

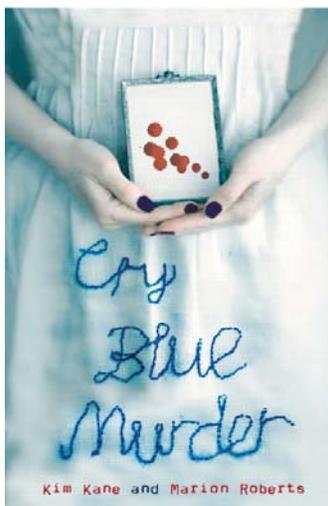


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WARNING: THESE NOTES CONTAIN PLOT SPOILERS

CRY BLUE MURDER

Kim Kane and Marion Roberts



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising Teacher Librarian in context with the Australian Curriculum (English)

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SYNOPSIS

A serial killer is preying on teenage girls in Melbourne. When Celia meets Alice at an online tribute for the latest victim, they quickly develop a friendship. Confiding their deepest thoughts and fears via email, they soon become extremely close.

Cry Blue Murder unfolds through a series of emails, newspaper reports and police evidence. It is a haunting and poignant psychological thriller that pushes the boundaries of trust and betrayal, life and death.

THEMES

Death and Bereavement:

- Three girls have been murdered, and another left for dead. Celia fears for her safety as the killer targets his prey with precision. Is she next?

Relationships:

- Celia does not enjoy a very positive relationship with her mother or older sister. She confides in Alice, finding in her new friend a sense of trust and understanding that doesn't exist at home.

Trust and Betrayal:

- The themes of trust and betrayal are integral to *Cry Blue Murder*. How do we allocate our trust to others? How easily can such trust be betrayed?

Social Media:

- The dangers of online communication underpin the text.
- Online relationships are a distinct feature of the twenty-first century.
- Online safety is essential.

Crime and Suspense:

- *Cry Blue Murder* is a psychological thriller. Implicit in the story are realistic and horrific details of a serial killer's plot to murder teenage girls.
- Extracts from police evidence help piece together this gruesome tale.

WRITING STYLE

Cry Blue Murder is a psychological thriller for young adults, told through a series of emails, newspaper reports, and pieces of police evidence. The dual narrative unfolds through emails between Alice and Celia. Factual recounts and interviews help piece together the killer's movements. Little do they realise they're facing an evil that nobody sees until it is too late. The voices of both Alice and Celia are realistic and authentic.

KIM KANE'S AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Cry Blue Murder is a crime novel and one of the first novels to explore the relationship between a groomer and his victim. It has been described as a cautionary tale for teenagers, although we certainly never intended this as a cautionary tale – we wanted to write an engrossing and relevant novel.



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However, it's impossible to write this sort of thing without being affected by it – and affected by the true stories we read during the course of our research. As a teenager, I was enthralled and horrified by *Go Ask Alice*. I hope we have created the social media version of that novel.

I always set out to write a book that I'd have wanted to read as a child or teenager (as the case may be), a book I'd still enjoy now. As a young teenager, I was attending slumber parties and watching *Nightmare on Elm Street* through my fingers. There seems to be a period when girls in particular want to be terrified; crave it.

Marion and I first bonded over shared memories of a crime that gripped Melbourne while we were at school. Through my heavily distorted memory, it seemed there was a picture of another girl in the paper, girls about my age, girls at a school I knew well from gym competitions and music festivals. Marion had similar recollections.

As it transpired, Marion and I both love and have always loved true crime – not so much the books, which can be terribly pappy, but I studied criminal law at university and I loved the cases. The law is full of stories, but these were the most vivid of all and the documents that comprise the analysis and reporting of crimes really do unravel like a narrative – the pathology reports, the interviews with witnesses, the police reports. It was information we found fascinating and we hoped the reader would too.

If our novel's realistic, I guess that's because that's what we both do. We love observing life's little details and recording them and if we're part of a growing trend, that's fabulous, but completely unintended.

MARION ROBERT'S AUTHOR MOTIVATION

After a string of solo projects, Kim and I were already in a bad habit of emailing each other more than necessary to relieve Monday-itis, boredom and solitude. Sometimes we would assume silly character voices and entertain ourselves with long-winded and unlikely scenarios doused in black humour and political incorrectness. We soon recognised an appreciation for the dark side and thought it would be fun to do a collaborative project. We were already working with the epistolary form due to the constraints of our circumstances meaning we had very little shared physical writing time.

Neither of us had written a thriller before. We laugh out loud at our earlier drafts – so many dust swabs! The novel started very much as an exploration of characters with creepy undertones and a thin plot. It was originally intended for much younger readers – not unlike *Harriet the Spy*. As the work developed it became clear we needed to re-write the characters to be around the age of 15.



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Suddenly, we were writing a thriller. The tricky part wasn't so much the novel's epistolary form, it was the fact that neither of us had written a thriller before. When you think you're creating suspenseful elements you have no way of knowing if they are actually working. Luckily, we had lots of generous readers along the way who gave us valuable feedback. We have learned enormously through the whole process.

It was definitely challenging writing in the epistolary form but also an extremely rewarding and accessible form. What I like about *Cry Blue Murder* in a creative sense is that Kim and I transformed what appeared to be logistical constraints into the key structural elements of the novel. We had very little shared physical writing time – a total clash in availability, in fact. So we worked that into our story – Celia lives in Melbourne and Alice is at a regional boarding school. The two protagonists never meet. Their entire friendship is via email with the odd phone call. We wrote the novel exactly as our characters did – email by email in the context of something larger happening.

