

# School Library Pack 2014: Future Classics

## *Binny For Short* by Hilary McKay

### A Guide for Reading Groups

#### About Hilary McKay

Hilary McKay was born in Boston in Lincolnshire. She is the eldest of four girls. As a child, Hilary loved reading and says that the library was as familiar to her as her own house! After she had two children herself, Hilary decided that she wanted to spend more time with them and to write. Her other books include, *The Exiles* which won the Guardian Children's Fiction award and *Saffy's Angel* which won the Whitbread award.



#### About *Binny for Short*

Since her father died, Binny's family have struggled. Moving from one shabby flat to the next, there's not even enough money to spare for her sister Clem to continue with her flute lessons - and worst of all, Binny isn't able to keep her wonderful dog, Max. Events take an unexpected turn when Aunt Violet dies and - to everyone's astonishment - leaves Binny and her family a house by the sea. Their new seaside home brings them new friends, new discoveries and even a dangerous adventure for Binny - but she still can't help longing for her beloved Max.

#### Characters

- **Binny** – Binny is eleven years old, her father died when she was small and she was further upset shortly after when Max, her dog, was given away.
- **Clem** – Clem is the elder sister of Binny. She is a keen flute player and is so dedicated to learning how to play the instrument that she sells various items and gains a job in order to be able to continue her lessons after the family can no longer afford them.
- **James** – James is Binny's younger brother. He has a fascination with starting his own farm with real livestock and concocts various poisons with which to water the cress that he grows.
- **Mum** – Binny's mum struggles to afford to look after the children once the bookshop and house are sold. When they move to Aunt Violet's house, she gets a job at an old people's home.
- **Gareth** – the next door neighbour at Aunt Violet's house, he and Binny become enemies and dare one another to try new things. Gareth is unhappy because of the new relationship his dad has.

#### Questions for discussion

1. Do you think Binny and Gareth really are enemies? What happens in the book to show the relationship that they share?

You might find it useful to think about:

- Gareth's bike
- The time they spend up in the treehouse
- The expedition they go on to clear the beach of the old fishing net

2. When talking about moving house, Clem asks her sister 'Why do you hate it?... but Binny shook her head and would not explain.' (p49)

Why might Binny be so against the idea of moving house and particularly of moving to Aunt Violet's old house?

3. How do Binny and her family make Aunt Violet's house feel like home? Do you think Gareth feels that the house where he lives, next door, is a home?

4. '...it was no use wailing at James because, as far as anyone could tell he lived like a boy in a bubble, entirely in his own world.' (p80)

Do you agree that James lives as though in his own world? In what ways is this true? What does James do and think which makes you answer in this way?

5. Why might Gareth feel so angry towards his step-mum? Do you think he is always fair to her?

6. Which do you think is the most challenging dare that Gareth and Binny suggest to one another? Might any of them be dangerous?

7. Do you think that Binny would make a good sister or friend? What are the reasons for your answer?

**You might find it useful to think about:**

- Max the dog and how loyal she is to him

- Do you think Binny is sometimes headstrong, does she sometimes say things she might later regret?

- Her fun loving side with the tricks and dares that she plays

8. Do you think Binny has got over the death of her father? Can you think of examples of her behaviour or actions that might show that she is still upset?

## Extension activity

Gareth has a real love of nature and knows about different marine birds and creatures. Together he and Binny set out to clear the old fishing net from the sea to protect the natural wildlife. Can you think of an area near you that you and your group could improve? What work do you think needs doing and what types of wildlife would you hope to attract?

## Further Reading

Dare you read any of these other books about families?

*The Penderwicks at Point Mouette* by Jeanne Birdsall

*Lucky Star* by Cathy Cassidy

*Madame Doubtfire* by Anne Fine

*Rainbow Beauty: Strawberry Summer* by Kelly McKain

*Lemonade Sky* by Jean Ure