

# Penguin Random House

## TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

### THE CALLING

#### Fleur Beale

A novel about finding your calling, the extraordinary nun Mother Mary Joseph Aubert, and the realities of religious bigotry in late-nineteenth century New Zealand.

'Dreams were dangerous things.'

It was the dream of Molly's dying mother that she would become a nun. It isn't, however, the dream of her Methodist father, who wants her to marry.

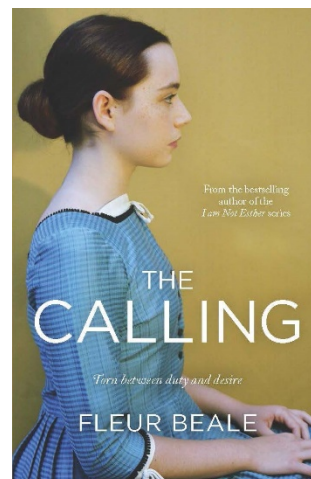
But what is her true calling and how can she follow it? As the 19th century draws to an end, Molly searches out the extraordinary nun Mother Mary Joseph Aubert to find out.

#### About the Author

Fleur Beale is the author of many award-winning books for children and young adults — she has now had more than 40 books published in New Zealand, as well as being published in the United States and England. In 2015 she was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

*The New Zealand Listener* has called Beale 'one of the most consistently accomplished and versatile writers for teenagers in the country'. A 'strong storyteller' (Trevor Agnew, *The Press*) who is 'consistently engaging' (Frances Grant, *Weekend Herald*).

Her entry in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* noted that her characters are 'intensely aware of their difficulties, social troubles and shortcomings', and in so doing she exhibits 'her understanding of teenagers, male and female, and ability to motivate even reluctant readers'.



#### SPECIFICATIONS:

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Extent: 352  
Readership: 13+

#### RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Before reading
- During reading
- Themes/ Characters
- Language and style
- Research and creative responses



# ***The Calling*** by Fleur Beale

Teacher Notes: *By Lara Liesbeth*

## **BEFORE READING**

- 1) Open the book and look at the author biography. Fleur Beale is a writer with many accolades. Make a list of these. Have you read any of her other books?
- 2) This book is dedicated to the Sisters of Compassion. Have you heard of them? Research who they are. Why do you think this book might be dedicated in such a way?
- 3) Cover art and design can give us clues about the book inside. Name three visual or verbal features that you think do this, and suggest what the clue might be.

## **DURING READING**

### ***Comprehension Questions***

#### **Chapter:**

What does Molly dearly want at the start of the book?

- 1) Time has passed. What has happened in the years since the letter?
- 2) From whom is the letter that Molly holds so dear?
- 3) What does this chapter tell you about Molly's temperament?
- 4) What is your first impression of Eddie?
- 5) Where does Molly go after buying her boots?
- 6) What did Molly do to stop her brothers fighting?

