

RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower secondary (ages 13+; years 7–10)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking; Ethical Understanding
- **Strands:** Language, Literature and Literacy

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Explore themes of interpersonal relationships and ethical dilemmas within a fictional setting
- Examine story structure and literary devices such as unreliable narrator, flashbacks, conflict and setting

THEMES

- Family and friendship
- Danger, fear and vulnerability vs. safety
- Pet ownership
- The perception of truth
- Secrets and lies
- Grief
- Transitions and catalysts for change

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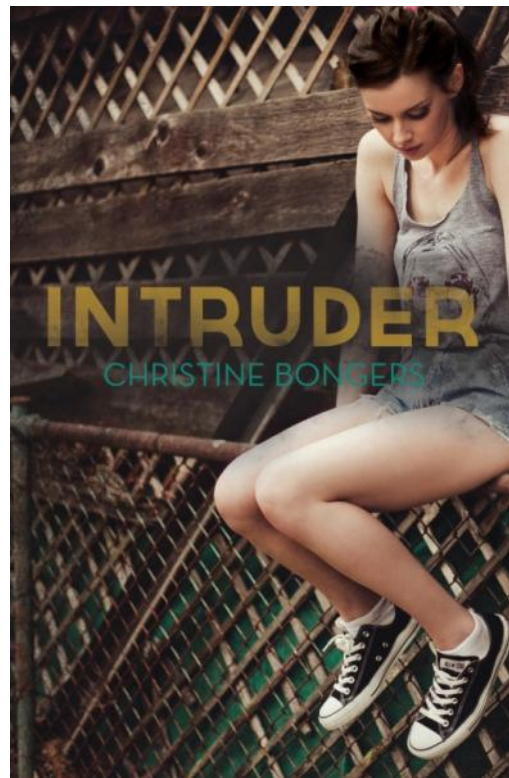
PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9780857983763 (paperback);
9780857983770 (ebook)

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Intruder

Christine Bongers

SYNOPSIS

I don't walk past the house on our left. I don't speak to the evil witch who lives in it. I wish she was dead. Even deader than my mum. Which makes it hard . . . because she was the one who came running when I screamed.

When Kat Jones is woken at midnight by an intruder looming over her bed, she screams. Her dad works night shifts, playing piano in the city's bars as well as baking pastries. So in Jimmy's absence, the person who comes running to save Kat is her hated neighbour Edwina – the woman Kat believes betrayed her dying mother.

Although Jimmy calls the police to report the intruder, he and Kat decide not to tell them Jimmy wasn't home. *'We keep ourselves to ourselves,'* that's their rule. Their secrecy stems from an incident three years ago when Kat was put in foster care. Kat is worried that if the police know that her dad isn't home in the evenings, they'll take her away again – and that's her worst nightmare, even worse than the threat of the intruder coming back.

Jimmy needs to keep working nights to pay the mortgage, so he gives Kat an ultimatum: either she can spend her nights with Edwina, or she can accept another intruder in her life – Hercules, the world’s ugliest guard dog. Even though Kat is dog-phobic after a terrifying attack that left her with a scar along her jaw, it’s a no-brainer. She chooses Hercules – and despite her fears, she quickly grows to love this ugly dog and his *‘innocent abandon, his untrammelled joy in the day’*.

The incident with the intruder is about to spark more change in Kat’s life – this time for the positive. When she visits the local dog park with Herc, she meets new boy, Al. He helps her overcome her panic attack at the gate, and he’s so easy to talk to that Kat finds herself letting down her guard and telling him her secrets. Kat has been friendless for several years, following her reticence to talk to others after her mother’s death, and now she revels in her friendship with Al. However, she’s soon on the back foot when Al calls her out on her hatred of Edwina and her frustration with Jimmy. Could Al be right when he says, *‘You just sharpen your claws on the wrong people sometimes?’* Kat must decide if she’s willing to change her perceptions and rethink her views. If she doesn’t, her new friend might not stick around.

But the prowler isn’t finished with Kat. He calls on her home phone, letting Kat know that he’s aware she’s home alone. Then he poisons Hercules, and it’s touch and go whether Kat’s beloved dog will survive.

Edwina insists that Kat stays at her house for safety, and this time Kat doesn’t resist. Being back in her old bedroom – in the house of her mother’s best friend, who Kat once turned to for affection and love during the long years of her mother’s illness – brings back memories that Kat has long held back. Is Edwina really the *‘evil witch’* that Kat believes she is? And did Kat really see what she thinks she saw, when she came across Edie and Jimmy together on the day of her mother’s death?

