

CATH HOWE



MY LIFE

on

FIRE



ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR KS2

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MY LIFE on FIRE

ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR KS2

About this pack

My Life on Fire is written by KS2 teacher, Cath Howe. These activity ideas have been created to encourage children to explore the themes of family upheaval and kleptomaniac whilst discussing the importance of empathy and understanding how to help others in difficult situations.

About the book

Ren's family lose their home in a fire. They're living with her grandmother now and things are a bit tense.

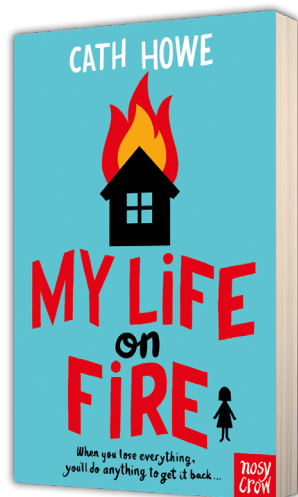
Ren lost her collection of things, her clothes; her brother lost his little bear and is inconsolable. So, Ren starts replacing things with other people's possessions. They've got loads of stuff after all.

But she gets caught and has to strike a terrifying deal to avoid detection...

About the author

Cath Howe is a children's author and teacher in South West London. Cath runs workshops in schools on everything to do with writing and performing. *My Life on Fire* is her fifth novel following the highly acclaimed *Ella on the Outside*, *How to be Me*, *Not My Fault* and *The Insiders*.

Follow Cath on Twitter: [@cath_howe](https://twitter.com/cath_howe), or visit her website: www.cathhowe.com



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CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES

Shabbir's Stone

In Chapter 36 we find out that Ren stole Shabbir's stone, but we don't read about the event as it happens.

Write the scene where Ren takes Shabbir's stone. How and when do you think she does it and how does she feel about taking it during and after the theft?

Alternative Viewpoint

Write the scene in the art cupboard, Chapter 39-42, from either Ren's or Jake's viewpoint. Try to get right inside their heads and focus on what they are thinking about and how they are reacting.

The Mr Softie Stories

Think about these stories, told by Ren to her little brother – Chapter 7.

- Write about how these stories make you feel about Ren?
- What kind of sister is she?

Make sure you consider the scene in Chapter 33 and 34 where Petie goes out in the night, and she sets out to find him.

Lessons Learnt

Ren doesn't take things because she needs them, but she does get into a habit and decides she's good at stealing.

- Do you think she will ever steal again?
- What has she learned through the events of this story?

Make a list of ideas about Ren's character and actions.

The Teacher's View

What would Miss Chatto say about her first year as a teacher and the events that happened in her class: the bird, Ren and Caspar, the art project and the spate of thefts?

Write Miss Chatto's monologue – start with the words, "I never would have dreamed that my first year in teaching would have been such a mixture....."

All about Gran

Ren's gran changes her mind about Ren. Have a look at scenes where we see her.

Write about Gran.

- What kind of person is Gran?
- What did you think of her by the end of the story?

Look at Chapters 12, 26 and 46 in particular.

My Life on Fire

What do you think the book title "My Life on Fire" means? Discuss and write your opinion.



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PSHE ACTIVITIES

Class Jury

Only Jake and Gran discover what has been going on and, it seems, they don't tell anyone.

Was Jake right to give Ren and Caspar time to put the things back? Discuss what you think other adults and teachers would have done if they had found out the truth about Ren's stealing. Now imagine they did find out.

Hold a meeting where Gran, Jake, Mum, Dad and Miss Chatto are all hot seated as witnesses, share what they know about Ren and decide what should be done.

Caspar

Look at the bird incident at the start of the book – Chapter 3. Is Caspar an unusual person?

- Gran says, towards the end of the story, that he has done a lot of good.
- Miss Chatto says he is a one-off.

What do you think?

Why does Ren thank Caspar at the end of the story? (p 269)

What is the hardest thing Caspar has to do in the story?

Scenes to consider:

- In Caspar's house when his brother visits home – Chapter 27
- The shadowbox accusation – Chapters 31, 36 and 37
- Art cupboard scene – Chapters 39-42
- Inside the charity shop – Chapter 44
- Caspar at the art exhibition – Chapter 51

Write about Caspar's personality.

Food

Look at the scenes where the children eat – Chapters 20 and 23.

Ren and Petie are rude about the food Gran has cooked. In the scene with Dad, Ren puts her veg on Dad's plate.

Discuss with a partner – who do you feel sympathy for in this scene?

Why does Dad tell Ren to try to eat the kale and not Petie?

What should adults do if children refuse to eat something that might be good for them or something which took ages to make?

Have you ever felt that you had to eat something you really didn't want to eat, maybe at someone else's house?

