



## Captain Corelli's Mandolin

of rejection. He joins the army and falls in love with Francesco, a soldier from Genoa, who will never know about Carlo's love. Together, they march from Albania to Athens, suffer extreme cold and hunger and are defeated by the Greeks. Francesco dies, and some of the soldiers are saved when a German invasion forces the Greeks to fight on two fronts.

**Chapters 5–8:** While the islanders wait for an imminent invasion, Mandras recovers and Pelagia feels increasingly guilty. On 30 April 1941, the Italians arrive in Cephallonia and the villagers are ordered to provide them with accommodation. Captain Corelli stays at Dr Iannis's house. He is an Italian officer with a sense of humour, a mandolin that he calls Antonia and with plans to become a professional musician when the war comes to an end. His character, his music and his sensitivity gradually win Pelagia's love. During his stay at Iannis's house, Corelli organizes an opera group, La Scala. Günter Weber, a German soldier with a Nazi conviction of superiority, joins the group. Mandras, in the meantime, joins ELAS, a Communist group of freedom fighters under the leadership of Hector. With this group, his resentment finds expression and he becomes a cruel murderer and rapist in the name of historical necessity.

Both Pelagia and Corelli are aware of the cost that an affair with a member of an occupying force could have for a Greek girl engaged to a local fisherman who is away fighting the invasion. So their love stays platonic while they make plans for an after-war marriage. It is during this period that Bunny Warren, a British spy, turns up and is helped by Dr Iannis.

**Chapters 9–10:** When the Allies invade Sicily and Italy surrenders, the Italian soldiers in Greece are abandoned to their fate. Corelli knows what to expect and tries to prepare his soldiers for the fights that will come. He leaves his mandolin in Dr Iannis's house, parts with Pelagia and stays with his men. Gandin, the leader of the Italian troops, decides to negotiate with the Germans a way out of Greece for the Italians, a mistake that costs the lives of many Greek civilians who die under German bombing, most Italian soldiers who are executed, and his own. The order to execute the Italians is given to Weber, who tries to refuse it but is informed that disobeying an order is punished by death. When the Italian soldiers are being shot, Carlo protects Corelli's body with his own, and when Weber finds that Corelli is alive under Carlo's body, he lets him live.

**Chapters 11–13:** Velisarios brings Corelli to Dr Iannis's house, where bullets are removed from his body. Velisarios, the doctor and Pelagia find Carlo's body and bury it with a simple ceremony. When he recovers, and with Bunny Warren's help, Corelli escapes from the island in a boat. In spite of Corelli's promise to come back, Pelagia feels empty and devastated.

In 1944 the Germans are ordered to leave the island. The Greek Communists, known as the EAM (the former ELAS), advance against the fascists and say that anybody who is not with them, is against them. Dr Iannis, suspected of having fascist ideas, is kidnapped, and Pelagia, now alone, shares her days and sorrows with Drosoula, Mandras's mother.

Mandras, who is now a member of the EAM, returns to the island, resentful and aggressive. In his anger, he tries to rape Pelagia, and she shoots him in his shoulder. When Drosoula arrives, she curses him for what he has become. Shattered, Mandras drowns himself in the sea.

Dr Iannis returns two years later, broken and speechless, and finds a girl in his house, Antonia. She had been abandoned at his door during his absence, and Drosoula and Pelagia had adopted her. She could have been the daughter of a German, Italian or Greek father, but she never finds out.

When in 1949 the national government regains power, Pelagia and her father have switched roles and now he helps her assist the sick and wounded. The villagers find them an odd family, and Pelagia develops a belief in ghosts, since she sees Antonio come every year and disappear before her eyes.

**Chapters 14–17:** In August 1953 a strong earthquake hits the island. Houses are destroyed; many people die and survivors feel guilty for not having helped their dead. Pelagia can't forgive herself for not having helped her father. Antonia and Drosoula encourage her to finish writing her father's history book, which gives her some comfort. Time goes by. Pelagia receives anonymous postcards from different cities in the world. Antonia marries Alexi, a 32-year-old lawyer, and has a baby that Pelagia calls Iannis. Drosoula opens a taverna where her old house used to be. At her death, Pelagia takes charge of the taverna and, after some time, hires a musician to work there. Iannis becomes interested in music and starts playing Corelli's mandolin.