With New Year’s Day being the biggest night of the year for break-ins, Kat will need everyone’s help to set a trap to catch the intruder – Jimmy, Al, policeman and fellow dog owner Bill, and Edwina.

Kat can no longer hide from the truth, and from the support that family and friendship can bring. But will the explosive truths she learns about her and Edwina’s shared past mend fences, or will they break apart her fragile family forever?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Bongers was born and bred in Biloela, Central Queensland. She left to attend university and has worked as a broadcast journalist in Brisbane and London, written two environmental television documentaries and run her own media consultancy. She completed a Master of Arts in youth writing in 2008. Her first novel, *Dust*, was a Children’s Book Council of Australia Notable Book. Her second novel, *Henry Hoey Hobson*, was shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year – Younger Readers, the WA Premier’s Book Awards and the Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards. Christine lives in Brisbane and shares her life with husband Andrew, children Connor, Brydie, Clancy and Jake, and their dog, Huggy, the Derek Zoolander of Beagles (really, really, really good looking, but not very bright).

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AUTHOR’S INSPIRATION

Christine Bongers says:

Some stories start in dark places and, prompted by the question *What if?*, emerge slowly into the light. This story started five years ago when my daughter was woken by a man standing over her bed. She was eleven years old.

We were lucky. The prowler ran off when she challenged him. And my child is resilient; she recovered much faster than I did.

Motherhood is guilt. Particularly when they’re little. Forgot your lunch, sweetie? That’d be Mum’s fault. Turned up in full uniform when everyone else was wearing free dress? Definitely Mum’s fault.

Mothers are great at taking responsibility. I swear some Mum is out there right now taking the blame for the Ukraine crisis and the fall of the dollar.

We’re even better at torturing ourselves with terrifying ‘what ifs’ . . .

But as the years safely passed, I stopped responding as a mother and found myself responding as a *writer*. Turning that prowler incident over in my mind, intrigued by the fictional possibilities of that most tantalising of questions: ‘what if ...?’

What if it happened to a girl who was home alone? What if her mum was dead? What if her dad worked nights? What if the only person who came running when she screamed was the one person she hated most in the world?

And so the story of *Intruder* began to emerge, each question prompting countless others.

Why does Kat hate her neighbour Edwina? How could her dad, Jimmy, leave her alone, night after night? How would a vulnerable, *motherless*, once-bitten, twice-shy teen react to a guard dog being forced on her? And how would she respond to the unexpected and unconditional love it offered?

On one level, *Intruder* is about vulnerability and what we need in our lives to make us feel safe.

On another, it is about how the inescapable past shapes and, at times, traps us.

Like all of us, Kat sees the world through the prism of her own experiences. She hates her neighbour; she knows what she saw. A single shocking snippet of reality that sets like concrete in her mind and becomes the bedrock for all her subsequent actions.

The intruder is the catalyst for change in Kat's life. Bringing her simmering problems with her troubled father to the boil. Shattering her fragile belief that she is fine on her own. Forcing her to accept help – from the unwanted dog, Hercules, and her much-hated neighbour. And, ultimately, compelling her to face a truth buried in the bedrock of the past.

To paraphrase one of my favourite characters: *Intruder* is like an onion. It has layers. I hope its readers enjoy peeling them back. 😊

KEY QUESTIONS

For Christine Bongers, these are the key questions students could discuss after reading *Intruder*:

1. Discuss the meaning of the title – does it allude to more than just the prowler? What other intruders might Kat have to deal with?
2. Kat talks about the '*inescapable past*' dominating the last three years of her life (p. 34). Is the past inescapable? Discuss.
3. Discuss Kat's relationship with her father. Why does she call him Jimmy? Why does she get angry when Al criticises her dad, saying he's '*supposed to be the grown-up*' (p. 128)?
4. Who is Kat's mother? Discuss.
5. Why do you think the prowler targeted Kat?
6. Kat's world view is strongly influenced by seeing Jimmy and Edie together when her mother was dying. Should we trust what we see with our own eyes? Discuss.

STORY TECHNIQUES AND LITERARY DEVICES

Genre and structure

Intruder is a **realistic** novel, set in the current day.

From its very title and in the book's blurb, *Intruder* sets up an expectation that it is a **suspense** novel – that the guiding force of the book will be answering questions: Who is the intruder? Will he return? Will he hurt Kat? Although this plot is central to the story on one level, there are other, deeper levels that become more important, such as Kat learning the truth about her family, and learning to forgive and to communicate more openly with others.

