

Two Lives

Aims

- To introduce the characters in the story and explore their feelings.
- To encourage students to speculate about what happened and what will happen.
- To examine the Welsh mining background.

1 Ask students to read the letter in Extract 1 and answer these questions: What is the relationship between Huw and Megan? Who is Beth? What else can you discover about them?

Answer: Huw and Megan had a relationship in the past; Beth is Megan's daughter (NB: this isn't explicitly stated in the letter); Huw is coming back to Tredonald to visit; the sitting room was important to Huw and Megan; they haven't been in touch for a long time.

2 Tell students that Part 1 of the book is called "Young Love" and there are five chapters in it. Ask them to read Extracts 2, and see what they can find out about Huw and Megan's relationship when they were sixteen and living in a Welsh mining village.

Answers: Megan's father wants her to go to college but doesn't consider her views; Megan's father doesn't want his daughter to marry a coal miner; Hugh and Megan keep their relationship secret; Huw and his father emigrate to Canada; Huw and Megan are still in love; Huw plans to come back for Megan.

3 Ask students to work in a group of four. They should note down three or four possible endings for the first part of the story "Young Love"). Compare the groups' suggestions with the whole class.

4 Tell students that the story takes place in the Welsh mining village of Tredonald. Ask them to work in pairs and list what they know about coal mining as a job. Call back answers from the whole class and make a list on the board.

Possible answers: it is a difficult, dangerous job; miners often get killed or trapped in the mines; they get diseases from the coal dust; it's a dirty job; the miners are very close to each other, as are the communities in which they live.

5 Ask students to read Extracts 3 and see whether the picture of coal mining presented matches their ideas, and what else they learn about mining.

Answers: open, but the extracts tell of tiredness, dirt, danger.

6 Tell students that Part 2 of the book is called "Fifty Years Later". Remind them of the letter in Extract 1 and ask them what they think happens when Huw and Megan meet?

Answers: open, but expect the following responses: they fall in love again; they realise they have always been in love; they realise they like each other but a future together isn't possible; Megan rejects Huw for not getting in touch with her.

7 Ask students the following questions: What do you think happened to Huw and Megan? Did they keep in touch? Did they meet again? If so, how, where and when? If not, why not? Ask them to read Extract 4 and find the answers.

Answer: Megan's father had kept the letters Huw sent to Megan from Canada, so she thought he had forgotten her.

Ask them what else they find out about Megan from this extract.

Answer: She's marrying Paul in two months' time.

Ask students why they think Megan's father had kept the letters and whether they understand his reasons for doing so. Ask them if they feel it was the correct thing to do given what they know about life in this coal-mining community just after the war. Ask them what they think will happen next.

8 Ask students to imagine that they are Megan. What might she want to say to her father if he were still alive? Based on their answers to the questions in Activity 7, ask students to write the letter that Megan might send to her father telling him how she feels now.

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Extract 1

Tredonald
August 1996

My Dear Huw,

It was so good to get your letter. And thank you for the photos. It was good to see that even after all this time you haven't changed much. Wish I could say the same about myself!

Your letter produced a lot of different feelings in me – I was very happy to see how well you've done in life – I always said you could be a great artist! But I felt sad, too, that I hadn't been part of it. We had so many plans when we were younger, didn't we? But we mustn't think about the past. There's so much we have to talk about now. Beth and I are both very pleased that you've decided to come to Tredonald – let me know when you arrive in England.

With all best wishes

Megan

PS Here's a photo of Beth and me which was taken in the sitting room above the shop. Remember?

Extracts 2

- a** Nobody from Mr Jenkins' family had ever gone to college, but now there might be a chance for Megan. He wanted her to get away . . . Mr Jenkins didn't want his daughter to marry a coal miner, or even to spend her life working in the shop – she was too good for that. He hadn't asked Megan what she wanted.'
- b** 'I think you're wonderful. Will you be my girl?'
'Oh Huw, yes, I will be your girl,' said Megan. 'But we mustn't tell anyone . . .'
- c** . . . on April 28th 1946, David Thomas and his only son, Huw, left the village of Tredonald for a new life in Canada.
- d** 'Do you think we'll feel the same about each other in a year's time?'
Huw pulled back and looked deep into her eyes. 'I will, Megan,' he said. 'I know I'll never change.'

Extracts 3

- a** Huw was also sixteen years old and already tired of life. He worked eight hours a day, five days a week in the village coal mine. There was nothing much else for people in the village. You either worked underground, or you didn't work at all.
- b** Huw got into the lift at the bottom of the mine with a group of other tired-looking men. Their faces were black from the coal . . . The lift climbed slowly and noisily up from the dark underground world. Ten dirty faces looked up towards the light.
- c** But suddenly there was a loud noise from the mine . . . It was the sound the village hoped they would never hear. All along the street, doors opened and men and women came out. They ran towards the mine, all thinking of the men who might be caught five-hundred metres below the ground: 'Please God, don't let it be my husband, my brother or my son.'

Extract 4

Megan wanted to finish. She wanted to ring Paul . . . They were getting married in two months and she was moving into his house in London . . . She couldn't take all her parents' things with her . . .

Megan pulled the last box towards her . . . More letters . . . She couldn't believe what she saw. They were all addressed to her and they were all from Canada. And none of them had been opened. She looked at the dates – 1946 and 1947 . . .

Now she realised what her father had done . . .