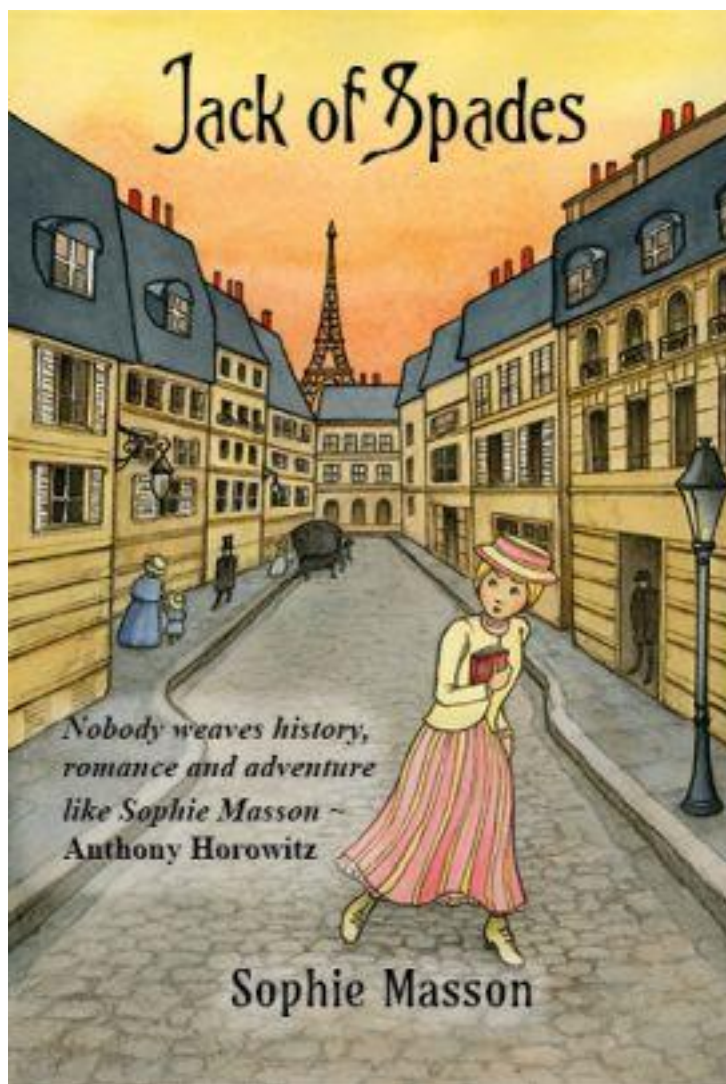


TEACHERS' NOTES



Jack of Spades

By Sophie Masson

Cover and internal illustrations by Yvonne Low

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About the story:

It's May 1910 and 16 year old Linda Duke has just received a strange message: a playing card, the Jack of Spades, in an envelope that was sent from Paris, where her widowed father, impoverished Shakespearean scholar Professor Charles Duke, has gone on a research trip. In the family code, 'Jack of Spades' means treachery and danger. But it is not her father's handwriting on the envelope!

Linda, convinced he is in great danger, sets out immediately to Paris to look for him. And so begins an extraordinary adventure, that will take her deep into the heart of the city; not only its bright, light daylight world of music and gaiety and good times, but also the dark and dangerous world of criminal Paris. Who are the people following Linda? What was her father really doing in Paris? Who can she really trust? Linda begins to understand that she has stumbled into a daring, deadly plot, and that time is fast running out—for her father, herself, her friends—and the future of France and the rest of the world. And that it is up to her now to stop the conspiracy, in a world where treachery and betrayal seem to reign supreme.

Full of the glamorous, dangerous atmosphere of 1910's Paris, with a spirited, intelligent heroine and a great cast of vivid and engaging characters, this is a gripping thriller for readers 10-14 by award-winning author Sophie Masson.

About the author:



Born in Indonesia to French parents and brought up in Australia and France, Sophie Masson is the award-winning and internationally-published author of over 60 books, for children, young adults and adults. Her work ranges over many genres, from historical to contemporary fiction, fantasy to thrillers, novels to picture books, as well as essays, short stories and poetry. A bilingual French and English speaker, Sophie has a master's degree in French and English literature and is currently undertaking a PHD in Creative Practice at the University of New England. She lives in northern NSW.