Like Christine Bongers' first novel, *Dust*, *Intruder* is told in **first person, past tense** narrative mode. We see events only through the **limited perspective** and understanding of fourteen-year-old Kat.

Questions and activities

1. How might the novel have been different if it had been told in third person? Write a scene in third person to try it out.
2. How does the author create suspense? Find examples of suspenseful moments.

Chronology

Christine Bongers uses a **non-linear** rather than chronological story structure to create mystery. The book begins with a **cliffhanger** of a sentence – '*Which made it hard . . . because on Christmas night, she was the one who came running when I screamed*' (p. 2) – then goes back to explain what happened that night.

She also uses **flashbacks** throughout to explain **back story** that helps the reader to understand Kat's situation. For instance, on p. 40 we hear about why she is afraid of dogs, and on p. 244 we see a dream-memory from her childhood.

Questions and activities

1. Does the order of the flashbacks matter, in terms of story structure? Make a list of the flashbacks in the book and note how each contributes to your understanding of Kat and her situation.
2. Why does the author start with such a dramatic sentence, then go back in time to explain what has happened? Where do you think the story should have started?

Red herrings

Like any good **suspense or mystery** story, *Intruder* uses **red herrings** to throw the reader off the scent. The biggest red herring in the story is that Kat thinks the intruder could be 'Hoodie Guy', a boy she sees around her neighbourhood. Ultimately, though, Kat is made to realise that someone's actions aren't necessarily evidence of their guilt, and perceptions aren't everything, when she finds out more about Hoodie Guy's situation: 'He was just different, and that's an awful reason to turn someone into a prime suspect' (p. 267).

Questions and activities

1. Why do authors use red herrings?
2. Can you find other examples of red herrings in the story?

Epigraph

'Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.'
William Shakespeare

Kat must face her greatest fears in *Intruder* – and they're not all about the intruder himself. See for instance p. 63, where Kat must find the bravado to keep walking after she sees Hoodie Guy.

Questions and activities

1. What do you think the epigraph means before you read the book?
2. The quote is from Shakespeare's play *Henry IV*. In the full quote (which you can find here: <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/1henryiv/1henryiv.2.3.html>), the character Hotspur is reading a letter that warns him of danger: 'The purpose you undertake is dangerous,' the letter reads, and Hotspu reassures himself with this line: 'Why, that's certain. 'Tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink; but I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.' Despite the danger of the intruder returning, in what ways does Kat reassure herself, like Hotspur, that she is safe enough? Is she correct?
3. Now read the epigraph *after* finishing the book. What further resonance does it take on? Think about Kat and Edwina, and how it takes a great danger for Kat to realise the error in her perceptions. 'Safety' here refers as much to Kat's emotional and mental comfort as it does to her physical safety – she has become more happy and settled in herself since forgiving Edwina, and opening herself up to making friends.

4. Christine Bongers says: '*Intruder* is about vulnerability and what we need in our lives to make us feel safe.' What makes us feel safe, or unsafe, in our lives?

Analogy

Intruder also incorporates other **analogies** to add **layers of meaning** to the story. Consider what Kat says about the film *Psycho* on p. 92, what she realises about Roald Dahl books on p. 147, and her thoughts on the scientific concept of inertia (p. 182). Quasimodo and Jabba the Hutt are also mentioned (p. 31), in the context of Herc's looks.

Questions and activities

1. How do these analogies deepen the reading experience?
2. Like the Roald Dahl books Kat notes, what other books have you read that feature missing or neglectful parents? Why do children's books often feature absent parents?
3. See *Worksheet: Fairytales* for a quiz.

Irony

Irony is a literary device in which the intended meaning is different to the actual meaning of words. The author uses **dramatic irony** in that, despite the book being written from Kat's point of view, the reader is aware earlier than Kat herself that Edwina is not the 'evil witch' Kat thinks she is.

Questions and activities

1. Can you find examples of places where the reader begins to suspect that Kat does not know the full or true story?
2. Could each of the following be considered irony, or not? Look up the meaning of irony and its various types (situational, dramatic and verbal) and discuss each one.
 - Kat is forced to look after a dog when she is phobic about dogs.
 - Kat's philosophy is 'We keep ourselves to ourselves' but she tells Al all her secrets.
 - Kat is willing to think Hoodie Guy might be the intruder because of what she assumes about him, but she is afraid of what the police will assume about her family if they know that Jimmy works nights.
 - Kat has spent three years hating Edwina for what she learns was a misunderstanding.

