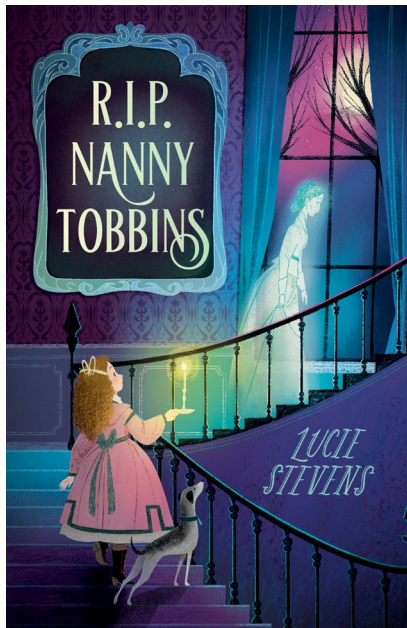


# Classroom Resources



**ISBN:**  
9781460766521

**NOTES BY:**  
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**PUBLICATION DATE:**  
June 2025

## R.I.P. Nanny Tobbins

Lucie Stevens

### BOOK SUMMARY

A quirky and very funny middle-grade fantasy title that is perfect for fans of *A Girl Called Corpse* and *Nevermoor*.

When Nanny Tobbins fell off a horse and broke her neck, the grown-ups told nine-year-old Albertine she'd never see her beloved governess again. But it simply isn't true. For every night, when the clock strikes twelve, Nanny returns to the nursery.

Yet in her new ghostly state, Nanny Tobbins quickly causes chaos in the household – and the timing couldn't be more inconvenient. Albertine's stepmother is struggling to settle in, and Papa is much occupied working with Prince Albert on the Great Exhibition.

To make matters worse, the grown-ups don't believe in ghosts at all, leaving Albertine to take the blame for Nanny's unruly antics.

How will Albertine restore peace to her home before the unthinkable occurs?

### KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- AC9E4LA03
- AC9E4LE02
- AC9E4LE03

### THEMES

- Families
- Grief/ Loss
- Humour

**Recommended Reading Ages:** 9+

**Resources Created for:** Middle Primary

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# Classroom Resources

## Before Reading

1. Using the front cover only, discuss the following:
  - a) What does 'R.I.P.' stand for and where might you usually see it written?
  - b) Introduce the term 'epitaph': its original meaning from the Greek is 'funeral oration'. Normally, it is a short text inscribed on a gravestone or plaque to honour a deceased person. Do students know any other words or phrases commonly used as epitaphs?
    - (i) As an ongoing activity, students can seek out interesting, quirky or just funny epitaphs. There are numerous websites with these listed.
  - c) Discuss the cover art; what does this tell us about what the novel will be about?
2. Who would normally be referred to as a 'nanny' and what does their role entail?
  - a) What other fictional nannies do students know of? E.g. Nanny McPhee, Nanny Piggins, Mary Poppins.
3. Divide the class into small groups. Allocate each group an aspect of the novel's Victorian England setting to research and present to the class:
  - Queen Victoria/Prince Albert
  - the Great Exhibition
  - Victorian times
  - mourning/funeral customs in the Victorian era
  - child labour
  - spiritualism in Victorian times
  - transportation
  - crinolines, chatelaines and other aspects of Victorian dress for women
4. Establish a class Learning Wall to record reflections, questions and answers, relevant information, quotes, examples of writing techniques and speculations.

## During Reading

Write brief chapter summaries as you read. Keep them short and include only key plot/character development points.

- Include important quotes that reflect these key points.

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## Narrative setting and techniques

This is historical fiction set in Victorian times. It particularly references the Great Exhibition organised by Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, and Henry Cole in 1851.