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Corelli finally comes back and tells Pelagia he thought she had married. In spite of her fury because she feels he has betrayed her and they have lost a life together, she finally holds to him as they go to visit the hut where they had secretly met many years before.

### Background and themes

**Love and war:** *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* is about two classic subjects – blighted love and the horror of war. By setting the scene on a beautiful unspoilt island, the writer is able to counterpoint the tragedy more starkly. How, he seems to invite us to ask, could such terrible things happen in such an idyllic place?

**A history of invasions:** The particular island the writer has chosen is special in that it has been invaded many times in its long history. As the doctor points out, horrors have often come from outside. In the first part of the novel, we see how the islanders come to terms with invasion, even when the soft Italian invasion becomes the harsh German version.

**Horror from within:** Then civil war hits the island, and the horrors come from inside. Now it is Greek against Greek and the atrocities are even worse. But in this tragedy of Gothic proportions, the writer has not finished with our emotions. Shortly after the end of the civil war, the island is struck by an earthquake, and families are ripped apart again by death, made doubly hard to bear this time because parents have left children to die in collapsing houses, and children have left elderly parents.

**A tragic love story:** Perhaps the writer is asking us to decide which of these horrors is the hardest to bear. But he is not done with us, because he offers another more personal horror – the horror of a lost life. The lovers have lost their chance of happiness through a ridiculous misunderstanding, not in the fog of war. As with the best tragedies, everybody is right and everybody suffers in the end.

### Discussion activities

#### Chapters 1–4

##### Before reading

1 **Group work:** Students read the Introduction and make a map with Cephallonia in the centre. They include and label all the places mentioned in the Introduction. Maps can be displayed in the classroom and stay there while the class works on the book.

##### After reading

- 2 **Discuss:** Ask students: *Why doesn't Dr Iannis like his own openings to the History of Cephallonia? Why is he finally satisfied with his change of title? After students have answered these questions, ask them: Is it possible to be objective when writing history? Doesn't reality always depend on the lens through which a person looks at it?*
- 3 **Research and artwork:** Students search the Internet for posters of the 1950s. Then they read carefully about the performance that Megalo Velisarios gave in the square (pages 3 and 4) and make a poster announcing the event.
- 4 **Pair work and discuss:** Ask students to find in this section of the book what the people in the village thought of the priest, the doctor and the doctor's daughter, and to discuss whether being a respected citizen in the village seems to depend on people's jobs, attitudes and behaviour, social position, etc. Ask them to also consider Dr Iannis's ideas about a good husband for Pelagia and his fears about what the town would think if she did not marry the man she was engaged to. Pairs report their ideas to the class and the class discusses whether the conditions that lead people to earn respectability have changed since the 1950s and whether they are different in small towns and big cities.
- 5 **Group work:** In groups, students compare the reasons why Carlo Guercio and Pelagia felt that they had to hide their feelings for the persons they loved and discuss whether their situation would be different today.
- 6 **Read carefully and write:** Students read pages 15 and 16 carefully and discuss why Francesco's perception of the time it would take to get to Athens changed from two weeks, into two months and then into two years. They write a letter from Francesco to his wife. Tell them to imagine that he wrote the letter over days, as the conditions of their trip changed, and that the last paragraph of the letter is written by Carlo. In it, he tells Francesco's wife about how Francesco died.
- 7 **Role play:** Students take the roles of Pelagia and Kyria Drosoula and role play their conversation after they have washed and looked after Mandras.
- 8 **Pair work and role play:** Divide the class into pairs. Half the pairs speak about Mandras's feelings when he received Pelagia's letters and could not read them or write back. The other half speak about Pelagia's feelings about Mandras's silence. Then students shift pairs and role play a conversation between Pelagia and Mandras when they meet.
- 9 **Research:** Read the following lines to the students: *'Those Italian pigs have sunk one of our ships at Tinos. And they fired on the harbour there. It was full of people. On a holy day too.'* (page 8). Ask students to search the Internet for information about this event. Tell them to find how the following names relate to the event: Elli, Mussolini, Metexas. Students report their findings to the class.