Conflict

Conflict is a driving force in *Intruder*, as it is in any good story. From the very first page the reader hears about Kat's conflict with her neighbour: she is refusing to speak to her after a perceived betrayal.

Kat then comes into conflict with her father over the question of the possible return of the intruder, and Kat is given an ultimatum: she can accept Hercules, the guard dog, or she can sleep at Edwina's.

To overcome the conflict in the story, Kat must get to the truth, change her own perceptions and decide to forgive.

Questions and activities

1. Find other examples of conflict in the book, such as between Kat and Al. How are they resolved?
2. Using a standard narrative arc, identify the following points in the novel: Exposition; Rising action; Climax; Falling action; Resolution. How does conflict and its resolution inform those developments? Find examples that support your ideas.
3. Why is conflict essential to all stories?

Unreliable narrator

We hear from Kat's point of view a strongly negative portrayal of her neighbour Edwina, and we think Kat is justified in her opinion when we hear that Edwina betrayed Kat's dying mother (p. 2). However, gradually, the reader begins to see that Kat's perspective is skewed – and perhaps Edwina is not the person Kat, or readers, thought she was. This makes Kat an **unreliable narrator** – someone whose biases or opinions make their story harder to believe, or who is deceiving the reader, whether intentionally or not. In Kat's case, it is revealed that her skewed perspective and her biases are unintentional, as she has misunderstood situations she has seen.

Questions and activities

1. How does your view of Edwina change throughout the story? What do you think of Edwina after chapter one? Do you believe she is an 'evil witch', or are you already starting to wonder whether there's more to this character than we are being told? When does your opinion about Edwina start to change?
2. Is there a point where, as a reader, you understand more than Kat does, or you have started to doubt her word? How did this affect you as a reader? Did you distrust her? Do you

think she intended to deceive the reader, or was she just trying to deceive herself? At what point does Kat realise that her perceptions are wrong?

3. What other books have you read that have an unreliable narrator? Some examples are: *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne, *Pig Boy* by J.C. Burke, *Liar* by Justine Larbalestier, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky.
4. Many of Kat's misunderstandings could be attributed to her being a child at the time, and not having the maturity to process what she was seeing or experiencing. What things did you misunderstand when you were young, whether silly or serious?

Setting

Intruder is clearly set in Queensland, with Kat living in a typical high-set timber 'Queenslander' house, and this setting is interconnected with Kat's sense of **identity and belonging**.

Questions and activities

1. In what ways does the setting of Kat's story – with the two houses side by side, and the dog park and creek nearby – inform the story itself?
2. What does the house mean to Jimmy? What does it mean to Kat? (See, for instance, pp. 33–35.)
3. Have you read other books set in Brisbane or Queensland, such as others by Christine Bongers or books by Nick Earls or Rebecca Sparrow?

LANGUAGE

Figurative language

One of the strengths of Christine Bongers' writing is the way she employs powerful **similes** and **metaphors** and **descriptive or figurative language** to deepen the reading experience, draw us into the characters' strong emotions, and **add layers of meaning** to her work. Here are some examples: 'cut like a scar' (p. 1); 'I lasered it into earth, concrete and tar' (p. 1); 'dragged like a dead leg' (p. 8); 'The evil witch's soft voice went through me like radiation' (p. 10); 'another choking sob exploded like a depth charge' (p. 14); 'I just drank down my glass of cement and hardened up' (p. 115).

Questions and activities

1. There are plenty of other examples in the book of similes, metaphors and descriptive language. Make a list of 10 more examples you can find.
2. See also the activities in the section about Hercules – he is the recipient of some of Kat's most flowery descriptions!
3. Do you notice anything in common about the metaphors Kat uses? For instance, the ones quoted above are often negative images, and they're also very down to earth, physical things – radiation, explosives, cement, lasers. Why do you think this is? Find some other common features among the descriptions in the story.

Idiomatic language

Christine Bongers uses clever **wordplay** and Australian **vernacular** to make the voice of Kat sound natural. Here are some examples: 'walk-on floordrobe' (p. 28); 'it might decapitate you' (p. 47); 'I bum-skied across the kitchen floor' (p. 54); 'like stink on feet' (p. 123); 'chuck a hissy fit' (p. 135); 'BFFs' (p. 142).

Questions and activities

1. What other examples of slang, vernacular or wordplay can you find in the book?
2. Why did the author choose such casual language in writing this story? Compare the language used to that in the book and film that Kat herself has been reading and watching: *Emma* by Jane Austen and *Clueless*.
3. What other made-up or newly formed words have you seen? Try looking at *Macquarie Dictionary's* 'Word of the Year' results: www.macquariedictionary.com.au/resources/view/word/of/the/year/ Which ones do you think will stand the test of time? Which ones will be out of fashion by next year?
4. What words do you and your friends use that others might not understand?

