

These notes are for:

- Upper Primary / Secondary
- 8 +yrs old

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Geography
- History
- Science
- Art
- ICT

Example of:

- Junior Fiction
- Novel

Experience of:

- Reading & Writing
- Reflecting on text
- Listening & Speaking
- Research

Themes:

- Environment
- History
- Friendship
- Family
- Humour
- Mystery

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia Ph +61 2 9517 9577
Locked Bag 22 Fax +61 2 9517 9997
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

For enquiries please contact Melissa Hamilton:
educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au

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Surface Tension

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By: Meg McKinlay
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Outline:

Even secrets have a way of floating to the surface.

It's the seven bandaid swim that clinches it. It's what convinces Cassie that there is no way she's going to swim at the local pool any longer. From now on she is going to swim in the lake. The lake covers Old Lower Grange, which was purposely drowned on the day Cassie was born. That day was important for everyone, especially Liam, a twelve-year-old boy who joins Cassie at the lake. As summer heats up, the water level of the lake gets lower and lower. And slowly the dark secrets of Old Lower Grange are uncovered.

Author Information:

Meg McKinlay grew up in Bendigo, Victoria, in a book-loving, TV- and car-free household. A poet as well as a children's writer, Meg developed an affinity with the Japanese language after going on an exchange year in high school, and went on to complete a PhD in Japanese Literature. She lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia, where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese, and Creative Writing. Meg divides her time between teaching and writing, a balance that swings wildly between chaos and calm but she is always busy cooking up more books.

How to Use These Notes:

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the text *Surface Tension* by Meg McKinlay. Multiple copies of the text are recommended for shared reading. This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

Classroom Ideas for *Surface Tension*:

Before reading *Surface Tension*:

- View the cover and title. Identify the following:
 - The title of the book
 - The author
 - The illustrator
 - The publisher
 - From the front and back cover what information can you learn about the book? What do you think this book is about? How do you think the book will begin/end? Write your own story called *Surface Tension* based only on this information.
 - Discuss the following: What is the role of the author/illustrator? What is the role of the publisher? Who else is involved in the making of a book? What age do you think the intended audience for this book is?
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Activities and Discussion Questions:

- Read page 15, "I clamped my mouth shut and felt the coughs detonate inside, puffing out my cheeks like tiny explosions." This is a simile. What other similes can be found in *Surface Tension*? Create your own simile to describe an experience in an unusual way.
- On page 32, Cassie's Mum asks "How can you know where you are if you don't know where you have been?" Split the class into two and have a mock debate about the validity of this statement. Have one side argue for how a person's past effects who they currently are. Have the other half discuss how the past is irrelevant because it is a person's current actions that determine who they are.
- Research your family tree back at least five generations.
- Ask your parents and grandparents for stories about where they grew up. How do you think the place they grew up has affected who they are today?
- Research an actual town that was drowned by a dam. How did the residents feel about the dam? What happened to the residents after their town was flooded? Do you think the accounts you found told the whole story or were there bits left out?
- Page 51 refers to some science experiments that Cassie did with surface tension. Try these experiments for yourself. For the first experiment you need a glass of water filled to the rim and some coins. Gently place each of these coins into the water, narrow edge first. Observe the shape the water takes as coins are added. How many coins fit in before the glass overflows? Is this more than you expected? For the second experiment, lower a needle or paperclip into a bowl of water with a fork. Pull the fork back at the surface of the water and be careful not to wet the needle or the paperclip as this will cause it to sink. It may take a few tries but you should be able to get the needle or paperclip to sit on the surface of the water.
- Page 66 claims that "history is written by the winners!" Have a class discussion about what this means. Why would this happen? Is this always the case or are the accounts of history not written by the "winners"? What does this mean for the way we view our history?
- Certain lines in *Surface Tension* are italicised. How does this set them apart from the rest of the text? How does it affect the tone of these lines to have them in italics?

Activities and Discussion Questions cont.

- Draw a map of the neighbourhood where you live. Make special note of any landmarks and the street names.
- On page 114, Cassie's Dad describes his artistic process, "what I like to do is look at the photos, capture the essence of the thing, then put them away and just work from the mind's eye." Try creating your own artwork using this technique. In what ways did your artwork reflect the original photo or person? In what ways is it different? How do you think these differences came about?
- Create a newspaper article about an important event in your life. Remember to have an eye-catching heading and keep it brief, sticking only to the facts.
- Create your own mosaic of an important landmark in your local area.
- On page 181 Cassie talks about telling stories, "She had done all these drafts, all these versions. All of them telling the story of the town. All of them telling the same story differently." Have each student in the class write their own account of something they were all involved in. Read the stories aloud to the class. How were they different? Did they even tell the same story? Was any story more official than any of the others?
- How does the metaphor on page 158 work as a metaphor for the overall narrative of *Surface Tension*? "A heavy red glaze could cover a network of tiny hairline fractures that would shatter something utterly if you struck it hard enough in just the right spot."

After reading *Surface Tension*:

- Write a review of *Surface Tension*. Did this match your original expectations of the book?
- Research Meg McKinlay. Where did she grow up? How do you think this has affected her writing? What other books has she written?

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