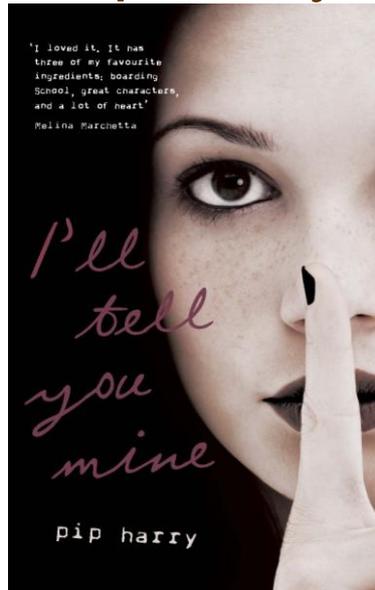


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I'LL TELL YOU MINE

Pip Harry



Teachers' Notes

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

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SYNOPSIS

When Kate is kicked out of home, she feels alone and alienated. Sent to boarding school, she hides behind her goth image. Coming to terms with her mistakes and faltering relationship with her mother isn't helped by her wayward behaviour and misleading friends.

Boarding school is harder than it sounds, but making friends with a small group of girls eventually helps Kate to show her true identity and deal with her problems rather than run from them.

THEMES

Relationships:

- Kate has a strained relationship with her mother.
- Kate's friendships with Annie and Nate are at times damaging.
- Kate makes a new friend in Maddy. With that friendship comes times of trust and mistrust.
- Kate's relationship with her father and younger sister are positive.
- The marriage of Kate's parents is under threat.
- Kate meets Lachy, who sees through her goth image to the real Kate.

Identity:

- Kate is a goth. She becomes agitated with people who call her an emo.
- Kate covers her face in white makeup, dresses in baggy clothing, and has dyed her naturally red hair black. She is covering her inner identity with the goth image.
- When Kate meets Lachy, she begins to shed some of this image, revealing her true identity.

Self-esteem:

- Kate suffers from low self-esteem. She often puts herself down.
- Her self-esteem is knocked by Nate's rejection.
- Her self-esteem improves when she begins to put an effort into her studies.
- Kate's English teacher sees her potential as a writer. This helps her to gain confidence and express herself creatively.
- Kate realises that many people suffer from low self-esteem.

Grief:

- Maddy uses sex to help deal with her mother's death.
- Maddy's father turns to alcohol in his grief.

Rules and Authority:

- Kate disregards rules and authority.

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- Kate begins to understand that everyone needs boundaries and that parents set these boundaries for a reason.

WRITING STYLE

I'll Tell You Mine is told in first person, present tense. Kate's voice is sincere, honest and at times, raw. The narrative is realistic and tangible. Pip Harry's use of dialogue, figurative language and a distinct voice gives the text a literary quality that is gritty and compelling.

STUDY NOTES

- Discuss the cover of the book. The title, image, blurb and endorsement by Melina Marchetta all work to draw the reader directly into the narrative. Make predictions about the text based on the cover.
- What does the opening paragraph of *I'll Tell You Mine* reveal about Kate's character?
- After reading the first chapter, make predictions about the plot. What might Kate have done to deserve getting kicked out of home? What might her secret be? At the end of the novel, discuss whether your predictions were accurate.
- Kate lists 10 'random' Norris Grammar rules on p4 and 5. How do these rules compare with your school's rules? The fact that these rules are placed so early in the text helps the reader to understand Kate's disdain for rules and authority. Which of these rules would you reject and which do you agree with? Why did Kate choose these rules to share?
- Read the description of Norris on p6 (second paragraph) and again in Chapter 2. Take notice of Pip Harry's writing technique. She has left out a lot of mundane detail, choosing to focus on a few stand-out features. The author's voice can also be heard in this description. Try this technique in a description of your school.
- Rather than have information 'dumped' on them about characters, readers get to know characters slowly. Authors divulge information about characters in different ways and at different stages during a narrative. Choose a character such as Kate's mother or father or Maddy. Track their character development throughout the text. An example of Kate's parents is on p7.
- Draw an iceberg. Above the waterline, show what the author actually says about a character. Below the waterline, write words and phrases about the character that are inferred.