RESPONDING TO LITERATURE

In this section, students can **reflect and respond** to aspects of the text as a work of literature via its key **themes, motifs** and **symbols**.

Family

Central to *Intruder* is the question: what is a family? Since her mother's death, Kat has felt neglected by her father, Jimmy, because he works nights and

leaves Kat home alone. However, she is also fiercely protective of her father and their need to keep the family's secrets so they are not reported to Child Services, and so that Jimmy does not break down again as he did after his wife's death.

Kat comes to learn facts about Edwina that she hadn't known, and which cast a new light on her conception of who her family is and why Edie is 'the keeper of secrets' (p. 299). Kat's coming of age therefore involves accepting her changed and expanded family situation.

Questions and activities

1. What problems have been faced by the different families in the book, such as Kat's and Al's? How have the families coped with these changes?
2. 'We keep ourselves to ourselves.' (p. 12 and 18; p. 22) Is this a good philosophy to live by? Why/why not? Why does Jimmy think this is the right thing to do?
3. Is Kat overprotective of Jimmy? Consider the evidence she has of his fragile mental state (e.g. pp. 13–14).
4. Do you think Jimmy should be working nights, leaving Kat at home? Consider the evidence for and against, and each character's reasons for their opinion. (For instance, although we feel Kat's loneliness and her fear, we also see that, for Jimmy, playing music is his life and something that brings him joy and satisfaction, as well as helping to pay the mortgage.)

Friendship

Another change in Kat's life brought about inadvertently by the intruder is that she meets Al. A boy her own age, Al helps Kat to recover from her panic attack at the entrance to the dog park, and his easy and accepting manner soon has Kat confiding the full story of the intruder and her family's situation – despite her desire to keep the family's secrets. Kat has previously held people at bay – for instance, she considers the dog park people's friendliness 'too close for comfort' (p. 91).

Perhaps the key quote summarising Kat's philosophy at the beginning of her story is on p. 105: 'When you gave people your secrets, you gave them power over you'. Her later changed mindset might be summarised with this quote: '[Al and Herc] were like the missing puzzle pieces of my jigsaw, clicking into the empty spaces of my life and creating an unexpected picture of how good life could be' (p. 171).

Questions and activities

1. Why does Kat confide in Al so quickly? Why does she think it is a risk to talk to Al? (See p. 102 and p. 105.)
2. Does the course of friendship run smooth? Consider the ups and downs of Kat and Al's friendship. What helps them to overcome the conflict between them?
3. What is the value of friendship? How does Al help Kat, and vice versa? Make a list of all the ways various characters help each other.
4. Consider other character interactions in the novel, too. Would you describe the dog park characters as friends or are they merely acquaintances? Are Edwina and Jimmy friends?

Grief

Kat and her father, Jimmy, as well as their neighbour Edwina are still recovering from the death of Kat's mother three years ago, and this grief takes form in different ways for each character.

Questions and activities

1. How does their grief manifest for each of these characters?
2. The Kübler-Ross model of grief posits that the experience of grief consists of five different stages, though not necessarily experienced in this order: Denial; Anger; Bargaining; Depression; Acceptance. Can you identify any of these stages of grief in the past or present actions of Kat, Jimmy or Edwina?
3. Compare Kat's actions and emotions with those of other characters whose stories you have read who are experiencing grief. Examples include: Shelley in *The Whole of My World* (Nicole Hayes), who has also lost her mother; Paige, Sarah and Tallulah in *Pretty Girl* (J.C. Burke), whose friend Jess recently died in suspicious circumstances; and Mia in *If I Stay* (Gayle Forman), who is not only coming to terms with the death of her parents in a car accident, but is in a coma herself, and potentially will not survive.

Fairytales

Kat very much sees Edwina through a prism of the 'evil witch' of fairytales, and fairytale tropes inform the story. Edwina 'used [her silky-smooth voice] like a witch would use an apple, or a gingerbread house, to lure people in. It was a trap for young players' (p. 9); Kat tells Al, 'She's a witch ... Anything she gives you is

poisoned' (p. 153). When Al takes Edwina's side in an argument, Kat thinks Edwina has 'Stolen what was mine. She'd bewitched Al' (p. 175) And when Kat notes that her old room in Edwina's house used to be 'my fairytale castle, where I used to retreat into fantasy, spinning the dross of my life into gold' (p. 229), she blames Edwina: 'She was a witch for ... taunting me with the broken dreams of my childhood' (p. 230).