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About the illustrator



Yvonne Low is an illustrator, writer and award-winning artist, who is inspired by nature and loves to discover overlooked surprises in everyday life. She enjoys playing with words and colours and exploring new ways to illuminate and communicate. Her illustrations are whimsical, often have a dash of humour and always try to tell a story. Yvonne works in pencil and watercolour and dabbles in acrylic, pastel, pen and ink and Chinese brush painting. Her work has featured in The School Magazine, she has illustrated for ABC Commercial and her work can be seen at www.scbwi.org, www.thestylefile.com and on her website www.yvonnelow.com.

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Something from Sophie Masson:

Jack of Spades is set in Paris in 1910: a city and a period I've always been interested in. My family is French but we come from the South, and though we often went back to France for family holidays when I was a child, I only got to know Paris as an adult. That happened over several visits, and particularly in 2010, when I spent six months as a writer in residence at the Keesing Studio in the heart of the city, thanks to an Australia Council grant. 2010 was the centenary of the great Paris floods of 1910, when the Seine River waters spread around the city's streets and even lapped around great landmarks like the Eiffel Tower! And so in 2010 there was also a great deal in Parisian museums, exhibitions and in newspapers about 1910. The novel is set several months after the

flood, of course, (it lasted about a week, in late January-early February 1910) but that concentration on 1910 and what was going on in France then helped me to visualise settings for the novel later.

1910 is part of the period known as the Belle Époque (literally meaning ‘Beautiful Times’) in France, which ran from around 1871, which marked the end of the Franco-Prussian War, to 1914, which marked the beginning of the First World War. In Paris, it was a time of glamour, prosperity, optimism, great artistic achievements and technological innovations, but despite its happy name, it had a dark side, of course, and some of that comes out in *Jack of Spades*. It was also a time when the European secret services were beginning--for example, in Britain, MI5 and MI6 were formed in 1909.

I used a lot of primary sources in order to recreate the background and atmosphere of Paris in 1910, and to really immerse myself in it bought old postcards, old newspapers and also a fabulous old Baedeker's Paris guidebook from the time. The Baedeker's really helped with details such as how the Metro system worked back then, how much a cab ride would cost, where hotels were situated, where you could send telegrams from, and so on, and there were great maps which made it easy to plot journeys. Linda carries that guidebook, of course!



Something from Yvonne Low:

From my reading of the novel and the title itself, I realised the most important elements of the novel were Paris, 1910, playing cards, Jack of Spades and danger, all of which needed to be brought out in the illustrations.

I researched images of Paris in the 1900s, including the fashion, art and architecture of the time. This was the era of long dresses, almost everyone wore hats (straw hats, bowler hats and top hats), the horse and carriage and steam engines, impressionist painters such as Monet, and grand and ornate buildings on wide boulevards and mysterious narrow lanes. Contemporary photos were often sufficient for building and street references, as Paris has hardly changed since the 1900s, which is what makes it such a charming and beautiful city to visit!

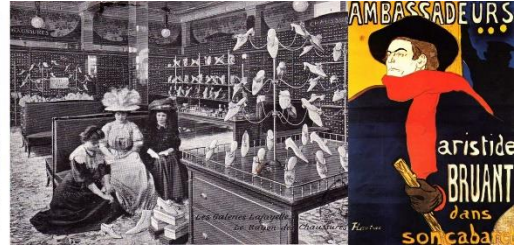
The playing card (and Jack of Spades specifically), is an important reference to the title of the book and a continued motif in the book, so the 'spades' or pike symbol was used on the front and back covers and inside the book as chapter headings and page numbers. Art Nouveau was still popular in 1910 Paris, so I came up with my own version of this elaborate and decorative style to use in these elements.

The internal black and white image for the novel was created to portray two of the most important characters' first interaction, along with some suspense and action in the scene – a grand railway station with steam engine, full of bustling passengers and an escaping street urchin.

I used pencil and watercolour with some ink pen to create the finished pictures.