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### Chapters 5–8

#### Before reading

- 10 Guess:** Tell students: *These are lines from the coming chapters. Who do you think they are about? Has this man become evil or insane? What other cruel things do you think a man like this could do in war times?*  
'It was easier each time he hit him. In fact it became a pleasure. It was as if the anger from the earliest years of his childhood rose in him and was given expression. The old man threw himself on the ground, screaming, and (...?) suddenly knew that he could be a god.'

#### After reading

- 11 Role play:** Tell students to imagine that both Mandras and Captain Corelli love Pelagia so much that they want her happiness over and above their own. They role play a conversation between the two men; each gives reasons why it would be better for Pelagia to stay with the other.
- 12 Read carefully and discuss:** Students read carefully the first paragraph on page 25. Then they discuss why people, like Dr Iannis, want to write the history of their times and expect their writings to be read in the future. Ask them: *Is it because we all want to continue to exist in some way after we are gone? Is it because they want their version of truth to be known? What event in the history of your country in your times would you like the inhabitants of the future to know about?*
- 13 Debate:** Tell students: *Mandras justified his actions on Hector's ideas that 'a new Greece would be built, and you did what you liked with the inferior bricks that were going to be thrown away' (page 35). Weber thought that other races were inferior to his, and that this was a fact from science (page 44). Ask them: Is there any difference between these two men's ideas? Is Mandras's attitude different from the enemies he is fighting? Can a nation be built on the bases of violence and discrimination? Does fighting for your nation and ideals justify cruelty towards individuals?*
- 14 Group work:** Divide the class into groups. Have them discuss how far they agree with the following statements, explicitly or implicitly made in this section of the book. Groups report their conclusions to the class.  
*Music is not just a sweet sound; it is an emotional and intellectual journey.*  
*It is the duty of the inhabitants of a nation to hate invaders.*  
*Moral principles are important, not science.*  
*Love is a temporary madness (...). Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away.*
- 15 Artwork:** In groups, students draw the soldiers described in the first paragraph of page 26, Pelagia and Dr Iannis. Using these drawings, the whole class makes a collage poster of the scene.

- 16 Pair work:** In pairs, students select a passage from this section of the book that, in their opinion, represents a clear image of war. Pairs share the passages they chose and explain why they selected them.

- 17 Write and role play:** Students write an article that appears in a local newspaper informing people of what ELAS was doing. In the article, they mention the names of some of the people involved, including Mandras. Then they role play a conversation between Pelagia and her father after they have read the article.

### Chapters 9–10

#### Before reading

- 18 Guess:** Tell students: *The coming chapter is called 'Autumn 1943: Betrayal'. Who do you think is going to betray whom?*

#### After reading

- 19 Discuss:** Remind students of their discussion in activity 12. Have them now discuss whether the reasons that might have led Carlo to hide his writings in the hole in Dr Iannis's house were the same that led the doctor to hide his own. Then ask them: *How would people's need to be remembered be different if an eternal youth tonic were discovered and men became immortal? Would war still make sense? Would civilizations, countries, ideas fight each other to become dominant?*
- 20 Discuss:** Have students read carefully Carlo's and Corelli's answers to Weber's request for forgiveness before killing the Italian troops. Ask them to discuss which answer will probably stay longer in Weber's memory and why.
- 21 Role play:** Students imagine Weber and Corelli meet again many years after the war has ended, and role play their conversation.
- 22 Discuss:** Students discuss whether Weber's answer when ordered to kill the Italians was motivated by his desire to have a clean file or a clean conscience.
- 23 Role play:** Students decide what they think they would have done in Weber's place. Then they imagine Weber had refused to obey his orders and role play a jury deciding on his fate.
- 24 Write:** Students write a letter from Corelli to Carlo's family, informing them of how he died.
- 25 Discuss:** Students choose the music that they think would make an appropriate soundtrack for a film version of the scene in which the bodies of the Italian soldiers are burned.
- 26 Read carefully and discuss:** Students read carefully the fifth and sixth paragraphs of page 56. Then they discuss whether they think an imminent feeling of approaching death may cause relief when people are in deep pain or utter terror.

