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**FICTION FOR
UPPER PRIMARY/
LOWER SECONDARY**

We have five titles for you this month, all suitable for 10–14 year olds. Our featured book is utterly charming. It's the latest novel from Nicki Greenberg called *The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel*. Pepper Stark is thrilled when she is finally granted her lifelong wish to join her father, the Captain, aboard RMS *Aquitania* on a voyage to New York. But when the Saffron Diamond disappears, Pepper and her new friends have to solve the mystery of its disappearance. The story has such flair! From glamorous women and dashing men, to sumptuous descriptions of food and clothes, to delightful characters and an absorbing mystery, this book will have enormous appeal for young readers.

The Edge of Thirteen by award-winning author Nova Weetman deals with that awkward, angst-y time between childhood and young adulthood. Clem is about to turn thirteen and feels left behind by her friends who have become boy-crazy and are outgrowing her physically. The author says, 'I've always wanted to write a puberty book. A book about that tricky stage where your body is changing, faster or slower than your friends, and it's awkward and often embarrassing . . . I'm really interested in the spectrum of responses—from silent and private to open and relaxed. Having written the two earlier Clem books in *The Secrets We Keep* and *The Secrets We Share*, I felt like she was the perfect character to take me into this territory. I also wanted to explore the pressures that young people feel when comparing themselves to their friends. It's hard to be yourself and to work out what that is, and Clem was my way into that exploration.'

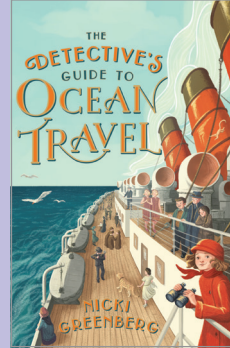
Told in a lyrical combination of prose and verse, the latest novel from Wendy Orr, *Cuckoo's Flight*, is set in the Bronze Age, the same period as her previous, award-winning novels, *Dragonfly Song* and *Swallow's Dance*. This latest, mesmerising story is about Clio, who is torn between duty and love of her herd of horses who she desperately wants to save when raiders threaten her town. Wendy Orr explains, 'When I heard about the discovery of a tomb of two Minoan women who were buried with a sacrificed horse and bull, I began to wonder about the role of horses in that society . . . Having been a keen rider before breaking my neck, I began to speculate on how horses might have been introduced. However, this led to a reoccurrence of dreams of riding and the grief of being unable to continue it—so I realised that my horse-loving protagonist Clio also had injuries that left her unable to ride . . . Many of the drafts for this book were written during the pandemic, and the last ones during the strict Melbourne lockdown, which undoubtedly affected the writing as the characters wait for both possible war and the lottery of sacrifice—and dealing with altering rules of daily life.'

Everything We Keep by Di Walker is a contemporary story about a young girl called Agatha who has been in and out of foster care for several years. Her parents are hoarders and are often unable to care for their daughter. When she is returned to them after developing a strong bond with her latest foster carer, Agatha realises that she needs to make a stand to survive. The author has worked as an adolescent and family counsellor.

And finally in this selection we have a new title in the *My Australian Story* series, *Six Seconds: The Newcastle Earthquake* by Alan Sunderland. Set in 1989, the story is told through the eyes of a young boy called Michael. His father is a journalist and Michael is starting to take notice of the news and begins to see the world around him as a place full of danger. Then the Newcastle earthquake strikes and Michael finds courage and resilience to help those around him. The author is a now-retired Walkley Award winning journalist and the story is a gripping read about this period in our modern history.

Happy reading.

Belinda



**FEATURED BOOK:
THE DETECTIVE'S GUIDE TO
OCEAN TRAVEL**

**FEATURED AUTHOR:
NICKI GREENBERG**

Nicki Greenberg is a writer and illustrator based in Melbourne. Her first books, *The Digits* series, were published when she was fifteen years old. She later spent ten years disguised as a lawyer, while maintaining a not-so-secret Other Life as a comics artist and children's book author. In 2008 Nicki's innovative graphic adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* was selected as a White Raven at the Bologna Book Fair. She then went on to tackle *Hamlet* in a lavish 425-page 'staging on the page'. *Hamlet* was joint winner of the 2011 Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year award. Inspired by her own young children, Nicki now dedicates most of her ink to books for younger readers. Her favourite activity is making books, but when she does manage to tear herself away from the desk Nicki loves to crochet bizarre sea creatures.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Our next Fiction for Upper Primary/Lower Secondary standing order is in June and will have selections from both May and June publishing.