I believe that having each other's constant support for the project drove a more dynamic process than either of us could have done alone. Working collaboratively meant that one of us usually felt positive about the work when the other was in the doldrums. It was always a surprise to see what progressions to the narrative Kim would come up with in her character's next email. While on one level we responded to each other's work as characters, we were also very open to each other's feedback in relation to the wider issues in the narrative and structure of the novel as a whole and provided constant critical analysis of each other's work.

STUDY NOTES

- The opening pages of *Cry Blue Murder* place the reader directly into the action. Discuss the techniques used by the authors to create this instant sense of suspense.
- Hallie's family decides to hold a hope-vigil for her. Discuss the importance of hope in times of adversity. Reflect on a time – either from your own life or from another text – when hope was all that remained.
- Reading backwards and forwards through a text is really effective. This means that they come to junctures in the text at which they go back and think about or re-read something from earlier. *Cry Blue Murder* definitely requires the reader to do this, particularly once the text has been read entirely. What parts of the text do you want to re-read? Discuss.
- Celia describes her family members on p18-19. Re-read these character descriptions. Choose one of your family members about whom to write a description.
- Why did Alice wait until Celia's father was away to arrange a meeting?



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- Celia begins sharing her poetry with Alice. Take time to read Celia's poems, discussing their symbolism and use of poetic devices:
 - p43 – Celia's poem about herself
 - p47 – Celia's poem about Cleo and autism
 - p112 – Celia's poem about the grandfather clock falling on Jaime
 - p135 – Celia's poem about the Polyommatus butterfly
 - p150 – Celia's poem 'Grazed'
 - p185 – Celia's poem to stitch onto a dress
- Write your own free verse poetry on selected topics that capture the themes of *Cry Blue Murder*.
- On p27, Alice describes what her brother Johnny looked like as he was pulled dead from the river. Re-read this passage, particularly in light of what you discover about Alice later in the text.
- As the clues develop, use a pinboard in the classroom to piece together the crimes and the clues.
- Make predictions as you read *Cry Blue Murder*. Record these predictions in a journal. Discuss your predications with a partner. Give evidence from the text to support your predictions.
- Newspaper articles feature in *Cry Blue Murder*. Study this text type, using examples from reputable newspapers. Follow any crime-related articles. Use these to create your own plot line for a thriller.
- After completing *Cry Blue Murder*, write your own newspaper article about the disappearance of Celia Beasley.
- What do you think will be the outcome for Alice now that Celia has been taken? Will there be other victims? Discuss.
- Create a character profile of Alice. How does she present herself in such a believable way to Celia? What clever tricks has she used to convince Celia and the audience of her authenticity?
- At any stage, did 'alarm bells' go off as you were reading, for instance, when Celia was to be picked up by Alice's dad? Did this concern you at all? Have you ever been put in a situation like this? Discuss.
- Discuss the motif of the butterfly that is used in *Cry Blue Murder*. How has this been cleverly interwoven into the fabric of the text? Just as Celia suggests to Alice, Google Nabokov's butterfly to help draw these links.
- The crime and suspense genre offers clues to the reader. Having finished reading *Cry Blue Murder*, discuss the clues the reader is given about Alice throughout the text.
- Discuss the relationship that you, as the reader, formed with Alice. How did you feel towards her at the end of the text? Discuss your feelings with classmates. Why was it difficult as a reader to believe that Alice could betray Celia in this way?



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- The police have other suspects in this case. Why do they question people such as Ajay Mehta and Terrence Barnes? Discuss the authors' motives in including their statements in the text.
- Re-read the email from Alice to Celia starting on p73. What can we tell about the psyche of Alice from this email?
- Celia talks about 'fame through grief' on p128. What does she mean by this?
- The authors' have used figurative language throughout *Cry Blue Murder*. Discuss the meaning behind each of the following examples:
 - On p24 Celia says that Tess sounds like 'chipped nail polish'.
 - On p160 Celia says that 'everything feels slippery. Like running in socks on tiles. I can't get any grip'. What does she mean?
 - On p187 Celia says 'it didn't feel like ours anymore – like when you find someone else's hair on your soap.'
- Create a book trailer for *Cry Blue Murder*, giving careful consideration to appropriate images, music and wording.
- Imagine that *Cry Blue Murder* is to be made into a film. Choose an episode from the book to recreate into a dramatic scene. Alternatively, write a screenplay script for this scene.
- The front cover of the novel draws the reader in quickly. It is even more effective once the text has been read. Study the cover, writing an analysis of the choices made in relation to its design. How does it connect readers with the text?
- The author, Kim Kane, has commented that as a teenager, she had a far greater confidence online than in person. Discuss this in small groups. Is this common amongst your peers. Why could this be a potentially dangerous approach to online communication? Are you more flirtatious online? Should people think more carefully about their online personas?
- The author, Marion Roberts, has described the internet as a 'form of wilderness'. What does she mean by this? Reflect on any experiences you have had on the internet that you would define as 'wild'.
- The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) run free educational sessions that inform students, teachers and parents about cyber safety. This is part of their Cybersmart program. Consider inviting presenters from Cybersmart to speak to your school community. Their website includes many valuable free resources for the teaching of cyber safety <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/>.



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kim Kane was born in London in a bed bequeathed by Wordsworth to . . . 'a writer, a painter or a poet.' Despite this auspicious beginning, she went on to practise law. Kim lives with her family in Melbourne. She writes whenever and wherever she can.

Marion Roberts is a creative writer residing in Melbourne. *Cry Blue Murder* is her third novel. She has a masters in creative writing from the University of Melbourne and is currently studying performance writing at the Victorian College of the Arts.