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- Analyse the author's description of the boarding house on p11/12. What features of this description help to bring this scene alive? What stylistic features can you detect in *I'll Tell You Mine*?
- Kate's secret is a thread running throughout the entire narrative. Discuss the author's technique of hooking the reader by using this intriguing thread. In small groups, brainstorm possible threads that could run through a narrative of your own. Try writing a short narrative using this technique.
- How are Kate and her mother similar? How does this contribute to their relationship in both positive and negative ways?
- We get snippets of information about Kate's mother when she was younger. She seems much different now. How and why has Kate's mum changed so much? How does this contribute to the breakdown of their relationship?
- Both Kate and her mother get very angry. Discuss the ways in which their anger is channelled. How does this change during the course of the novel?
- Pip Harry effectively uses one word sentences. Discuss this technique and where these sentences are placed in the text. (see p2)
- Examine the use of figurative language throughout the text. Discuss its authenticity and originality. Allow students to identify examples themselves, keeping a journal of ones they particularly like. Examples include:
 - Tipped all my parents' patience out on the floor like the last bit of milk in the carton – p2
 - My lungs feel like they're Glad-wrapped – p5
 - The rest of the place is tatty and curling around the edges, like a day-old sandwich – p6
 - My hair is dyed the colour of a vinyl record – p8
 - Mum blew in like a frosty wind – p24
 - Pinging messages back and forth like a tennis match – p25
 - Heavy artillery was about to come out – p26
 - My school clothes are like a Christmas tree with no ornaments – p29
 - There's an enormous bag on her bed haemorrhaging shoes – p36
 - Smells of fat and gravy fill the room in a rich fog – p38
 - Her mouth is pursed like a cat's bum – p39

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- Watching the black dye wash out of my hair and swirl down like an oil slick – p68
 - White-hot rage – p155
 - I run from pool to pool of fluorescent street light – p157
 - Southern Cross station hasn't yet woken up. It's still wiping gritty sleep from its eyes... – p157
 - Mr Minogue is gnarled like an old tree – p169
 - A roaring triangle of orange-blue heat – p171
 - It looks like an old watercolour painting of the bush – p182
 - The sunset is now streaking the sky with gelati pastels – p183
 - I hold onto that thought, like a loved kid's toy – p200
- Kate has a distinct dislike for the institution of school. What clues does the reader get of this throughout the text?
 - Kate's self-esteem is not very positive. She often puts herself down. Keep a journal of Kate's thoughts and self-talk that shows this. Discuss self-talk – that it can be damaging if negative but very powerful if used positively. Keep a journal of your own thoughts and self-talk. Consider how you could challenge your negative thoughts and promote your own self-esteem through positive thoughts and self-talk.
 - Invite a school counsellor to run sessions about self-esteem as well as the way in which things such as sex, drugs and alcohol can further damage self-esteem.
 - Self-esteem is not only an issue for Kate. Make a list of other characters whose self-esteem is at risk, giving examples of how this low self-esteem is revealed. Examples include Grace who has been treated for anorexia (Ch 4), Maddy who lets boys use her, Louise etc. Discuss that most people at some time have doubts about themselves. It's how they challenge these doubts that are important.
 - Kate mentions that she feels invisible. What does she mean? Why does she feel this way? Is this the fault of others or herself? Or both? In a journal entry, reflect on a time when you have felt invisible.
 - Discuss Kate's comment that her mother is making her 'scrub every last trace of individuality' from her face (p70). Do you agree with Kate or not? Discuss.
 - Track the development of Kate's character from the start of the novel to the end. Using a visual representation tool such as a graphic organiser or

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a flowchart, show how she has changed. Give examples from the book to help illustrate your ideas.