ELIZA VANDA'S BUTTON BOX
EMILY RODDA

THE BALLAD OF MELODIE ROSE
KATE GORDON

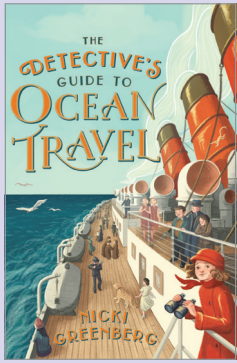
WEDNESDAY WEEKS AND THE TOWER OF SHADOWS
DENIS KNIGHT & CRISTY BURNES

A GLASSHOUSE OF STARS
SHIRLEY MARR

COMMON WEALTH
GREG DREISE

ELSEWHERE GIRLS
EMILY GALE & NOVA WEETMAN

THE BOY WHO STEPPED THROUGH TIME
ANNA CIDDOR



THE DETECTIVE'S GUIDE TO OCEAN TRAVEL

Author: **NICKI GREENBERG**
 SCIS: **1999442**
 ISBN: **9781922400673**
 RRP: **\$19.99**

For as long as she can remember, Pepper Stark has wanted one thing: to join her father, the Captain, aboard the magnificent *RMS Aquitania* on a voyage to New York. She has never been allowed to set foot on her father's ship—until now.

From the decadent food to the star-studded passenger list, travelling First Class on *Aquitania* is every bit as glamorous as Pepper had imagined, even the American stage sensation Perdita West, wearing the world-famous Saffron Diamond around her neck, is there. But when the priceless jewel disappears mid-voyage, Pepper unexpectedly finds herself entangled in the crime and finding the missing diamond isn't so easy on *Aquitania*, where everyone has something to hide . . .



STUDY NOTES

- Ask students about their expectations of this book based on its cover illustration. Questions to consider:
 - Can you guess which period of history this book will be set in?
 - Why do you think the character in red (Pepper) has a pair of binoculars? What might that symbolise about her character traits and her role in the book?
- The book refers to Second Class too, but not in the same detail as First and Third. Why do you think this is? How would you imagine Second Class to look?
- 'Sol didn't seem like the sort of person who dined in fancy restaurants. In fact, if she was honest (although she felt like an awful snob for thinking it), well, he didn't seem like the sort who sailed First Class on *Aquitania* either.' (p 43–4)
 - What assumptions is Pepper making when she concludes that Sol doesn't 'seem like the sort who sailed First Class'? Why does she make such assumptions?
 - Can you find other points in the book where characters judge one another based on appearance? Which characters judge the most, and why do you think this is?
- Why has Toby described *Aquitania* as 'overdressed'? (p 69) What does that imply about *Aquitania* compared to the other ships that Toby has been on?
- Compare Toby's description of *Aquitania* here with Swindon Ogilvie's description on pp 50–52. Ogilvie describes the ship as 'sumptuously antique'. How do you think this phrase compares with Toby's description of 'overdressed'? Would you say that 'sumptuously antique' is a compliment? Does your opinion change when you read the entirety of Ogilvie's article?
- How does Toby's language reflect his social class? Which words in particular indicate his status?
- This story is set in 1927 and a lot has changed since then! Back in this period, restrictive gender norms controlled how people behaved, what they wore, and how they spent their time, both for work and for leisure.
 - 'Accidents and loss of life are possible at sea, and I have always felt that a body washed ashore clad in good clothes would receive more respect and kinder care than if dressed in those fit only for the rag bag.' (pp 35–36) Miss Quacken's book of social etiquette instructs that a person who drowns while at sea would receive better care if they were well-dressed than if they weren't. Do you think Miss Quacken's views are exaggerated, or would people really have believed this in the 1920s? (Hint: this passage is a direct quote from *Ocean Notes and Foreign Travel for Ladies* by Kate Reid Ledoux, published in New York in 1878!)
 - 'She was curious, always curious,' the Captain had said. 'She'd have made a fine ship's engineer herself, if she'd been a man.' (p 71) Why do you think Pepper's mother, Beatrice Stark, couldn't have been a ship's engineer? How does this compare to the present day?
 - The Captain describes his late wife as 'curious, always curious'. Do you think many women were described as 'curious' at this time? How might women have been defined instead?
- Red herrings in detective novels are 'false clues' that divert the reader's attention away from the real culprits and lead them to believe that someone else is responsible. This novel plants a few red herrings in our midst. Answer the following questions about red herrings in *The Detective's Guide to Ocean Travel*:
 - Did you believe that the red-haired 'mummy' could really be the culprit?
 - Can you list other red herrings in this novel? Which of these did you think was most likely to have stolen the diamond?
- Have a go at writing your own red herring for this story. Things to consider are:
 - What is their name?
 - Which Class are they boarding in?
 - How do they dress?
 - Who are they travelling with?
 - What do they look like?
 - Do they have any defining features that Pepper might recognise them by?
 - Were they at the fancy dress party?
 - What might their motive be?
 - Are they hiding something?
- If you were in Pepper's position, would you have conducted the investigation in the same way? Who else might you have investigated?
- Re-read from p 281, beginning with the extract '“We've got to help!” Pepper cried out over the din' through to p 283. Did your reading pace change while you were reading these pages? At what point did you start reading faster? Did you notice if you held your breath, or felt differently while you read these pages? Why do you think that was?
- On p 281, we read many repeated words. 'Full pail—heave, pivot, pass. Empty pail—grab, swing, pass. Full—heave, pivot, pass. Empty—grab, swing, pass—' What is the effect of these repeated words? Why do you think the words are written like this instead of a more descriptive sentence?
- Why do you think the Captain doesn't tell Pepper about her mother?
- Do you think the Captain's social status affects his relationship with Pepper? How might the Captain be 'expected' to act towards Pepper?
- Create a Venn diagram (two circles that cross over each other) with one circle representing you and the other representing a member of your family, or your caregiver. Consider how do you differ from this person and what you share with them. Do you have more similarities or more differences? How do you think your venn diagram compares with Pepper and her father?
- Norah and Sol have big dreams. Do you think Pepper has the same amount of ambition as they do?
- How much can Norah and Sol rely on their natural talents as a singer and chef respectively? Is talent enough to make your dreams come true, or do you need other attributes too? What else are Norah and Sol doing to make their dreams a reality?
- Read the letters at the back of the book. What do they tell you about Norah and Sol progressing towards their life goals?