Notes on historical background:

The Belle Époque



As Sophie Masson points out in her notes, 1910 was part of the historical period known in France as the Belle Époque. During this time, France and especially Paris were at the forefront of global culture, and people came from all over the world to visit, live and work there. Paris was the most cosmopolitan of all world cities, and it was a time of great technological and artistic invention. Many of Paris' famous landmarks, like the Metro, the Eiffel Tower, the Opera Garnier and the Moulin Rouge, were built during this period.

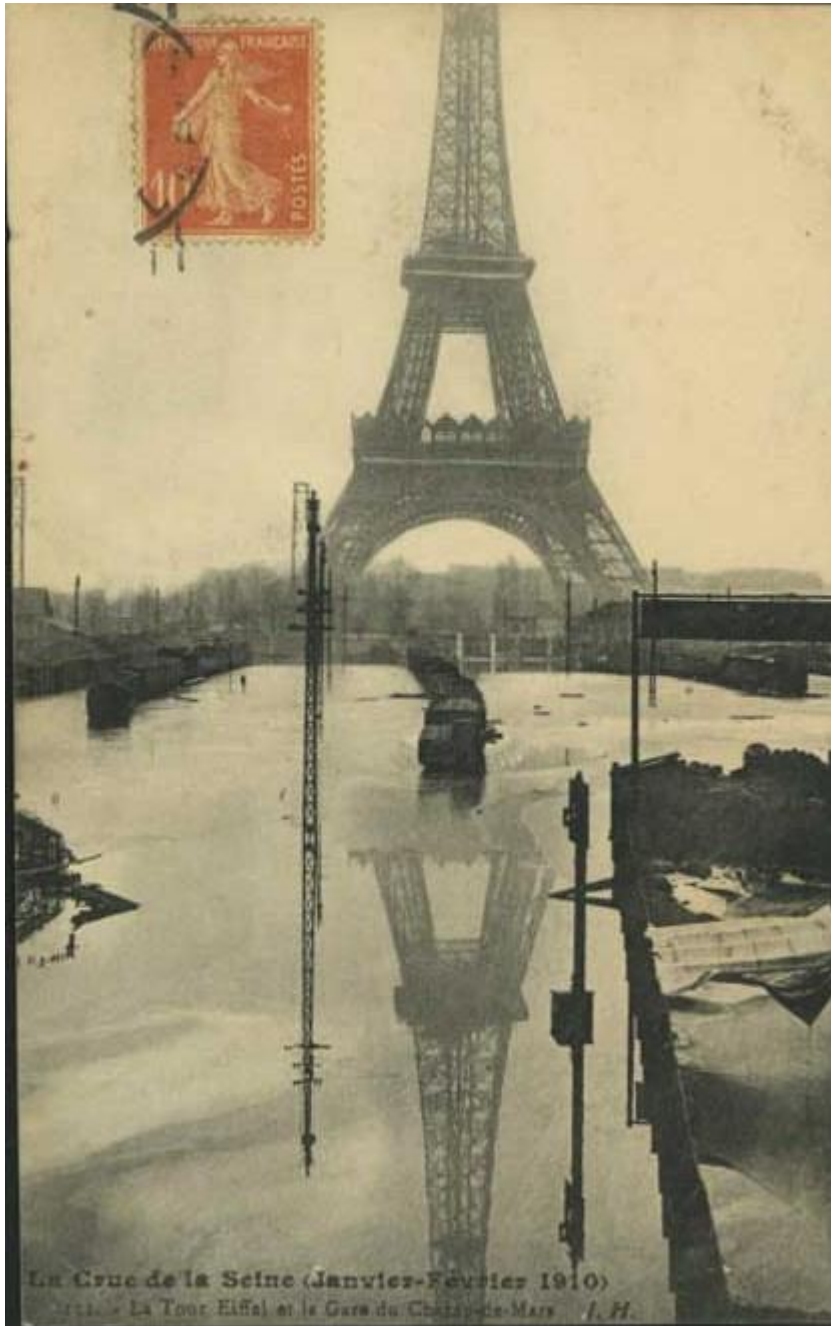
The movie industry started here during this time, with the Lumière brothers showing the first films in 1895. They were very short, only a few seconds, but soon longer films were being made. Planes started being made in this period, as did mopeds and scooters, which you see all the time in Paris now!