- 7) What does Dad do when Molly refuses to do all the chores?
- 8) Who is Molly's father going to marry?
- 9) What does Gladys say about Mrs Archer?
- 10) Why do you think Molly bursts out crying?
- 11) What does Mama Doris want Molly to add to her dress?
- 12) What does Molly decide at the end of this chapter?
- 13) How much money does Molly's father give her?
- 14) Whose familiar face does Molly see at the end of this chapter?
- 15) Why does Father Niall recoil from Molly?
- 16) What is your first impression of Mother Joseph?
- 17) Molly thinks that she will be given a particular role at the nunnery. What is the job that fills Molly's heart with dread?
- 18) Molly expects to sleep in a nun's cell. Where does she sleep instead?
- 19) What job is Molly assigned at Jerusalem?
- 20) What does Molly ask permission for in her letter home?
- 21) From whom were the three letters for Molly on mail day?
- 22) Why does Molly cry in this chapter?
- 23) What does Mother say about the lost geese?
- 24) Where has Eddie gone?
- 25) Name two things that Father Soulas did differently to Mother when he was in charge.
- 26) Who comes to help Father Soulas?
- 27) Why is Molly glad to escape to help Father Soulas on the farm?
- 28) What happened to Father Farelly?
- 29) What does Molly joke about missing most?
- 30) What is Molly's half-sister's name?
- 31) What is Molly most frightened of doing with her sister? Why?
- 32) What does Molly realise about Dinah?
- 33) What does 'the Gospel of the Horse' tell Molly?
- 34) Whose familiar face does Molly see in Wellington?
- 35) What is Father Niall Farrelly's secret?
- 36) Where does Molly find work in Wellington?
- 37) What offer does Molly get after the accident?
- 38) What does Molly realise about Eddie?
- 39) Where do Molly and Eddie have their talk?
- 40) Why can't Molly nurse Mrs Appleby?
- 41) What is the name of Mrs Appleby's son?
- 42) Who is Mrs Neill?
- 43) What does Molly decide to do in this chapter?
- 44) What do you think of Molly's final decision?

## AFTER READING

### *Themes*

A) In small groups, discuss the following themes and questions in relation to the novel.

**1) Religion can offer both solace and despair**

Molly finds great solace in her Catholicism. She feels connected to her mother, who was also Catholic, and is determined to be a nun. She feels her life purpose is in Catholicism. On the other hand, religion tears her family apart. In chapter 12 Bert says: 'I don't get it. Why's she suddenly started hating Molly? She was all friendly before she knew about it. It's dumb.' He shares a child's perspective on the divisiveness of the time of having different religious beliefs.

**2) Compassion for others versus personal sacrifice**

Molly is constantly trying to be compassionate towards others. Sometimes it is at great personal sacrifice, for example when she has to leave Jerusalem to look after her stepmother Doris and half sister Violet. Where does the balance lie?

**3) Home is where the heart is**

Molly has a lot of different homes in this novel. There is her childhood home with her family, Jerusalem, and various workplaces in Wellington. What makes Molly feel most at home? What does 'home is where the heart is' actually mean?

**4) Obligation versus individual freedom**

At one point later in the novel Molly asks 'when did obedience end and slavery begin?' (339) She feels many obligations to various people which dulls her personal insights into her own happiness.

**5) To thine own self be true**

Molly finally unpacks what she wants at the end of the novel. She is guided by Mother Joseph saying '*Look into your heart.*' (334). An important theme here is the value of knowing yourself. It can make decisions easier.

**6) We can do hard things**

Molly is worried throughout the novel about the difficulties she encounters. But later she is advised that 'it's best to face the hard things. You can do it. You're strong.' (334) An idea to think about in this novel is that doing hard things is not impossible. In fact, doing hard things can lead you down the right path!

- B) Together, rank these themes from most important to least important. Use evidence from the book to support your ideas.
- C) Choose your top theme and write a paragraph telling us why you think it is the most important. Share with the class and discuss.
- D) Set up an informal debate with teams arguing why their theme is the most important in the book.

## ***Characters***

Molly is the most important character in this book. She is the narrator and the story is centred on her life. Mother Joseph is an important minor character, as is Father Niall, Eddie and Molly's father.

1) Write down everything you learn reading about:

- a) Molly
- b) Mother Joseph
- c) Eddie
- d) Father Niall
- e) Molly's father

- 2) How do these characters develop throughout the novel? Divide a page into three columns titled 'Beginning', 'Middle' and 'End'. Fill in the columns with your understanding of these characters throughout the text.
- 3) Find quotes from the book to support your opinion. Add these to your character development page.
- 4) Draw an outline of Molly. Inside the figure, write down all the feelings she has in the book. On the outside write down all the things other people want from or for her.

## ***Genre, Style and Language***

### **Tense and narrative perspective:**

This book has been written in first person, which means we can understand the thinking and feelings of the main character the best, as if we were their confidant. It is also written in past tense, which gives a sense of history to the story and the lives of the characters.

