Lots of the activities and discussion topics in these teacher’s notes are deliberately left open to encourage pupils to develop independent thinking around the book. This will help pupils build confidence in their ability to problem solve as individuals and also as part of a group.
The Front Cover
What do you think Coco Chanel’s big dream might have been?
Do you know anything about Coco Chanel?

The Blurb
Does the blurb suggest that your idea about Coco’s big dream was correct?
Check your understanding of the following words and phrases:
• orphanage
• cabaret singer
• seamstress
• fashion designer
• style icon
If you are not quite sure, you could consult with friends, use a dictionary, or read the book to see if you can work it out for yourself.

The Endpapers
What effect does looking at the end papers have on you?
Why do you think the illustrator decided on this design?

What is an orphanage?
Who do you think ran the orphanage?
What sort of childhood do you imagine Gabrielle had there?
What do you think the words that Gabrielle is writing on the board mean?

What do you think this tells you about her character?

Why do you think the nuns found Gabrielle more difficult than the other children?

What do you notice about the classroom? How is it different from yours?

How do the girls in the picture pass their time?

What would you choose to do?

What do the author’s words suggest about Gabrielle?

What sort of sewing did she do?

Why do you think people called her ‘Coco’?

Can you find the Coco Chanel logo in the dream cloud?

What items can you see on the floor? Why do you think they are there?

Create some dream clouds with your own shapes and patterns for a class display. Try some ideas out in rough first, experimenting with line, tone, colour, space, shape and pattern.
What do the words ‘simple’ and ‘elegant’ mean?

Find some synonyms in the thesaurus and collect a range of adjectives.

Create your own hat design and an advert for it, using some of the different adjectives you have found, to ‘sell’ your hat. You could photograph it and try out different effects in the photo programme and create an electronic advert.

Create a class hat shop display of all your designs. You could make your favourites into 3D designs.

How many hats do you think you would need to make in order to open a hat shop?

What does the word ‘mademoiselles’ mean?

What were ‘corsets’?

Why do you think women wore them?

Can you think of any clothes we wear now that are uncomfortable?

Do you think people should wear clothes that are uncomfortable?

How is Coco’s dress different from the other ladies’ dresses in the illustration?
So Coco created a new style that was simple and straight. It quickly grabbed people’s attention. At her first fashion show, some people sneered and didn’t take Coco seriously. Her clothes were too strange and different for them.

Guess the garment exercise:
Describe a piece of clothing that you can see in the illustration to your partner and see if they can identify the correct item. You might want to include some of these terms:
- buttons
- bows
- ribbons
- checks
- stripes
- spots
- borders
- pleats
- cuffs

Extend your hat shop display by creating designs of clothes that are comfortable to wear.

In pairs, compare the clothes which the audience are wearing to those that the model is displaying.

Why do you think the model is holding a token with the number 12 on it?

Why do you think some people sneered?

How does the illustrator convey the feelings of the audience?

Create a freeze frame of this illustration, with a model, Coco Chanel, and members of the audience. Choose someone to touch the different characters in turn to discover their thoughts.

Create your own class fashion show, with one person taking the role of compere, describing each outfit as the models walks down the catwalk, whilst other people make up the audience. Think about using music as part of the ‘performance.’

You could take photographs to display later as items in a catalogue or a newspaper report, or you could make a film.
How many references are there to Coco Chanel in this illustration?

Which country is depicted in the illustration?

What do you think about the idea that ‘being different might make other people think differently too’?

Do you think fashion design is important? Give reasons to support your opinion.

Add the birth and death dates of Coco Chanel and create your own timeline of her life, including important events, such as the First and Second World Wars.