Ghost in the Guitar

Paul Shipton

About the author
Paul Shipton was a teacher but is now a full-time writer, mainly of books for younger people. He was born and grew up in Britain, but he now lives in Wisconsin in the United States with his wife and children.

Summary
Tom is not a very good guitarist but he and his pianist girlfriend Katy are happy together and enjoy playing in their band, Steel City. They are delighted to get a chance to compete in the 'Battle of the Bands' but then disaster strikes. Katy breaks Tom's guitar and has to borrow money from her studious younger sister, Rachel, to get Tom a new one before the competition. They finally find an old guitar that they can afford, but as soon as Tom picks it up, he begins to change. Tom becomes obsessed with playing the guitar, and his single-mindedness seems to pay off. Overnight, his playing improves enormously, but he is not the person that Katy knew. She finds out that the guitar belonged to someone called David Ryan, a guitarist who was killed in a car crash, after the 'Battle of the Bands' in 1980. She also discovers that the guitar brings bad luck ...

Chapter 1: In Chapter 1, Katy and her boyfriend Tom play pop music with their best friends in a band called Steel City. Katy is a pianist and Tom a guitarist. Aruna is the singer and bass player and Danny is the drummer. They do gigs at different pubs, but their dream is to play for a big crowd. Yet Steel Band plays on a small stage in the King's Arms, a local pub. After playing, the band rest in a room at the back of the pub. Suddenly, Tom turns on the radio to find out which bands have been chosen for the 'Battle of the Bands'. He tells the band that he has sent a cassette with their songs to the radio station and that they could be chosen to take part in the competition. All the members of the band listen to the radio with their hearts pounding. And as they hear their own name, they jump up to celebrate. Katy accidentally hits Tom's guitar and it breaks into two. They now need to get money for a new one. Otherwise, they won't be able to attend the Bands Competition next Saturday!

Chapters 2–3: In Chapter 2, Katy borrows money from her sister Rachel, who is initially reluctant to give it to her, but who eventually agrees to it. Katy can't ask her parents for money since they are not happy with her not going to university. Katy and Tom go shopping for the new guitar. Tom likes many guitars but they can't afford them. As they are about to leave the guitar shop, the owner brings an old guitar. The minute Tom holds the guitar, his face changes completely. He has a very strange smile but he looks like a pop star. Back at home, Kate feels strange herself. She recalls Tom's odd face and writes a sad song. She feels a bit uneasy but she can't find why. In Chapter 3, the Steel City get together to practise for the coming competition. Tom is unusually late and acts very peculiarly. He plays better than ever with a cold smile and he is terribly mean to his bandmates. He tells them that their performances are appalling and has them practice for hours on end. As Tom drives Katy home, he continues to act strangely and she starts wondering why he has behaved so oddly ever since they bought the guitar.

Chapters 4–5: In Chapter 4, Katy is so worried about Tom that she drops by to visit him since she hasn't heard from him for days. Tom's mother tells her that he has been acting weirdly and that she has had to make him go to work. He hasn't been doing anything but play the guitar. As Katy enters Tom's room, she feels there is something certainly uncanny about the guitar. She goes back to the guitar shop to find out more about it. She is told that a Mrs Carter gave him the guitar for very little money since she said it brought 'bad luck'. As these words echoed in her mind, Katy asked for the address of the woman and left for her house. As soon as she mentions the guitar, Linda Carter's face turns white. In Chapter 5, Katy learns that the guitar belonged to David Ryan, a young man who used to play in Circle of Gold together with Phil Carter, Linda's current husband. David was obsessed with being a star and with winning the Bands Competition back in the 1980s. He died in a car crash but his guitar was left intact. Linda and Phil kept the guitar but uncanny things started...
happening and they decided to sell it. Katy tells the whole story to Rachel and asks her for help. They both go to the band’s rehearsal and start scrutinising Tom’s behaviour.

Chapter 6: In Chapter 6, Katy and her sister Rachel realise that Tom is being led by the ghost in the guitar, that of David Ryan’s. Rachel takes Katy to the local library. They look for the newspaper from the day after the Battle of the Bands in the 1980s. They find out that David Ryan’s band made it to the final but they didn’t win. Yet, the most shocking discovery is that David and Tom look exactly alike. They soon realise that Tom Webster and David Ryan are fighting inside the body of Tom. They are afraid that David’s ghost may want to relive its own story and make Tom die. They need to prevent history from repeating itself in order to save Tom. The band has to win for Tom not to die in the car crash.

Chapters 7–8: In Chapter 7, the big night arrives. The arena is crowded and the bands start playing. Many bands play but they all make mistakes. There seems to be a good chance that Steel City will win, with Tom playing brilliantly. The judges cannot decide between two bands, Steel City and The Passengers so the two bands have to play again. But then Rachel arrives with bad news. She has discovered that David Ryan’s band won the competition in 1980, and suddenly, Katy has to prevent Tom from winning. In Chapter 8, Rachel runs onto the stage and breaks Tom’s guitar for a second time. For a moment, she is afraid that the ghost of David Ryan will hurt her, but then, he leaves Tom’s body and Tom is back to normal. The final twist in the tale is that Rachel, the younger sister who only liked classical music, has found the whole episode so exciting that now she listens to pop music in secret.

Background and themes

*Ghost in the Guitar* poses some age-old questions. Can the spirit of a dead person haunt a place, or an object? Can the spirit migrate into the body of a living person and take possession of that person? And, if it can, how can it be exorcised or driven out of the person?

Tom’s guitar is, apparently, haunted by the spirit of David Ryan, a brilliant guitarist who died in a car crash. Does Ryan haunt the guitar because he died violently, or because he achieved his ambition, to win the Battle of the Bands, and then found that it was not what he wanted after all? By the end of the story, his spirit has, again, apparently, been exorcised, but what, exactly, has brought about the exorcism?