1. Albertine is nine years old and, unusually for Victorian times and their social status, her papa shows her much love and gives her a lot of attention. His best friend is Prince Albert, who introduced many innovations to England.
  - a) Conduct some research to find out more about the typical experiences of upper-class children in Victorian times and compare them with Albertine as well as what we're told about the Royal Children.
  - b) While Albertine's relationship with her father is unusual for the period in which the novel is set, would their relationship be considered as unusual today?
2. Albertine's papa is obviously quite wealthy and a member of what was known as the upper-class, being a close friend and adviser of Prince Albert. What clues does the author give the reader that convey this? Students might like to consider the kind of house they live in, clothing, food and the people who live with Albertine and Papa.
  - a) Research life for the upper-class, the middle-class and the poor in Victorian-era England.
  - b) English Heritage: Victorian Daily Life is a good site to start with.
3. Albertine and her father both love fairy tales, particularly those of the Brothers Grimm. Introduce or revise the term 'trope' in its sense of a literary convention or motif, characteristic to a particular type of story.
  - a) What are some tropes students would expect to find in fairy tales? E.g. beginning with 'Once upon a time...'; ending with '... happily ever after.'; the wicked stepmother; the hero and their animal companion; ghosts/spirits (often helpful, sometimes not).
4. What fairy-tale tropes can students identify in *R.I.P. Nanny Tobbins*? Put these on the Learning Wall so that students can add to them as they read the novel.
5. One of the most common fairy-tale tropes is the wicked stepmother. When Papa tells Albertine he plans to remarry, she is quite uncertain about The Stepmother coming to live with them.
  - a) How does The Stepmother fulfil much of what students expect from the wicked stepmother trope for much of the novel? Create a list to be shared with the class/put on the Learning Wall.
  - b) By the end of *R.I.P. Nanny Tobbins*, The Stepmother and her relationship with Albertine have subverted or moved away from the wicked stepmother trope. How can this be seen in the story?
    - (i) Why do you think the author has done this?

## Language and literacy

1. On the Learning Wall, make connections between the fiction narrative and the non-fiction information about the period students have researched, e.g. food, clothing, events or transportation.
  - a) Explore and record the use of noun groups/phrases and adjectival groups/phrases to describe more fully a person, place, thing or idea.

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2. Hyphenated words used as descriptors are quite common in English, e.g. able-bodied, high-spirited, wishy-washy. The author has created some that are neologisms (new word, phrase or expression). What is the meaning being conveyed with these examples?

Word/phrase	Page	Meaning based on context
clock-tick	148	
fire-crackle	148	
wheel-creak	165	
horse-snort	165	
silver-shimmer	191	

- a) Can students find any more examples in the novel?  
b) Have students invent some of their own to use in their writing.
3. Albertine has grown up bilingual. In other words, she understands both English and (most) German.
- a) Are any students in the class bilingual?  
b) What other languages do students speak?  
c) Some of the German words used throughout are clarified; others depend on context for understanding. Students can create a German–English word list, which has been started below:

German	Page	Meaning based on context
Großpapa	7	
meine Sahnetorte	26	
Fräulein	16	
Ja	16	
Was?	17	
mein Liebling	50	

- d) If appropriate, ask students in the class who speak languages or dialects other than English to provide equivalent words or phrases for some of the German used in the book.
- (i) It might be interesting to discuss how equivalent terms for something like 'meine Sahnetorte' won't be literal translations of 'my cream cake' but rather terms of endearment for someone you love.



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## Characters

1. Both Albertine and The Stepmother behave in ways that reflect their inner emotions and insecurities. Choose one or the other, then analyse with a 'character autopsy'. Use a blank figure template (many available online) and annotate following these instructions:
  - **Head:** What does the character think? Give an example from the text that might be inferred or explicit.
  - **Dialogue:** What the character says that helps you understand the kind of person they are. Insert a speech bubble above the head. Include text evidence.
  - **Chest/Heart:** Write what the character feels. If not directly stated, make an inference.
  - **Hands:** These show what the character does. Be realistic/selective. Only include important details that help you and others understand how the character interacts with the world around them.
  - **Shoulders:** What the character 'carries'. This is where the burden or conflict the character is going through is shown. Two shoulders mean two examples or quotes.
  - **Feet/Legs:** Where the character goes. This might be actual places, e.g. Albertine going to the cemetery, or it may be a more abstract place/location. Again, be selective – what are the most important places? Where does the character learn the most or change the most?
  - **Summarise:** Underneath your character, write two to three sentences that sum up what you understand about the character. How would you describe them to another person?
2. Write diary entries from the point of view of The Stepmother at various points throughout the novel. Consider:
  - How does she feel as a young woman now in the role of stepmother?
  - How difficult it is to relate to Albertine?
  - What the reader is told about her upbringing and life prior to her marriage.
  - What could/should she have done differently?
  - How does she understand/view Albertine's 'bad behaviour'?
3. Consider the role of secondary characters, e.g. Susan and Frau Warter. What purpose do they serve in the narrative? E.g. foil, comic relief, sounding board, wise words.

