readers what is the effect of this structure? Why has Brooks started with the end of the story?

Language

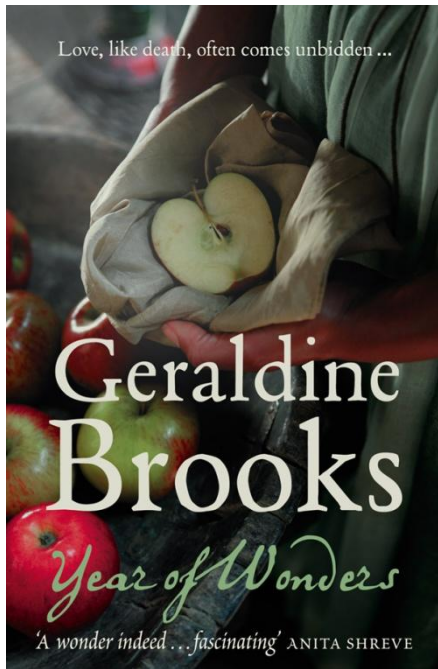
One of the ways that the author creates a profound sense of place and time is her wonderful use of language. Phrases such as "Let's swim her," instantly locate us in an era when a swimming test was used to determine whether or not a woman was a witch. You may find some of the vocabulary from *Year of Wonders* unusual or challenging. Working individually or as a group find challenging words in the text and write out the meaning and effect of each word or phrase, in your own words.

Word or phrase	Meaning and effect
Leaf-Fall	
Apple-picking time	
Hay stooks	
Sennight	A Middle English word for seven days and seven nights. Locates us in the past, not the present.
The timothy	
handfasted	
Lead seam	
slattern	
Oxford surgeon	
Papist	

Ring of roses	
Herb knowledge	
Devilment	
confinement	
doxy	
periwig	
Adit	
Let's swim her	A test to determine if a woman was a witch.
Holy herb of Saint John	In the Middle Ages, special flowers and plants were often associated to particular saints, especially if the plants had medicinal properties. St. John's Wort was believed to be associated with the beheading of St John. It has been used for over 2,000 years, primarily to heal wounds.
One withered pap	

In pairs, think and write down ten phrases and words that indicate that you are writing about 2012.

Visual literacy analysis of *Year of Wonders*



This is a useful way to consider one of the key ideas of the book; that a tragedy can also be the catalyst for enormous growth and change. It is also a useful exercise how to communicate ideas in a compressed format with only text and images as your tools.

The purpose of a book cover is to make a book so enticing that we want to buy it. A recent article in *Times Online* stated that, "studies show that a book on a three-for-two table has about one and a half seconds to catch a reader's eye. If it is picked up, it is on average glanced at for only three to four seconds." Time is of the essence! A book cover is essentially an invitation to buy the book. It is like an advertisement. The

visual and textual elements of the cover must work together to form the strongest emotional response in a reader. As famous adman, Bill Oberlander states, "you must captivate the heart and

soul of the reader.” You have to convert what the book is about into powerful words and images.

Related articles:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/dec/02/beautiful-book-covers>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/you-can-judge-a-book-by-its-cover-how-designers-are-helping-to-keep-the-old-format-alive-6273459.html>

Compare three different book covers of *Year of Wonders*

Part One: Find different editions of *The Year of Wonders* and consider the intended audience, mood and genre and the different visual techniques.

- What objects and words are emphasised in some and not others?
- What could the significance of the apple be? What can an apple symbolise? Is anyone looking at you directly? What does this tell you about the book? Who is the most important character or feature of the story? Describe the woman’s facial expression. What does this tell you?
- How do you respond to each one? Who do you think would find each cover appealing? What do they make you feel? What kind of mood do they evoke?

Part Two: Consider the visual literacy techniques on the cover of *Year of Wonders* in detail

- What does the cover tell you? What predictions can you make about the story? What is the effect of the tag line?
- Look at the font used. What does that tell you about what kind of book it is?
- What are the images used? Why do you think they have been used and emphasised? What do they tell you about the story?
- What part of the cover attracts your attention first? What is the effect?
- What do you look at first, then second and after that? What is the effect?
- Does one element of the picture seem to be placed in front of the other or is one element at the centre or off centre? What does this tell you about the book?
- What is the setting? What does this tell you about the story? What are the colours used? Why have those colours been chosen? How does colour change, emphasise or enhance meaning? Does colour alter the mood, tone, and narrative in any way?
- What is the relationship between the title of the book and the tag line? Can it be a *Year of Wonders* if it is a novel about the plague? What does this tell you about the book?

In pairs, design a cover for *Year of Wonders* by Geraldine Brooks. Design a book cover that would make the book appealing to teenagers. Given that there is such a high body count, endless violence and death, yet much tenderness and love in the novel what needs to go onto the cover to make it appealing to teenagers? Remember you must make the words and images work together.

1. What information about the book needs to go on the cover? Is the author famous? Or unknown? Would a person buy the book because of who has written it?

2. What are some of the major ideas in the text and how would you represent the ideas in the book in text and images on the cover?

3. How would you organise the ideas and information that needs to go on the cover?

Design your cover. You have 30 minutes.

Adapted from: Quin, R., McMahon, B., Quin, R., 1996, *Using Visual Texts in Primary and Secondary English Classrooms*, Department of Education, Queensland and North Sydney Girls High School Stage 4: Picture books unit, NSW Department of Education.