Great artists of the Belle Époque included Van Gogh, Chagall, Matisse, Toulouse-Lautrec, and a famous public art movement was 'Art Nouveau' or 'New Art' which featured lots of curly lines and flowers and was often incorporated into public buildings such as entrances to metro stations. Famous musicians who lived in Paris during this period included Igor Stravinsky, Maurice Ravel, and Claude Debussy, and during this time too many famous writers, from Guy de Maupassant to Ivan Turgenev to Jules Verne, lived and worked in France. Children's literature also thrived, with such bestsellers as the Countess de Segur's lively novels for children, which are still in print. Fashion flourished, with grand department stores such as Galeries Lafayette and Printemps beginning during this time, and it was then that Paris haute couture became the centre of the fashion world.

Paris also became known for its excellent cuisine, and tourists flocked from all over the world to eat in its restaurants and cafes, much as they do now!

But of course the Belle Époque had its ugly side, with poverty, inequality and crime flourishing also. It was also the time when international terrorism first made its appearance, with bomb and shooting attacks and assassinations of prominent people a common feature, especially throughout the 1890's and early 1900's (see note on Nihilists).

The Paris floods of 1910:



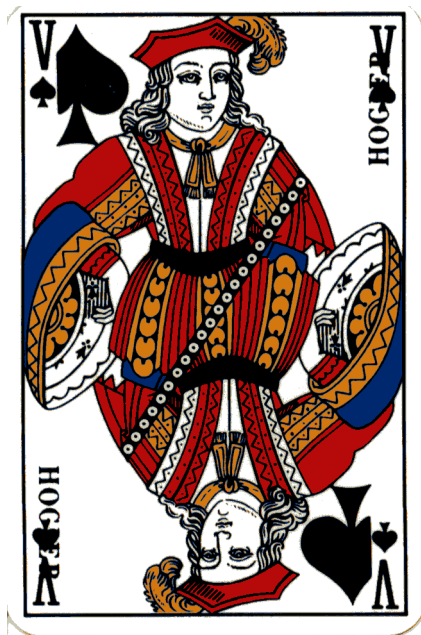
These occurred a few months before the time of year in which *Jack of Spades* is set. In late January 1910, following unusually wet weather in the previous weeks, the Seine River rose more than eight metres above its normal levels, and spread throughout the city. Though nobody died as a result of the floods, as the water rose slowly, thousands of Parisians were forced to leave their homes, refugees gathered in shelters in churches, schools and other public buildings, and emergency services had to get around by boat to help people left stranded, as of course trains and omnibuses could not function at all and walking was also impossible in some places. The floodwaters reached their highest level after 10 days and then started going down again, disappearing completely by 35 days after the flood had started. The Paris in which Linda travels still bears signs of what happened earlier, such as some things still not being repaired or completely cleaned up.

Nihilism



The international political movement known at the time as Nihilism, which is referred to in *Jack of Spades*, began in Russia in the 1860's, but soon spread to many other countries, including France, Britain, the Balkans, Italy, Austria, and the USA. Against what they saw as the oppression of all governments, some Nihilists advocated violence and terror to achieve political change, though not all agreed. However, in their heyday in the 1880's, 1890's and early 1900's Nihilist terrorists carried out many attacks and assassinations, including the murders of several heads of State—kings and Presidents. Bank robberies to finance the cause were also common, and bankers and industrialists were often targets. In France, fatal attacks included the bombing of courts, police stations, the Parliament, and a café, as well as the assassination of President Sidi Carnot in 1894. Some attacks were carried out by small groups or cells, others, like the Paris café attack, by 'lone wolves'. Government response in most countries was severe, with many arrests, jailings, expulsions and executions carried out before Nihilist terrorism eventually disappeared in the 1920's.