## Theme: Grief/Loss

Albertine does not grieve so much for her mother as she has no memory of her. She does, however, find comfort in Papa sharing stories about her, or talking about what her mother loved. By contrast, she is lost without Nanny Tobbins, who has virtually taken a mother's role with her all her life.

1. Introduce the term 'euphemism' to the students: a word or expression substituted for another considered unsuitable or offensive. So, Albertine's mother is 'with the angels' and Nanny Tobbins has 'gone away' after The Terrible Incident. What other euphemisms for death can students think of?
  - a) Why do students think there are so many euphemisms to do with death?

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2. Albertine doesn't really understand the concept of death as everyone has kept the details of both her mother's and Nanny's deaths from her; indeed, it takes Albertine quite some time to understand that Nanny Tobbins is dead and won't be coming back.
  - a) This lack of understanding creates some moments of humour within the novel. What are some examples of this?
  - b) Why do you think the adults in Albertine's life are so reluctant to be direct with her about Nanny Tobbins's death?
3. Ghosts/spirits/phantoms/spectres are common to many different cultures and can be viewed as a normal part of life.
  - a) Do students know of any customs or festivals that celebrate the dead and/or ghosts and spirits?
    - (i) It might be helpful to discuss the origins of Halloween, which they will probably be familiar with, as well as Dia de los Muertos and the Hungry Ghost Festival.
  - b) What do students think might be the benefits of these customs to the people that celebrate them?
4. Death isn't the only reason why we might experience a sense of grief or loss. When The Stepmother arrives, Albertine grieves the loss of time she and Papa once spent together.
  - a) Can students think of other life changes that might create a sense of loss? E.g. moving house, changing schools, a change to their friendship group, a change in their family structure – like an older sibling leaving home.
  - b) While the death of someone we care about will be widely accepted by our friends and family as a source of grief, other things that cause grief, like moving house or changes to our families, may not be as apparent to those around us. Do students have any suggestions about ways they can ask for help, and support each other, during these times?
5. As a class, discuss:
  - a) In helping Nanny Tobbins rest in peace, 'in her right place', is Albertine also able to be at peace with The Stepmother and the associated changes to her family?Or,
  - b) Is Albertine really seeing a ghostly Nanny Tobbins who is making trouble, or is her grief, along with her resentment of The Stepmother, making her 'act out'?

## After Reading

1. Using stimulus pictures of Victorian time, have students write a piece that demonstrates 'show, don't tell' to establish setting. Some useful and reliable sites for this are:
  - [Victoria and Albert Museum: Collections](#)
  - [National Geographic Kids: 15 Facts about the Victorians](#)
  - [Horrible Histories: Vile Victorians](#)
  - [English Heritage: Victorians: Food and Health](#)
  - [BBC.com: How to Eat like a Victorian](#)
  - [National Archives: Victorian Food and Drink](#)

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2. Write a newspaper article on some aspect of the preparations for the Great Exhibition, based on research. For example, Papa describes the birds who have made a mess of everything inside, but what other aspects of the preparations would have been interesting for the people?
3. At the end of the novel, we see Albertine, Papa and The Stepmother as a happy family, enjoying each other's company, but what about Nanny Tobbins? Write a brief epilogue about Nanny Tobbins's work with her new charges in the graveyard.

## About the Author

Lucie Stevens is a children's writer who grew up in a semi-rural area of Dharug Country, north-west of Sydney. After working in Australian publishing houses for many years, she moved to Berlin, where she helped make education outreach programs for the UK and European Space Agencies. Now, having resettled in Gadigal Country, Sydney, Lucie works as a freelance editor for NGOs and not-for-profit organisations. She has authored and co-authored several books for the education market, on topics ranging from mudlarks to Mars. *R.I.P. Nanny Tobbins* is Lucie's first novel for children.

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