

Journey to the River Sea

"For whether a place is a hell or a heaven rests in yourself, and those who go with courage and an open mind may find themselves in Paradise."

Context – *Journey to the River Sea* was written by Eva Ibbotson and was first published in 2001.

Eva Ibbotson - Eva was born in Vienna, Austria but relocated when her parents divorced, moving between homes until she settled in England. At the beginning of her career, Eva wrote for television before switching to writing fiction. Most of her children's books contain magical places and creatures, or (as in *Journey to the River Sea*) an appreciation of nature. She has won several awards during her career including the Smarties Book Prize for ages 9-11.



Amazon River – The Amazon River is the second longest river in the world and flows through South America. The mouth of the river (the Atlantic Ocean on the coast of Brazil) is so wide that it is nicknamed 'The River Sea'. The climate near the mouth of the river is hot, humid and has heavy rainfall. This creates dense plant life, attracting a wide range of wildlife such as jaguars, bats, a variety of bird species and snakes.



Pioneers - A pioneer is among the first people to explore or settle in a new area. They were tasked with creating maps of the area for others and to classify new species of plants and animals. Many pioneers settled in America, farming and creating communities where others could then join them.



Suffragettes – Women's rights were being fought for in the 20th century by an organization called the Women's Suffragettes. In many places at the time, women were not allowed to vote, property could only be owned by men and divorce was not legal. The movement called to change these equalities, particularly for women to have the right to voice their political opinions.



Main Characters – Consider what Ibbotson intended through her characterization of each of the below...

Maia - Maia is the adventurous and hopeful protagonist of the book. She lives in a boarding school for girls before relocating to Brazil to live with distant relatives. Despite the neglectful way she is treated, she maintains her lively spirit and grows close to an unlikely pair of friends.

Finn Taverner - Finn is a half Xanti and half English boy who is the heir of Westwood. He is desperately trying to avoid being sent back to England by two detectives named Trapwood and Low. He is very trusting, particularly of Maia whom he grows close to.

Clovis King - Clovis (real name Jimmy Bates) is a performer who dreams of travelling to England. He is kind and sensitive yet struggles with anxiety. He tries to find courage throughout the novel.

Miss Minton – Miss Minton is a stern governess who likes rules and routine. She teaches Maia and the twins but grows closer to Maia as the story progresses. She is maternal and protective of the children, trying to shield them from unkind people like the detectives

Mr. and Mrs. Carter – The couple moved to Brazil because Mr. Carter is wanted for fraud in England. He is reserved, mysterious and shows little concern for his family, only worrying about his eyeball collection. Mrs. Carter is obsessed with all things English and dislikes Brazil. She worries about germs and doesn't like the children to go outside. Neither of them like Maia but needed her money.

Beatrice and Gwendolyn - The twins are the pretty daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Carter. They are rarely seen apart and like luxurious, material objects. They are kept inside by their mother and taught to dislike Brazil. When Maia arrives, they don't appear to like her.

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Friendship - The story is driven by Maia and her friendships with other characters. Through her non-judgmental nature, she helps others to fulfil their dreams despite the risk to herself. Her relationships with Clovis and Finn break through social and racial barriers and shows the effect that friendship can have.



Greed and power – Greed and power are the fuel behind the choices of many characters. The Carters are driven by their need for wealth and status, no matter the consequences for Maia. However, the lesson in the book is that hunting for power can only end in tragedy, as shown in the case of the Carters.



Key Quotes

"If good fortune was to come her way, there was no one who deserved it more."

"Maia was a heroine, but not the kind that people envied; more the kind that got burnt at the stake."

"If you want something enough, you usually get it. But you have to take what goes with it."

"They're a jolly lot, the lepers," said Father Liam. "People who've suffered don't have time to grumble."

"When we're grown up I'll come back for you, I promise. No one can stop us then."

"I think something broke in Maia when her parents died, and out there it healed. Perhaps I'm mad--and the professor too-- but I think children must lead big lives...if it is in them to do so."

"...Adventures, once they were over, were things that had to stay inside one--that no one else could quite understand."

Key Vocabulary

Journey	An act of travelling from one place to another.
Academy	A place of study or training in a special field.
Governess	A woman employed to teach children in a private household.
Guardian	A person who is legally responsible for the care of someone who is unable to manage their own affairs, especially a child whose parents have died
Orphan	A child whose parents have died.
Allowance	An amount of money given.
Voyage	A long journey involving travel by sea or space.