THE EDGE OF THIRTEEN

Author: **NOVA WEETMAN**
SCIS: **1999399**
ISBN: **9780702263125**
RRP: **\$16.99**

Clem Timmins can't wait to see her best friends after being apart all summer holidays. But when they get back together, things have changed. Bridge is boy-crazy and acting like a different person. Ellie is wearing a bra and having a real-life romance. Clem feels left behind. When she makes friends with Tom, suddenly everyone's gossiping about whether they're going to be a couple. Clem's got no interest in having a boyfriend. Or does she?

At school camp, Bridge crosses the line and Clem has to ask herself—can she keep growing up with her friends when they're growing apart?

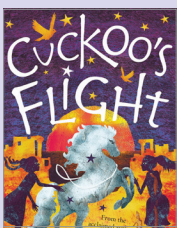
STUDY NOTES

- How does Chapter One force Clem to accept that she is growing up? What signs are there that she is not quite ready for the changes that lie ahead? What happens in this chapter that shows she is a true teenager? Have you ever felt as though you want to both grow up, yet stay young? How does Clem wishing she still had 'Pretend Santa' illustrate this conundrum?
- Clem has to wait until she is older to get a smart phone and an Instagram account. Did you have to wait to get a mobile phone? What is her mother worried about? Are her concerns justified? In what ways can you relate to Clem? Share in a reflection.
- Why, on her calendar, does Clem identify with the 'slow tree, [that is] perhaps a little undecided' (p 6)?
- What does Clem mean when she says she has a 'jealousy bubble' (p 11) when her friends know something she doesn't. How can jealousy be dangerous to friendship?
- Discuss the idea that there may be an 'internet

version' of Clem as opposed to the real-life version. Why is it important that these two versions are the same as one another?

- How is Bridge changing? How does Clem feel about this? Why?
- Like Clem, take three photos that define how you see yourself, remembering 'I don't want three selfies' (p 41). In addition, 'sketch an image that you think explains some aspect of who you are'.
- What is the significance of Tom and Clem using an old SLR film camera while on camp? Why does Clem think this would make her dad happy?
- How does *The Edge of Thirteen* address issues of gossip and peer pressure in causing friction in friendships?
- Discuss Clem's statement that 'all I've really outgrown is my parents' company' (p 213), while Jacqs tells her how lucky she is to have her family (p 226). What is the author sharing with readers about the importance of family, even though it may not always feel that way?

- In what ways is *The Edge of Thirteen* a story about identity?
- How does fiction help us navigate life's ups and downs from a safe distance?
- Discuss the relationship that Clem has with her mother. Why is it that Clem gets so easily annoyed by her mum at times, yet at others, feels extremely close to her? What examples in the text show how much Clem's mum truly understands and supports her?
- The motif of the calendar with a new tree for each month frames the narrative. Discuss the symbolism of this calendar. What prompts Clem to realise that she has been 'crossing the days off all wrong' (p 240)? How will crossing the days off at the end of each day rather than at the start help Clem?
- Discuss Clem's revelation when she flips the calendar to a new month that there are 'thirty-one days of potential' ahead (p 246). How does this show that Clem has matured and developed as a character?



