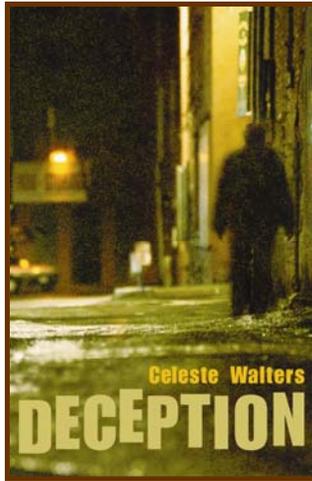


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DECEPTION

Celeste Walters



Teachers' Notes

Written by Celeste Walters

ISBN: 978 07022 3527 6 / AU\$18.95

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Deception revolves around the theme of the importance of community and the unifying (and disuniting) forces within communities.

Josh Sim, his widowed mother, Liz, and his grandfather, Harry, are a loving and united family who have found some peace, though still grieving the death of father, husband and son some years before. They are part of a community with ties that stretch back to before the depression and which is best expressed in their allegiance to their football club; the Grizzlies.

Liz, in her need to provide Josh with a secure future, takes a strangely well-paid part-time job in the household of the man responsible for the demise of the Grizzlies, thereby letting in the serpent of secrecy and distrust.

Josh, preparing for his Year 12 exams, hovering on the edge of adulthood and distraught at the death of Harry, jumps to conclusions when he finds out about his mother's involvement with the businessman and, lacking the good advice of his grandfather, acts ill advisedly.

It is a story with many strands, involving a range of characters with different aspirations and expectations, all playing their part within a carefully interwoven plot.

Any close study of Deception needs to focus on themes, characterisation, language and literary structure

THEMES

Aspects of unity, honesty, self-interest, selflessness, truth, trust, use and abuse of power are canvassed by the author through the lens of community: the community of family; the community of an area and the community of a specific group. Each community consists of the individuals within it — forces for both good and for evil.

The importance of, and the unifying and the destructive forces within, a community are demonstrated here through various structures, ways of behaviour within certain groups and individuals within groups. There is:

1. A football team representing the aspirations of a localised community. It provides/d:
 - (a) A unifying common cause
 - (b) A ritual in which the community joins:

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It was the club that brought the family and the community together. People knew that no matter how bad things were, Saturday would always come — and with it the match. p.27

This football community shares its ups and downs and draws its members from a spectrum of the local community.

2. A businessman and his associates representing the community of the rich and powerful;

Cullinan's business world reflects that of the old robber barons: a perception of being above the law; above common morality. His immediate community is of like-minded people who need to constantly demonstrate their power within the community and to display their wealth; this community is exclusive and more likely to argue over spoils than support one of their members in trouble. It is a hierarchical community and those at the top of the pyramid remain there by the use of power rather than by affection and respect.

3. A woman and a trade union representing the community of the working class. Josh's mother, Liz, is an ideological supporter of workers' rights and an intelligent and compassionate individual. The union is depicted as part of her working community, and although there is acknowledgement that not all workers follow rules of engagement or even good behaviour:

But this rage, this madness, has been building day after day, now the strikers want blood. They charge, screaming, yelling. Rocking the bus, smashing windows... p.200

the general impression is that the unions are the more caring of the two 'sides' of the business world.

4. The communities of the dispossessed, the powerless and the 'different':
 - (a) The homeless which are as predatory as the business world.
 - (b) Those that rely on the state for support in time of need: For example, Harry is, after his stroke, in danger of being forcibly sent to an unsuitable nursing home.
 - (c) Those that fall outside the general community's idea of 'proper': For example, the homosexual man that Josh accuses of an affair with Liz.

In the background are two other communities: School and Church. Both are represented by an amorphous group as well as a few individuals who

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are caring, if ineffectual. The author's depiction of the Church is problematic. Liz and Harry believe in self-determination; Josh finds some solace at St Bartholemew's where he bargains for Harry's life; whilst Walters uses Christmas as a unifying force for community and family goodwill.

Students can discuss these various communities and consider how representative the author's depictions of each really are. For example: How truly representative is Cullinan of businessmen in general? Do Trade Unions always act responsibly? How destructive of a community is the removal/amalgamation of local sporting teams? or, is that a product of changing times? Do people care enough to fight for what they feel is right? For example, Harry is working on a form of strike-action to get the football management to change their mind about amalgamation, but even his grandson, Josh, does not take up the idea.

Also discuss:

1. The importance of the common good rather than individual greed.
2. The role of the mass media in preserving the mores of a society:
 - (a) The need for a free and balanced assessment of current events:
A paper's gotta connect with people. It's gotta ask what it, how come? Why people are richer than ever and more unhappy...
p.233
 - (b) The suggestion that newspapers should use their power to change things. p.283

LANGUAGE

Walters is a lyrical writer. Her descriptions often use imagery to flesh out the object or action.