When Kat finally admits the truth to herself about her motivations for hating Edie, she returns to a fairytale analogy, this time *Hansel and Gretel*: 'She hadn't lured me away with the promise of a gingerbread cottage with lolly walls and sugar-frosted bookshelves. I had asked for these things.' (p. 246)

The intruder, too, becomes a creature of fairytale and horror stories: he is a 'boogiemanager who'd stepped out of a nightmare' (p. 18); and Hoodie Guy, who Kat thinks might be the intruder, is 'Like a troll blocking the bridge' (p. 193). Jimmy's torch is 'a haven from the monsters that skulked in the dark' (p. 199).

Questions and activities

1. Which fairytales have particular resonance or meaning for Kat's story in *Intruder*? Why?
2. Name some monsters that skulk in the dark other than trolls and boogiemanager. Why do we have so many of this kind of fairytale/horror character or creature in our culture and history?
3. **Imaginative text:** Turn Kat's story into an actual fairytale about a young girl who thinks the person in the house next door is a witch. Look at the structure of classic fairytales and the way they are written (such as their morals and lessons, and simple style), and write your story using that style.

Roses

'White roses for loyalty, for a love stronger than death. My parents had planted them when they first bought the house – before I was born, before I was even thought of. They marked the dividing line between our yard and the evil witch's next door. In my mind, they formed a dense barrier, knotted and gnarled, thick with razor-sharp thorns, to keep her out. In reality, they couldn't even keep out her flea-bitten dog.' (p. 44)

For Kat, the roses are: 'Thorned wraiths that should have been guarding the boundary between our two properties; barbed sentries that had failed in their duty to keep all trespassers out' (p. 103).

When Kat finally is able to see past her initial misperceptions of Edwina to the truth, even Edie's

garden takes on new significance with its bright, healthy plants: *'Beyond that grew glorious roses, lovingly tended and expertly pruned with faces turned towards the light'* (p. 270), in contrast to Kat and Jimmy's garden, where the roses were *'Poor sad things ... More thorn than flower with spiked spindles supporting an occasional stunted head, bowed down by neglect'* (p. 271).

Questions and activities

1. What do the roses between the two houses represent at different times in the story?
2. What role have roses played in other stories or in different cultures? Why have roses achieved such meaning in literature and society?

Lines, boundaries and fences

'I drew the line that ended my childhood on the morning of my mother's funeral, one month before I turned twelve. It cut like a scar from the left boundary of our property, across the sloping footpath in front of our old Queenslander, and down onto the patched bitumen of our street. I lasered it into earth, concrete and tar with hot dry eyes, forming an invisible barrier as permanent and impenetrable as my mother's death. No matter how hard my dad, Jimmy, had begged and tugged at my hand, I refused to cross that line.' (p. 1)

'Later, I would wonder if that was why I did what I did. Why I lowered the barricades and let someone I know waltz on in, past my heavily fortified defences.' (p. 71)

'It was me. I was the one who had crossed the line.' (p. 245)

Kat sees her world as lines not to cross, and boundaries she has set up to keep her cocooned and safe. Kat's coming of age in *Intruder* is closely linked to her being able to see the world differently, and remove the mental barriers that have been holding her back from making connections with others. Even the book's closing line returns to the idea of boundaries – but this time Kat is happy to cross them.

Questions and activities

1. Why has Kat drawn an imaginary line between the two properties?
2. What else separates the properties?
3. What does Kat mean when she says that, *'Some lines were too dangerous to be crossed.'* (p. 45)? Is she right?

4. Fences are also important in that they become required to keep the intruder out. The fence is breached by the intruder when he poisons Herc. Kat must face the fence at the dog park and be brave enough to enter. In what other ways is the idea of fences symbolic in the story?
5. Consider the book cover blurb, which mentions 'mending fences'. What does this saying mean? Why is mending fences seen as a metaphor for finding peaceful resolution to arguments?

Scars

Kat has a scar along her jaw from a dog attack, *'A daily reminder of why Kat and dogs don't mix'* (p. 40). When she gets Herc she sees herself as *'about to rip open the old scar'* (p. 62); Jimmy has burn scars on his arms from when he broke down after Yvie's death, which Kat says *'had seared the past into his flesh'* (p. 314); Al has scars from where the bully punched him, and both he and Kat have a habit of using their hair to cover their scars.