CUCKOO'S FLIGHT

Author: **WENDY ORR**
SCIS: **1999440**
ISBN: **9781760524913**
RRP: **\$16.99**

When a raiders' ship appears off the coast, the goddess demands an unthinkable price to save the town—and Clio's grandmother creates a sacred statue to save Clio's life.

But Clio is torn between the demands of guarding the statue and caring for her beloved horses. Disabled in an accident, she must try to put aside her own grief at no longer being able to ride—and in the process, save a friend's life and stop a war.

STUDY NOTES

- Begin your unit of study in your school library. Prepare a slideshow of images of the Minoan era—maps, sculptures of bull heads and snake goddesses, pottery, architecture, fashion. Explore what your students already know about Minoan culture, then ask them to take 30 minutes to find out more. Allocate topics for students to research, such as:
 - Fashion (men and women)
 - Trade and war
 - Matriarchal religion
 - Importance of offerings and blood sacrifices
 - Purple dye—who could wear fabrics dyed with it and how it was produced?
 - Bronze's impact on Minoan society
 - Gournia (which is the modern name given to the palace complex in which Clio lives)
- Define the term 'verse'. Turn to the first example of verse in Chapter One and discuss why you think the author might have made the decision to switch to this form of writing. Do you think rhythm and metre intensify mood in this example?
 - Turn to p 35 and read the verse featured there. How does this differ from the verse in Chapter One?

- Can you find other forms of verse in the novel?
- Try translating any short piece of verse from the novel into prose. Explain which you prefer reading—verse or prose—and why.
- Define the term 'matriarchal society' and discuss whether you think that the society described in *Cuckoo's Flight* fits that description. In your answer make sure you talk about Selena and the Lady. How does Clio's society differ from ours today?
- 'Why should I give anything to the goddess who's given nothing to me?' he asks bitterly. 'Why should I care for a town that mocks and stones me, that brought my grandmother into the world as a slave for the stinking drudgery of the purple? She was freed by the one god-hearted person in that miserable town, but she never lost the scars of body and soul from those early days.' (p 195) Did this scene make Dymos a more sympathetic character?
- How does Clio's town change by the end of the story?
- How do you think Clio changes over the course of the novel. Give examples of things she does during the novel that illustrate this change. What role does her grandmother, Leira, play in this progression?

- 'A swallow with a cuckoo chick in its nest will rejoice in teaching it to fly.' (p 150) According to Wendy Orr, the cuckoo in the book's title is Mika. Who do you think the swallow might be in the above quote?
- What is the significance of the cuckoo and swallow metaphor to the story? (Hint: think about cuckoos laying their eggs in the nests of other birds and how Clio takes Mika into her life and teaches her to ride.)
- The 'monomyth' is a literary theory that states that a huge percentage of stories from around the world fit one simple pattern: a hero ventures from a normal world to a different region where they encounter difficulties, have a decisive victory and return to their world with new powers or wealth. The films in the *Stars Wars* series, for instance, fit this pattern. Do you think *Cuckoo's Flight* fits the monomyth pattern? Give examples from the story to illustrate your answer.
- Wendy Orr says she wrote much of *Cuckoo's Flight* in Melbourne during lockdown and that the book was influenced by the idea that our world could change suddenly and in entirely unexpected ways. How might the events in *Cuckoo's Flight*—a story set thousands of years ago—relate to Melbourne in 2020?



EVERYTHING WE KEEP

Author: **DI WALKER**
SCIS: **1999438**
ISBN: **9781760972349**
RRP: **\$18.99**

Trailing her orange suitcase, and a heart full of worry, thirteen-year-old Agatha is about to go home. She has been in and out of foster care for years now, but her latest new life lived with naval precision with Katherine, Lawson and their dog, Chief, has proved to be the salvation that Agatha needed. She has new friends, a sense of place and space to breathe.

But when the social worker says it's time to return to her parents, her world comes crashing down. 'Home' has always made her anxious and ashamed and she can't understand why she is being forced to go back.

Is it possible to find a way to love her parents without having to live with them?

STUDY NOTES

- What is the emotive impact of the cover artwork. How do you feel when you look at it?
- After reading the novel, as a class discuss the title and what you think it means in the context of Agatha's story. Think about both the figurative and literal meanings of the phrase, and how keeping things can harm, or can help.
- What was Agatha's mother's reaction when other people tried to clean out her house and threw out some of the things that were cluttering up her life?
- How do you think Agatha's mother must feel about her life and her house? As a class discuss what it must be like.
- Routine is very important to both Katherine and Lawson, and in her time living with them Agatha has also come to appreciate its benefits. What routines do you have in your life? Individually write a piece reflecting on the importance of having a routine to fall back on and whether you find strict adherence to a routine comforting or inhibitory.