- How is 'farm Maddy' different from 'school Maddy'? Why do you think she has two such different personas?
- Re-read the passage in which Kate travels back from her Year 7 camp on the bus. Discuss the way in which Pip Harry has used descriptive techniques to re-enact this journey. Experiment with this style of writing in a short passage of your own. Perhaps it could be about a time you felt left out and couldn't wait to be somewhere else.
- The author uses the technique of flashbacks very effectively. Recall some of Kate's flashbacks and where they are positioned in the narrative. A good example is her 'train lotto' game with Annie and Nate (p159). Why have they been placed at these junctures of the text? How do they help the reader to gain empathy for Kate?
- Kate starts to read her journal that she'd kept before being kicked out of home. It is filled with sketches, photos, poetry, writing and objects from those times. Keep a journal of your own, collecting interesting 'bits and pieces' that reflect your life at this time. Write reflections, feelings, poetry, etc (p148).
- Why do you think that Kate's father wouldn't allow her mother to clean her room?
- There are a few characters on their 'L' plates, learning how to drive. Discuss the theme of learning to drive in a wider sense. How is adolescence about learning to drive for life? Do the adults in the book need to still be on their 'L plates' sometimes, too? Discuss.
- When Kate goes to Maddy's farm, her dad reminds her that she's allergic to hay (p166). What does this reveal about the relationship between Kate and her father?
- Kate has gotten into the habit of running away from her problems. She eventually realises that this strategy isn't working. In small groups, discuss strategies for facing up to problems. Share an example of when you have faced a problem head on.
- Which other characters also run from their problems? How do they avoid them?

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- On a story graph, illustrate the 3 main 'acts' of this narrative: at boarding school; at the farm; back at boarding school. Give broad details of each act.
- Which character do you most relate to? Why? Construct a character profile of this character.
- The girls eventually realise that they all have weaknesses and that they also have gifts and talents. What are your gifts and talents? How can you confidently use these talents? Create 'warm fuzzies' for your friends, telling them what their gifts and talents are.
- Create a soundtrack for *I'll Tell You Mine* by choosing songs that reflect various scenes from the novel. Explain your choices in a short description of the scene/song. Create an album sleeve to suit this soundtrack.
- Create a book trailer to promote *I'll Tell You Mine*.
- Create a visual representation of the themes presented in this novel. This piece could be a painting, sculpture, graphic novel excerpt, etc.
- Brainstorm 'secrets' that could form the basis of interesting narratives. In small groups, plan the storyline of such a story. Similarly, think of various settings for such a story eg school camp/trip, country school, etc.
- Kate's description of her motorbike ride with Lachy is very original and vivid. Choose other experiences to describe in an original and vivid manner. Examples could include riding on a roller coaster, a chair lift, flying, hot air balloon ride, surfing, etc.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I was inspired to write this YA novel, *I'll Tell You Mine*, many years after I attended a private girls' boarding school as a lost, angry Year 9 student, and emerged a much more positive, independent girl. I intended to write this novel primarily for girls aged 14-18, but I hope it finds a readership with adults and teenage boys.

I was very interested in exploring domestic violence where the child is physically abusive and aggressive towards the parent. Anger can be very difficult to control during adolescence, and my character, Kate, struggles to contain her emotions when dealing with her mother, leading to a violent incident.

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Another theme central to the book is secrets. Nearly every character has a hidden agenda or secret – from the closeted lesbian sports star to the wannabe prefect whose boyfriend is sexually abusive, to the overweight country girl who hides a stunning singing voice and a hush-hush dalliance with a popular girl's boyfriend. And of course, Kate hides the biggest secret of all – why she has been sent away from home to the boarding house.

During the writing process I was focused on writing content that was realistic and true to my own teenage experience, which at times even I found confronting. I wrote this book very slowly over the course of three years. I researched by listening and observing teenagers – on trains, on the street. A couple of great lines came out of this. I also worked with a small writers' group, who helped me polish up sections of the book and encouraged me to keep going when I got stuck.

While researching school boarding houses, I updated my knowledge of major private boarding schools, to find out their policies on mobile phones, computers, and other advancements. But the bulk of it came from my experience as a Melbourne schoolgirl boarder. It made an indelible impression!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pip Harry is a freelance journalist who has worked on magazines for many years, including chasing celebrities as Entertainment Editor for *NW* and Deputy Editor for *TV Week*, before turning herself into a yoga-loving frequent flyer as Health & Travel Editor for *Woman's Day*. She's the co-founder of the relationships website, realitychick.com.au, and has had short stories published in the *UTS Writer's Anthology* and *Wet Ink*. Pip lives in Sydney with her partner and their gorgeous daughter, Sophie. When not at a keyboard, she can be found searching for the perfect flat white and competing in ocean swimming.