Questions and activities

1. What do scars mean to Kat in the book? How do they evoke memories of the past? Are they holding Kat back from moving on?

Hercules

The book is filled with vivid descriptions of Hercules, the would-be guard dog, and examining these descriptions is a great way to study how authors use imagery. Here are some examples:

- *'A pudding-shaped mound of quivering skin and jowls'* (p. 30)
- *'A deep wrinkle unfolded and two eyes blinked up at me from a face that pole-vaulted the ugly barrier and zoomed skywards into stratospheric heights of hideousness.'* (p. 30)
- *'With that squat toad-shaped body and oversized head, the dog looked like a mutant cross between Quasimodo and Jabba the Hutt'* (p. 31)
- *'He was a car-crash of an animal, horrible but compelling'* (p. 32)
- *'[Herc] thumped into each turn like a square wheel trundling down a slope'* (p. 151)

Questions and activities

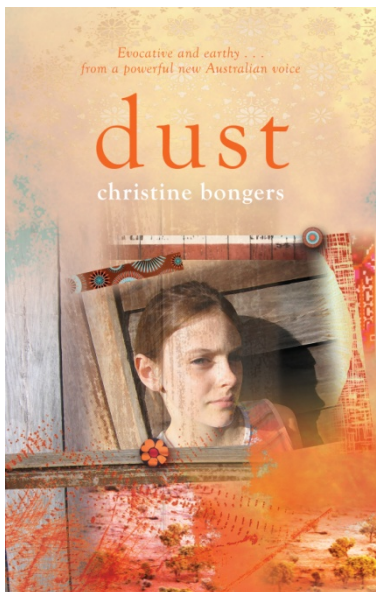
1. From the descriptions, what kind of dog do you think Herc is?

2. Use your own pet, or find a picture of an animal, and describe it as fully as possible using similes, metaphors and descriptive language. What or who might your chosen animal be compared to? Make your description as flowery and overblown as you can! Who can write the most over-the-top description of their pet or an animal?
3. What is it about Herc that makes Kat come to love him despite her initial hatred of dogs, and despite his ugliness? Research the benefits of pet ownership, such as reduced stress. How do pets enrich our lives?
4. What does Herc symbolise for Kat (which might change over the course of the book)? For instance, consider this quote: *'He glanced back at me, his misshapen face split in a huge grin. There was something about his innocent abandon, his untrammelled joy in the day, that jolted my heart with a sudden sensation of loss. How long had it been since I'd felt that free?'* (p. 38) Or this one: *'I dug my fingers in and held on tight, seeking the comfort of another living being in the desolate landscape of my evening.'* (p. 109)
5. What extra symbolism does the name 'Hercules' bring to the story? Who was Hercules, the Greek demigod, and what were his personal qualities? (Hint: he is particularly known for his strength.) Does the dog Herc live up to his namesake?

MORE ACTIVITIES

- **Imaginative text:** Write the next chapter of the book, imagining that you are Kat and Al on their first day of school. Who do they meet? What will they tell others about what happened over the school holidays? Will they make new friends?
- **Imaginative text:** Consider the differences between Kat's usual writing style, and the style in her dream-memory of her childhood on p. 244. Now write another dream-memory from Kat's childhood (or choose a memory from your own childhood)– perhaps from the family holiday on the beach at Ballymore; or a scene with Marco the beagle; or a scene of her in her old bedroom at Edwina's. Make sure you keep the voice childish and innocent to match the age Kat was at the time.
- **Informative text:** Write a newspaper article about the arrest of the intruder. What facts need to be included about his crimes?
- **Informative text:** Write a magazine article about 10 things you can do to protect your home from burglars.
- **Persuasive text:** In groups, debate some of the questions raised in the text, such as:
 - Should Jimmy have been working nights?
 - Should Kat and Jimmy have told the police the truth about Jimmy not being home?
- **Game:** In the story, Kat plays the 'Hanging with Friends' app on her mobile. Make your own game of hangman in the classroom, choosing words from the book and making others in your group guess what they are.

FURTHER READING FROM RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



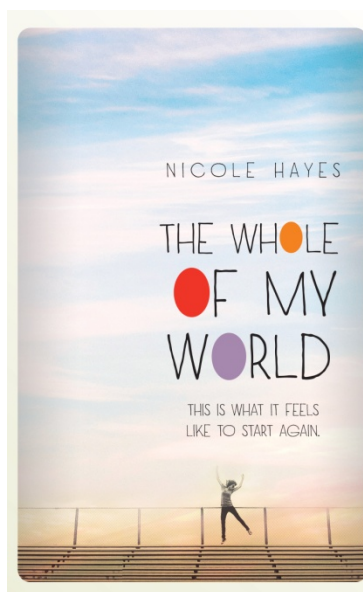
Dust
by Christine Bongers

Why this story? Christine Bongers' first novel, set in 1970s Queensland, is another novel of secrets exposed.