1. Note down three parts of the novel where we as readers are given specific information about Molly that can only be known through first person narrative.

As mentioned above, past tense gives a sense of history to the text, but it can also be fun to play around with this in your own and other people's writing.

2. Choose three paragraphs from throughout the book that you think are well-written in past tense. Write each paragraph in present tense, then in future tense. What are the similarities when you change the tense? What are the differences? Which do you prefer? Why?

## **Figurative language:**

An author can use figurative language to describe things in an interesting way. There are many examples of this in the book. Similes and metaphors are enlightening ways of describing things through comparison. A simile is a comparison using like or as; a metaphor compares directly.

Idioms are also used for effect in this novel. An idiom is a phrase, saying, or a group of words with a metaphorical (not literal) meaning, which has become accepted in common usage.

Here are some examples from the book:

### **Similes:**

‘He didn’t say why he’d suddenly stopped being as annoying as a pebble in a boot ...’ (54)

‘... it fair riled me to see my father leaning back in his chair, puffing on his pipe and looking at her like she was his own invention.’ (77)

‘Round and round went my thoughts like the wheels on a train.’ (95)

### **Metaphors:**

‘The stream of visiting women meant she didn’t help me with the Monday wash ...’ (77)

‘She poured out a whole river of chatter.’ (80)

‘... I saw that all peace in my home was burnt to ashes ...’ (85)

### **Idioms:**

‘That took the wind out of her sails.’ (78)

‘This month was going to be a fine old picnic.’ (232)

‘My friend, you have hit the nail square on its head.’ (241)

- 1) Can you find other similes, metaphors and idioms in the book? List as many as you can.

### **Vocabulary:**

There is some excellent vocabulary in this book. Here are some examples.

- Obstreperous (15)
- Conversationalist (20)
- Resolve (45)
- Skelping (46)
- Copping (48)
- Discipline (50)
- Scuttled (51)
- Bedraggled (51)
- Corporeal (60)
- Pummelling (61)
- Alight (75)
- Riled (77)
- Adoration (79)
- Riven (87)
- Blasphemous (112)
- Traipsed (115)
- Array (280)
- Benighted (281)
- Confounding (282)
- Atone (331)

- 2) Choose ten words you don't know and write the definitions for each word. Use each in a new sentence.
- 3) Can you write a short story using five of the words you now know? They don't have to be in the same place - spread them throughout your writing.



## ***Further Research and Creative Responses***

1. Use the historical note at the back of the novel to choose one book used in research by Fleur Beale. Read and write a book report to present to the class.
2. Think of an example of someone famous (either historical or contemporary) who has followed their heart and had to do hard things (overcome adversity) to get to their true destiny. Make a poster presenting this person and explaining these things to viewers.
3. Choose one setting in the book and create a diorama of this place. It might be Jerusalem, Molly's home, a house in Wellington, or somewhere else! You choose.
4. Visit your local museum and pay special attention to New Zealand's colonial history. What do you like about the museum's depiction of the 19th Century? What looks difficult? Make a list of these things.
5. In groups of three, turn Molly's story from *The Calling* into a play. You will need to choose a vignette from the book to represent in dramatic form. Practice and perform for your class.
6. Choose a part of the story to rewrite from Eddie's perspective. It might be when he is with Molly or when she is away. What is important to him? Let us hear what he thinks by switching and using first person narrative for him.
7. Make a map of Molly's colonial New Zealand. Mark her journey through the book on your map. Can you find any pictures of Wellington at this time in our history to enrich your map?
8. Write a final chapter about Molly's life after the story in the novel ends. What is her nursing training like? What about her marriage to Eddie? Does she meet her new half-sibling now that Doris is pregnant again? It's up to you!

Eddie is interested in engineering what we now know as motor cars, even though people are still only using horses and buggies in his time. Research the evolution of the motor car and present as a powerpoint,