Describe the feeling and the food in your own story.

Ren's Dream House

Why does Ren make the Dream House – Chapter 50?

Discuss the scenes leading up to it. How does she get the idea?



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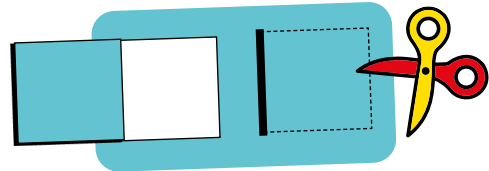
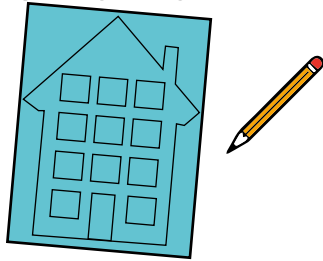
WHOLE CLASS PROJECTS

CREATE YOUR OWN DREAM HOUSE

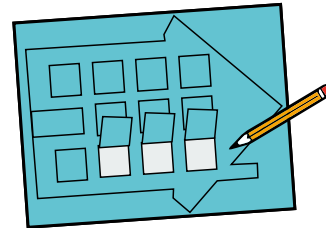
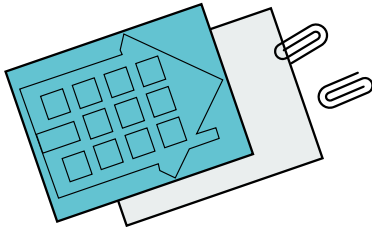
YOU WILL NEED:

- 2 pieces of A4 card – one plain and one coloured
- Scissors
- Paperclips or blue tac
- Colouring pens or pencils
- Glue

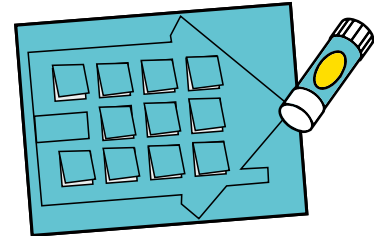
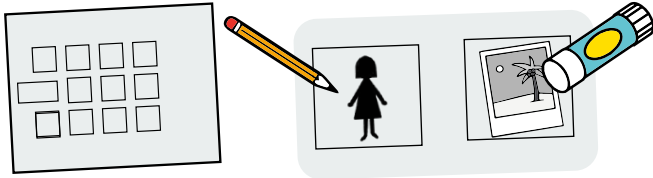
1. Take your coloured piece of card and draw out a house with windows, chimney, roof and any other details – remember behind your windows will be all the people and objects that are important to you so make sure they're big enough!
2. Carefully cut each window on 3 sides leaving the left-hand long side uncut.



3. Lay your house front on top of your plain card. Secure it with a clip or blue tac so it doesn't move.
4. Open the windows and mark their outline on the plain card underneath with a pencil.



5. Lift off your house front and plan something to go in each window- you don't have to draw everything – you can use little photos, cartoons, small flat objects or anything else you can think of.
6. When your windows are done, glue your two pieces of card together and do more work on the front of your house – you could add decorations, window boxes, plants in the garden, etc.



7. Close the windows. Hey presto – your house is complete!



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WHOLE CLASS PROJECTS

MY LIFE IN A BOX

What things would you put in a shoe-box-sized box to reflect who you are?
What do you care about? Love? Enjoy doing?

Create your own box – sketch and label the things you would put in it. Talk about the objects in it to a partner or your class. You could create a whole class exhibition.



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WHOLE CLASS PROJECTS

STEALING ISN'T REALLY STEALING

Ren always finds reasons for her stealing and these change with each theft.

Discuss these statements. Are they true? Share them round your class. Think of situations for 3 of them and hold a class discussion on when stealing isn't really stealing...or is stealing always stealing?

Stealing isn't really stealing, in fact when you're ...

1. Taking something by mistake
2. Taking something that used to be yours or could have been yours
3. Taking something that no one else cares about
4. Taking something to look after it
5. Taking something that's broken anyway and, once you've mended it, it doesn't count as taking it
6. Taking something from someone who already has too many things and won't notice
7. Taking something when you're not sure whose it is and it could even be yours
8. Taking something meaning to give it back
9. Taking something that wants you to have it, like you are its real proper owner in a deep way
10. Taking something someone else is hurting
11. Taking something without meaning to and then being stuck with it
12. Taking something as a joke
13. Taking the wrong thing because you didn't notice and then noticing too late
14. Not exactly taking it-kind of moving it
15. Taking something invisible
16. Taking something no one owns
17. Taking something as a present
18. Being forced to take something
19. Forgetting to put it back and then not knowing where it belongs
20. Taking something to be helpful
21. Taking something so someone doesn't

Extension Activity:

Pick one statement and make up a story about it.



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