Cecilia Maria was named after saints and martyrs to give her something to live up to. Over my dead body, she vows.

In the blinding heat of 1970s Queensland, she battles six brothers on her side of the fence, and the despised Kapernicky girls, lurking on the other side of the barbed wire. Secrets are buried deep, only to surface decades later when Cecilia drags her own reluctant teenagers back home to dance on a grave and track down some ghosts.

Teachers' resources available.



The Whole of My World
by Nicole Hayes

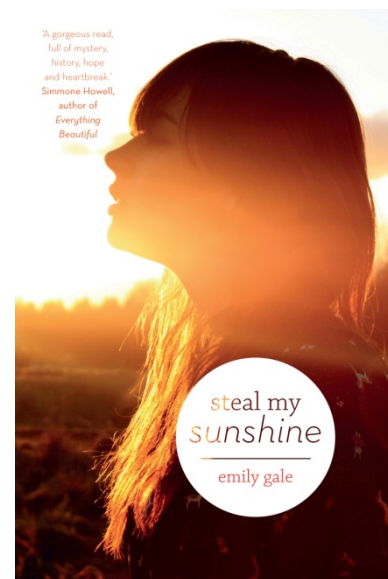
Why this story? Compare Shelley and her father's experience of grief with Kat and Jimmy's.

Desperate to escape her grieving father and harbouring her own terrible secret, Shelley disappears into the world of Aussie Rules football. Joining a motley crew of footy tragics – and, best of all, making friends with one of the star players – Shelley finds somewhere to belong. Finally she's winning.

So why don't her friends get it? Josh, who she's known all her life, but who she can barely look at anymore because of the memories of that fateful day. Tara, whose cold silences Shelley can't understand.

When the whole of your world is football, sometimes life gets lost between goals.

Teachers' resources available.



Steal My Sunshine
by Emily Gale

Why this story? A bittersweet story about a family in turmoil.

During a Melbourne heatwave, Hannah's family life begins to distort beyond her deepest fears. It's going to take more than a cool change to fix it, but how can a girl who lives in the shadows take on the task alone?

Feeling powerless and invisible, Hannah seeks refuge in the two anarchists of her life: her wild best friend, Chloe, and her eccentric grandmother, Essie, who look like they know how life really works.

But Hannah's loyalty to both is tested, first by her attraction to Chloe's older brother, and then by Essie's devastating secret that sheds new light on how the family has lost its way.

Teachers' resources available.

WORKSHEET: Fairytales

In *Intruder*, the author uses fairytales and analogies to add depth to Kat's story. Can you match the quote to the fairytale or novel that it belongs to? Draw a line between the quote and the correct story.

Quote	Fairytale
1 <i>'... used [her voice] like a witch would use an apple ... to lure people in'</i> (p. 9)	Rumpelstiltskin
2 <i>'Anything she gives you is poisoned.'</i> (p. 153)	Three Billy Goats Gruff
3 <i>'my fairytale castle, where I used to retreat into fantasy, spinning the dross of my life into gold'</i> (p. 229)	Snow White
4 <i>'She hadn't lured me away with the promise of a gingerbread cottage with lolly walls and sugar-frosted bookshelves.'</i> (p. 246)	Matilda
5 <i>'Like a troll blocking the bridge'</i> (p. 193)	Sleeping Beauty
6 <i>'In my mind, they formed a dense barrier, knotted and gnarled, thick with razor-sharp thorns, to keep her out.'</i> (p. 44)	The Hunchback of Notre Dame
7 <i>'the dog looked like ... Quasimodo'</i> (p. 31)	Snow White
8 <i>'[she] had ended up much better off with Miss Honey to look after her than with her own hopeless and uncaring parents'</i> (p. 147)	Hansel and Gretel

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
Intruder	Christine Bongers	9780857983763	8+	\$18.99		
Dust	Christine Bongers	9781741664461	9+	\$17.99		
Henry Hoey Hobson	Christine Bongers	9781864719956	5-6	\$16.99		
The Whole of My World	Nicole Hayes	9781742758602	9-10	\$18.99		
Steal My Sunshine	Emily Gale	9781742758497	9-10	\$18.99		
TOTAL						

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