- How do the different people who have come into Agatha's life affect her self-perception? Choose one of the other characters in the novel and write an analysis of how Agatha's interactions with this character influence her understanding of events and her decisions over the course of the novel.
- What were the pivotal moments in Agatha's life where Agatha made a decision that had far-reaching consequences for her life as a whole? Identify at least three key decisions Agatha made, and describe why they were important, what the alternative might have been had she chosen otherwise, and how they affected her mentally and emotionally.
- Agatha has a difficult and complicated relationship with her parents. She loves her parents, and even though she knows that they have failed her, it still hurts when she hears others criticise them. As a class discuss how it is possible to care about someone, while still being aware of their failings.
- Do you think that Agatha should have left

- Tully's house in the middle of the night? Why/why not? Write a brief description of events at Tully's house the morning after she first met Agatha. As a class discuss how Agatha's meeting Tully, and then leaving her home so suddenly, affected both Celeste's perception of Agatha, and the development of Tully and Agatha's friendship.
- Recreate the science experiment competition that Tully and Agatha won at school. You will need at a minimum a balloon, string, a straw and some tape. Record your thoughts before, during, and after the activity, and draw diagrams of your final model. Write a summary of what you discovered and why your balloon rocket worked or didn't work. You might also want to research the scientific principles behind this activity.
- Create a collage from (clean!) found materials collected from the classroom recycling bin that you feel in some way represents part of Agatha's story.



MY AUSTRALIAN STORY—SIX SECONDS: THE NEWCASTLE EARTHQUAKE

Author: **ALAN SUNDERLAND**
SCIS: **1999374**
ISBN: **9781743838235**
RRP: **\$17.99**

Growing up by the beach in Newcastle in 1989 means footy, sandcastle competitions and school. Michael's dad's a journalist and his small world gets bigger as he starts to pay attention to the news. His interest turns into anxiety and obsession as Michael begins to see the world as a dangerous place that is fast collapsing around him. When the Berlin Wall comes down, most see it as a sign of change and freedom but Michael isn't convinced. But when an earthquake hits his home town, Michael discovers that the worst that can happen is not always as bad as your fears.

STUDY NOTES

- When Michael shares his scrapbook with his class, his teacher and his parents become quite concerned for him. What would they have found concerning about the scrapbook? Do you think that they are right to be concerned? Why/why not?
- When Michael hears about bus crashes he stops riding the bus, and when he hears about a disaster at a British soccer game he is too frightened to go to the Knights game that he had been so looking forward to. Is Michael's response reasonable and proportional to what he reads about and hears in the news? Why/why not? What are some of the things that we can do to help ourselves maintain sensible levels of caution without being incapacitated with fear when we hear about or see scary things happening in the world? As a class discuss this and brainstorm a list of coping strategies that we can use to help ourselves develop a sense of proportion, and the resilience we need to cope with life.
- As a class, research what is the best thing to do

- before, during and after an earthquake. Think about how Michael curled up in the middle of the lounge room, and how all the bookcases and the television fell over. What might have been a safer thing for him to do if he'd known about earthquake safety protocols?
- An important part of emergency preparedness is having an emergency kit packed and ready to go. If you were in charge of packing a box or bag with emergency essentials for your family, what would you pack? In pairs or small groups brainstorm a list of important items to include in an emergency kit for your family.
- Think about what Michael needed right after the earthquake hit—both what he did have, the things he struggled to get to and the things he wished he had.
- Before Michael arrived to keep her company, his Grandma was trapped and alone. How do you think she felt when she heard his voice and then again when he actually made it to where she was? Write a description of the day of the earthquake from the point of view of Michael's grandmother, being sure to include not just

- what happened, but descriptions of how she felt and what she was thinking at each point.
- How do you think Michael felt after the earthquake, when he and his family had returned home and life had returned to normal? What sort of effect can experiencing a natural disaster like an earthquake have on people and why? Do you think that the earthquake changed Michael at all, and if so how, and in what way?
- Sometimes disasters really do happen, not just to people far away but to us as well. Some, like earthquakes, floods, or fires, are more likely to occur in one place than they are in another, while other disasters like the COVID-19 global pandemic will affect everyone on the planet! What are the natural disasters that people in your local area have been having to deal with over the last couple of years? What have the people in your local community done to help everyone stay as safe as possible during the natural disasters which have affected your local area?