French Jack of Spades



The mysterious Jack of Spades card Linda receives in the mail is a French playing card, with the 'jack' being known as 'valet' in France, and 'spade' is 'pique'. French playing cards are unique in that the

'face' cards (those with people on them) in each suit are associated with historical or mythical personages: for example, the King of Diamonds is Julius Caesar. Linda knows from her late mother's stories that the jack of spades in French playing cards is based on Hogier, or Ogier the Dane in English, a legendary character from a medieval French saga.

The world of spies

Spies have always existed in the world's history, but it was in the early part of the 20th century that spy agencies really took off. The Secret Service Bureau, which later became the famous British intelligence services, MI5 and MI6, started in 1909. The French spy agency, known then as the Deuxième Bureau, had existed since the 1880's but operations were stepped up from 1907 onwards. In the US, the Secret Service had been operating since the 1860's but in 1908 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was formed. (The CIA did not exist till the late 1940's). Meanwhile, in Russia, where the terrorist and revolutionary threat was very active, the feared secret intelligence service, known as the Okhrana, had been operating since 1881, and was probably the world's most formidable spy agency at the time.

Notes on settings in Paris



Jack of Spades features many famous places in Paris, such as:

The Latin Quarter, where Linda first goes looking for her father: Known for its narrow cobbled streets, cafes, bookshops, nightlife and student population, this area is home to the ancient University of Paris, the Sorbonne.

The Tuileries Gardens: Where Linda meets friends: these beautiful public gardens, filled with sculptures and featuring a central basin where children can race toy sailing boats, are 450 years old and once were part of the palace gardens of a French queen, Catherine de Medicis.

The Eiffel Tower: Which Linda visits on a rendezvous: built by French industrialist Gustave Eiffel's company for a huge international exhibition held in Paris, the 1899 World's Fair, the Tower was supposed to only stand for 20 years and then be dismantled, but it became so popular as a Paris landmark that it was allowed to stay. Today it gets about 6.9 million visitors every year and is the world's most popular tourist attraction!

The Opera, also known as Palais Garnier: Linda's *pension* is situated in a street near this spectacular building which was built in the 1860's and is famous all over the world. It's also close to some of Paris' most famous department stores, Galeries Lafayette and Printemps, which were also built in the 19th century.

Post-reading discussion questions:

What do you think would have happened if Linda had not travelled to Paris to find her father?

If you were Linda, arriving in Paris, what would you have done first?

How does the author build up the character of Linda, and of her friends?

The novel is set in 1910. What differences can you find from today, and how does the author go about recreating the atmosphere of the time while making it understandable for readers now?

How is language used in the novel to advance the story and create tension?

Classroom research activities:

Download and print a map of Paris, and plot Linda's journey through the city, marking the famous places mentioned in the book. Choose one of them and write a short history of it, illustrating it if you like.

Look up the history of playing cards. How did the suits—hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades—first begin? And how do they differ around the world?

Choose a famous person from the Belle Époque, from any walk of life, and write a short article about their life and achievements.

Clement's family's sweets company, *Confiserie Dubois*, is imaginary, but their speciality, sugared violets, is real, and comes originally from the Southern French town of Toulouse. What can you find out about the sweet, its history, how it's made, and how it's used?

Classroom creative activities

Pick one of the other people staying at Linda's *pension* and describe her arrival there from that point of view. What did the character think of Linda then? And afterwards?

Imagine you are one of the Lumière brothers and you have heard about Linda's adventures and want to make a film about one of the events that happen in the book. But you only have a few seconds of film! What do you choose? Write the outline for a very short screenplay.

Write a secret spy message and work out a way in which you could send it safely.

Create a travel poster for Paris that Linda might have seen on the way from London.

You have been asked to design a new set of playing cards, where the kings, queens and jacks are based on the characters *from Jack of Spades*. Which would you choose? Pick a suit and design your own king, queen and jack.

Write a newspaper report about the arrest of the Feodorovna gang in Paris two years before the events of *Jack of Spades*.

Linda loves mystery stories and dreams of maybe writing them one day. Create a cover for a book she might write.

Bobby grew up with a stage magician uncle in New York and helped him with shows. Imagine you've been to one of those shows. Describe what it was like, and how Bobby took part.