Discussion activities

Before reading

1. **Group work:** Put students into groups and ask them to discuss the following questions: Do you play any musical instruments? How good are you? Would you like to be a famous musician? Why/why not? Have you been to a concert recently? Which group did you see?

2. **Pair work:** Students work in pairs. They should imagine they are going on to play in a ‘Battle of the Bands Competition’: In pairs, imagine you want to be rock stars so you start a band. How many members will you be? What kind of music will you play? How will you get ready for the competition. Write down your ideas.

3. **Predict:** Ask students to look through the pictures in the book and work out a possible story from the pictures. Elicit ideas from different groups but don’t confirm or correct any of the ideas: In groups, look at the pictures in the book and the titles in the content page. Discuss what the story will be about.

4. **Write:** Ask students to work in groups. They should write a short paragraph about the story of a pop band of young people using at least ten of the words below: In groups, pick ten words from the box and write a paragraph about the story of a pop band which won the ‘Battle of the Bands Competition’.

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Ask students to look up the words they do not know in the Word List in back of the book.

Chapter 1

While reading

5. **Pair work:** Pair students up to role play a scene: Read pages 1–2 in pairs and imagine you are Katy and Tom. Talk about your gig, how it went, how you felt and what you need to do from now on.

6. **Predict:** Ask students to work in groups and to discuss the following: Read page 3 and imagine what the band is waiting to hear. What is the surprise?

7. **Write:** Tell students to work in pairs as they read pages 4–5: As you read pages 4 and 5, imagine you are Katy. What great things will you write in your diary?

After reading

8. **Role play:** Students work in groups on the following activity: You are The Passengers, another pop band who will also play in the ‘Battle of the Bands’. Talk about Steel Band, what you think about all the members, how they play, what their music is like, etc.
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9 Write: Ask students to imagine they are Steel City: Write down your plans to prepare for the competition. When will you practise? What changes do you need to make? What do you need to work on?

Chapters 2–3
After reading
10 Read and check: Tell students to read pages 5 and 6 and work on the following: In groups, as you read pages 5 and 6, compare Katy and her sister Rachel and write down how similar and different they are.
11 Write: Ask students to work in pairs as they read pages 6–9: Read up to page 9 and imagine you are Katy. Write what you are feeling right now in your diary. What are you frightened about? What is wrong?
12 Discuss: Students work in groups and discuss as they read pages 9–13: After reading all these pages, what do you think actually happened to Tom? What strange things is he doing? What is each member of Steel City feeling?

After reading
13 Write: Ask students to work in groups: Imagine you are Tom. You are feeling very strange. Sometimes you don’t know who you are. You feel you are a different person. Write down what is going on.
14 Predict: Ask students to discuss in groups how the story goes on in groups after finishing Chapter 3: What will Katy and the band do about Tom? What will Tom do to win the competition? How will the story change?

Chapters 4–5
While reading
15 Pair work: Students work in pairs as they read pages 15–19: Read pages 15 to 19 and imagine you are Katy and Rachel. Katy tells her sister everything she found and Rachel asks her questions. Discuss what you should do now.
16 Discuss: Ask students to work in groups and to discuss what the sisters find about Tom: In groups, read pages 22–24 and imagine you are Katy and Rachel. Write down all the strange things Tom has done.
17 Predict: Tell students to work in pairs on the following prediction activity: Imagine what strange things Tom will do in Chapter 6. How will Katy and Rachel try to help him? What else will they find about David Ryan?

After reading
18 Role play: Put students in pairs and ask them to imagine they are Phil and Linda: What is the big secret that you kept for so long? What happened the night of the Battle of the Bands? Why did David go so mad?
19 Write: Ask students to work in pairs. They work on the following writing activity: Imagine you are Tom. The Battle of the Bands is getting closer. How are you feeling? What are you planning to do? How do you feel about each of the members of the band?

Chapter 6
While reading
20 Discuss: Tell students to pair up for the following activity: Read pages 25–29 in pairs. Discuss what important things Katy and Rachel discover and what they should do to help Tom.
21 Role play: Ask students to work in groups: In groups, imagine you are Katy and Rachel. You decide to tell Steel City everything you learn. Plan what to do during the competition, how to win, how to make the ghost leave.

After reading
22 Write: Ask students to work in pairs on the following writing activity: Imagine you are the ghost in the guitar. Write down what you really want. What your secret is. What you think of Steel City and what you plan to do
23 Role play: Students work in groups on the following activity: In groups, imagine you are Steel City. This is your final practice before the competition. What do your say? How do you feel? What are you afraid of?

Chapters 7–8
While reading
24 Write: Students work in pairs on the following writing activity: Read pages 30–32 and imagine you are Tom. Tell everything that happened from his perspective. Write down what he is thinking, what he is feeling, etc.
25 Predict: Students work in groups on the following prediction activity: Read page 33 in groups and decide what Katy should do in order to help Tom and the band.
26 Compare: Students work in the same groups as in the previous activity: Continue to work in the same groups as you read pages 34–38. Compare what happens in the story with what you predicted. How close were you?

After reading
27 Pair work: Put students into pairs to answer these questions: In what way(s) did history repeat itself in Chapters 7 and 8? In what way(s) were things different?
28 Group work: Put students into small groups to write the newspaper story about what happened the night of the Battle of the Bands in 1980. They must use as much of the information in the story as possible and add more ideas of their own.
29 Write: Put students into groups and ask them to work on the following activity: Think of a new title for each chapter of the book. The title must be a sentence from the chapter in each case.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.