For example much is learned about the Sims' household in comparison to its surroundings, by the simple action of Harry leaving the house.

So, facing the day as he faces every other day, Harry clips the small picket gate behind him, locks in the miniature garden with its tangle of fuchsias and ferns, its wobbly birdbath in which starlings and sparrows, in collective intention to dip their beaks, become ensnared in a confusion of fecundity, and wheels his bike out into the lane — a space that has become the repository of dead trailers, trolleys, trash cans, and crash victims of the four-wheel kind.

Compare this to the description of the house at the penultimate scene:

It's as though the house is adrift on a dark sea; there's no breath to give it life, no wind to rattle its bones, to sound a familiar creak. Nothing.p.328

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Or to encompass landscape:

The sun blinks on the sludge-coloured surface and the willows that flank the banks appear frozen in the act of sweeping water. Scenes from a calendar. p.4

Or to highlight differences:

He hugs the side of the road (now called an avenue)... p.4

Discuss the function of language in characterisation, setting and definition.

STRUCTURE

The book is narrated in the present tense by an authorial voice that moves its focus from one character to another, juxtaposing their actions at the one time.

For example, at the same time at the beginning of the section Spring, Cullinan packs up his temporary office and leaves hospital flanked by the Nightingales — Eighteen hours of surgery have left him with nothing more than a slight limp p.107; his third wife, Tracey, is leaving hospital after a second round of surgery to correct her jaw shattered by Cullinan (she is wrapped head to toe in blue mink p.108); while Josh is in the public hospital visiting his grandfather who is in an uncommunicable state having suffered a massive stroke. [Josh]'s finding it hard to breathe p.110.

Discuss: Does this structure work in:
 Making the narrative immediate and engrossing?
 Emphasising the connections between the lives of these families?
 Emphasising the vast differences in their ways of life.

LITERARY DEVICES

1. Foreshadowing of Harry Sim's part in the novel:
 The first sentence in the book foreshadows the demise of Harry's beloved football team:
 When Harry Sim sets out for work on this particular day, he has no idea that his world is about to change forever. p.3

And later:

Underlining the important part the elm will play in his and Cullinan's lives:
 How can he know too that before that moment comes he'll be here by the same tree, though this time it won't be his body lying at the foot of it... p.37

Question: Does foreshadowing heighten tension?

2. Two motifs are employed throughout the book:

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That of the elm tree on the banks of the river. It is under this tree that both Harry and Cullinan meet face to face (though neither knows it).

- (a) The recurrence of the colours green and maroon (the colours of the local football team, the Grizzlies) which merge towards the end of the book into green and red as Christmas approaches with its annual message of goodwill, redemption and peace.

Question: Do repetitions of these images add to the cohesion of the story?

CHARACTERISATION**Activities:**

Sort the characters into those who are well-rounded and 'live' for the readers and those that are stock characters representing ideas of people within different groups of society.

For example:

Cullinan is portrayed as a man led by self-interest and with little interest in the welfare of others; a small man who transcends his size by sheer magnetic presence. However there are indications of good intent and of a reason for his behaviour. Liz is drawn to him, and he does not take advantage of her when she is overcome with pity for him. p.295.

Liz, whilst admirable in all aspects does keep a secret from her family.

Josh, confused and unsettled, loses trust.

Harry is perhaps the closest to 'perfection' of all the characters.

Martin Evans is the ideal of all newspapermen who seek the truth and are wedded to their industry.

Give the reasons for placing characters in either category.

SUMMING UP**Discuss:**

1. What is the more important aspect of the novel: the issues canvassed or the characters. Or, are they both essential to the working of the novel?
2. How successful the author has been in raising questions about aspects of modern society.

The sayings

Power and wealth do not guarantee happiness.

Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely

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Do you have to be poor to be kind? p.308

The limits of my vision are the limits of my world p.147

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Celeste Walters is the author of playscripts for children and adults, novels for younger readers, texts on developmental drama and the writing of eulogies and three books of whimsical verse for all ages. She has also written four highly acclaimed novels for young adults, *The Killing of Mud-Eye*, *The Last Race*, *The Glass Mountain* and *Deception*. She has a new picture book *Only a Donkey* illustrated by Patricia Mullins and a junior novel *Treading the Boards*.

Born in Melbourne, Celeste Walters has been a primary and secondary school teacher, an art gallery director, a children's theatre actor/manager and, for thirteen years, a lecturer in language, literature and drama at Deakin University. She now divides her time between Melbourne and country NSW where she writes, cares for new-borns and entertains groups at U3A.