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### Chapters 11–13

#### Before reading

**27 Guess:** Ask students: *In the coming chapters, who do you think will be kidnapped, adopt a baby, curse his/her own son/daughter, kill him/herself, develop a belief in ghosts?* Students share their ideas, and then check their predictions as they read.

#### After reading

**28 Debate:** Students look the word 'euthanasia' up in their dictionaries. Then they debate whether it would have been 'more human' to help Corelli die if he had been as badly hurt as Dr Iannis first thought he was. In two groups, students then debate whether euthanasia should be legal or not, and in what cases.

**29 Pair work and write:** In pairs, students write the speech the doctor made when Carlos was buried.

**30 Discuss:** Tell students: *The doctor tells Corelli, 'The truth will make us free. We overcome fear by looking it in the eye.'* Students discuss whether they agree with this statement or not and why.

**31 Read carefully and discuss:** Remind students of their ideas in activity 22. Have them read carefully Corelli and Pelagia's conversation about Weber on page 66 and compare their ideas about Corelli's feelings for Weber and the feelings he expresses here. Ask them: *Does Pelagia feel the same? How do you think you would feel?*

**32 Role play:** In groups, students role play an islander telling his/her grandchildren, many years after the war is over, his/her memories of the Italian and the German soldiers. Students who play the role of grandchildren ask the questions a child is likely to ask about war.

**33 Group work and write:** In groups, students discuss and write a different version of Pelagia's reaction when she finds the record player and the collection of Marlene Dietrich's records at her door. Then they vote for the version that they find more likely in the circumstances.

**34 Debate:** Ask students: *Can a person who has suffered as much as Mandras be blamed for having become insanely evil? Or should he be forgiven?* Divide the class into two groups and have them debate the question. One group finds arguments for forgiving him and the other for blaming him for his behaviour.

**35 Group work and game:** Tell students: *In his resentment, Mandras calls Pelagia 'a cow'.* In groups, students imagine which animal Pelagia would have chosen to express her feelings for Mandras, her father, Antonia, Drosoula and Captain Corelli. The other groups try to find out which animal represents her feelings for each person. The group that finds the most correct answers wins.

### Chapters 14–17

#### Before reading

**36 Group work and guess:** In groups, students discuss whether Pelagia has been seeing Captain Corelli's ghost or Captain Corelli himself, and why they think so. Groups share their ideas and then check as they read.

**37 Write:** In pairs, students discuss whose return the title of the last chapter makes reference to. They write the ending that they would like Pelagia and Corelli's love story to have.

#### After reading

**38 Research and artwork:** Tell students that Cephallonia is to the east of the area where the European and Aegean tectonic plates meet. Ask them to search the Internet for information about the 1953 earthquake and the location of the plates. Students share the information they find and, in groups, make a map of the tectonic plates.

**39 Debate:** Divide the class into two groups and have them develop arguments in favour of the following motions: Group A: *In a natural catastrophe like an earthquake, one should try to help oneself. It is by saving oneself that one can help others.* Group B: *Even in a natural catastrophe like an earthquake, one should always try to save others, old people and children in particular. If everybody tries to save others, more people will survive.*

**40 Group work:** Tell students: *Some events become so important in people's lives that they never forgotten. The earthquake changed the lives of the people in Cephallonia so much that after it they referred to events as having occurred before or after it. Has anything happened in your country that has become a significant event like this? Has anything happened in your lives that has become a significant event like this?*

**41 Discuss:** Tell students: *Pelagia did not want to allow Antonia's marriage with Alexi because she remembered her feelings for Mandras at Antonia's age and thought it might be a mistake.* Divide the class into two groups and have them discuss the following: *Should parents interfere with their children's decisions on the basis of their own experience?*

**42 Role play:** Students take the roles of Pelagia and Corelli and role play their conversation when they arrive at Casa Nostra.

**43 Pair work:** Tell students that after some time Corelli decides to visit Carlo's grave to thank him for having saved his life. In pairs, students prepare the speech that Corelli makes at Carlo's grave. Pairs read their speeches and students vote for the most moving.

**44 Write:** Tell students to imagine that when Pelagia saw Corelli the first time he came back, he did not hide but met her. Have them write an ending for the story at that point.