The Mystery of Allegra

Peter Foreman

Introduction

The story
Adrian is on holiday in Italy with his parents. One night they stay in the Villa Henderson. The villa belongs to Mrs Henderson, who lives there with her daughter Chiara (Claire in English), and her grand-daughter Allegra, who is five. Allegra is already in bed and asleep so they do not meet her.

In the night, although the door is locked, a five-year-old girl comes into Adrian’s room. Her name is Allegra, and she wants Adrian to take her to her mother.

In the morning Adrian meets Allegra again – but although she is about the same age, it is not the same girl.

The next night, the first Allegra, Allegra One, comes to see Adrian again. She says that she is going to die, and that Adrian must take her to her mother, who she says is in Bagno a Ripoli, near Florence.

The next day, Adrian talks to the second Allegra. She tells him about her father, who she thinks is in England. She insists that she is going to die soon, and that she wants to see her father before she dies.

Adrian returns to England. A year later he gets a letter from Mrs Henderson, telling him that Allegra is dead.

The following year Adrian returns to Italy – he is studying Italian at university. He stays with an Italian family in Florence, and is astonished to find that they have a five-year-old daughter called Allegra.

That night, the first Allegra comes to his room again and asks him to take her to Bagno a Ripoli. The next morning, Adrian drives to Bagno a Ripoli. In the cemetery he discovers a tombstone with the name ‘Claire Clairmont’ on it. Is this the first Allegra’s mother?

Reading a book about English poets, Adrian discovers that the poet Lord Byron had a daughter called Allegra. Her mother was called Claire Clairmont, and Allegra died when she was five years old. Adrian thinks that the ghost of this Allegra must live in the bodies of other girls with the same name – who then die at the age of five. He is very worried about Allegra Three, in the family in Florence, who is now ill. That night, the ghost Allegra comes to his room again. He drives her to Bagno a Ripoli and she disappears into the cemetery. When he returns to Florence, Allegra Three has got better.

Adrian stays in Italy, marries an Italian girl – and they call their daughter Allegra.

Background to the story
The historical background to this story is true. Byron (1788–1824) was one of the greatest poets of his age, and lived a romantic and dramatic life, travelling widely in the East and in Europe. He married in 1815 (two years before the birth of Allegra) but he and his wife separated very shortly after – the scandal drove Byron from England and he never returned again, dying in Greece of a fever. Byron showed an interest in ghosts and the supernatural throughout his life, and this interest inspired his friend Shelley’s wife, Mary, to write her famous book, Frankenstein.

Before reading
Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:
1. Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of story it is.
2. Ask the students to read the text on the back cover of the book, and the story introduction on the first page. Then ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
3. Use the pre-reading activity in this worksheet.
4. If there is a recording of this title, play the first few pages and stop at an interesting point.
The Mystery of Allegra

Pre-reading activity

Match the words with the pictures

1. The house was full of strange animals, and even stranger people.
2. ‘Papa is dead now.’
3. I saw a tombstone with some English words on it.
4. ‘What a beautiful child!’ I thought.
5. Shelley told Claire the sad story.
6. I took her to Claire Clairmont’s tombstone.
7. This was a different girl.

Aim: To introduce the students to the story and its principal characters
Time: 10–15 minutes
Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to each student, or to each group of students (this activity can work very well in pairs). Ask the students to match the picture with the correct caption and when they have done this ask them the following questions:

1. What can you say about the main characters in the story? Which of them is Allegra?
2. What is the date of this story? (There are, of course, two different periods shown in the illustrations – the lifetime of Allegra One and today – and students should at least be aware of the fact that the story spans nearly two hundred years.)
3. What sort of story is this?

Key: 1e, 2b, 3f, 4a, 5d, 6g, 7c
Correct the summary.

Adrian and his mother were on their summer holidays in Italy. One day they stayed the night at a hotel called Villa Henderson. During the night, Adrian had a strange visitor, who came into his room through the window. She was a five-year-old girl called Allegra; she asked Adrian to take her to her father.

The next morning, Adrian meets Allegra again – but she is not the same girl. The second Allegra has long blonde hair and blue eyes.

The next night, the first Allegra visits Adrian again. She wants him to take her to Rome. He takes her downstairs but when he gets there she has disappeared.

In the morning, Adrian has a long talk with Allegra Henderson. She lives with her mother. Her father lives in Venice, and she wants to go and visit him before he dies. There is another strange thing about this daytime Allegra. Sometimes she is very happy and lively, but sometimes she is unhappy and angry. She seems like two different people. Then one day she tells Adrian that her father is a famous musician, and her mother is dead.

To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 2 (or at the end of Chapter 3)
Aim: To check comprehension before continuing with the story
Time: 15–20 minutes
Organization: This activity gives a summary of the first two chapters. There are a number of factual mistakes in the summary. Give each student, or each pair of students, a copy of the summary and ask them to read and correct the summary as they read. They should write in their corrections. You can also do this activity at the end of Chapter 3, in which case the students make the corrections, but then continue the summary up to the end of chapter 3.
The Mystery of Allegra

After reading activity

The four Allegras

Allegra 1
Mother: name
Additional information
Father: name
Additional information
Date of birth
Description
What she wants
Happy or unhappy?
Any other information?
Date of death

Allegra 2
Mother: name
Additional information
Father: name
Additional information
Date of birth
Description
What she wants
Happy or unhappy?
Any other information?
Date of death

Allegra 3
Mother: name
Additional information
Father: name
Additional information
Date of birth
Description
What she wants
Happy or unhappy?
Any other information?
Date of death

Allegra 4
Mother: name
Additional information
Father: name
Additional information
Date of birth
Description
What she wants
Happy or unhappy?
Any other information?
Date of death

To the teacher

Aim: To revise the characters of the four Allegras
Time: 20–30 minutes
Organization: Give each student or group of students the worksheet. Ask them to fill in the spaces around each picture with key information about the child – most of this information will come from the story, but the students may sometimes need to use their imagination.