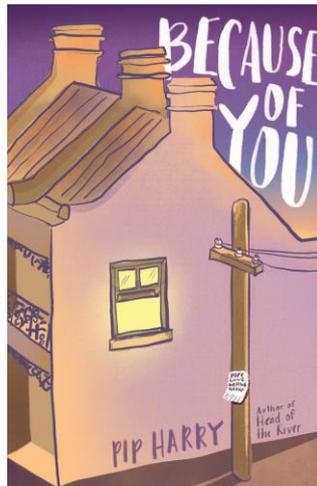


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BECAUSE OF YOU

Pip Harry



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

When eighteen-year-old Tiny finds herself living on the streets of Sydney, she feels desperate and hopeless. At a temporary shelter, she meets Nola, a Year 12 student completing her community service hours by helping to run a writing group for the homeless. Nola is faced with her own challenges and soon discovers that she needs Tiny as much as Tiny needs her.

Because of You is a novel that explores the themes of friendship, hope, acceptance and belonging. It also shares the powerful nature of words, the liberating experience of sharing stories and the importance of being heard.

THEMES

- Belonging
- Friendship
- Hope
- Identity
- Acceptance
- Homelessness

WRITING STYLE

Because of You is a dual narrative told from the first-person perspectives of Tiny and Nola. The depiction of life on the streets is confronting yet tender, eliciting in readers a true sense of empathy and compassion. This is achieved through Nola's shifting perceptions as she soon learns to accept and care about the people she meets at Hope Lane. The inclusion of free verse poetry, symbolism and the importance of finding one's voice makes this novel a tangible, literary text. It is suitable for secondary students, particularly those in Years 10–12.

STUDY NOTES

- Discuss the opening paragraph of the novel. How does the author successfully draw readers into the text using setting and voice?
- After reading the first chapter, show in a graphic organiser what we know about Tiny from a literal point of view and what we can infer about her. Discuss the importance of allowing readers room to speculate and infer, rather than being told everything about characters.
- What does Tiny's trip to Bali with Mari and her family tell us about her nature?

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- Tiny says that ‘it was the daydreaming all those months beforehand that was the best part’ (p2) of her trip to Bali. What does Tiny mean by this? Share a time when you enjoyed the planning of something as much as – or more than – the actual event.
- When referring to life on the streets, why does Tiny say ‘there’s nothing *but* time out here’ (p3)?
- How can we tell that Tiny has struggled at school? How has the author used ‘show not tell’ to convey this?
- How does Pip Harry successfully express the way in which many people perceive the homeless? Give examples from the text to support your ideas.
- What is the significance of the name of the temporary shelter – *Hope Lane*?
- Why does Tiny ‘[curl] into [her] shell at the first sign of danger’ (p6)? How does she do this?
- Why is Tiny reluctant to join the Hope Lane Writing Group? What makes her change her mind? In what ways does this decision impact on her life?
- Why does Zak see good in Tiny? Why can’t Tiny see good in herself? How does her self-perception prevent her from returning home?
- Why does Tiny say that Aimee has no idea of the joy her pregnancy will bring, nor the heartache (p7)?
- Discuss Tiny’s comment that ‘it’s not the cruelty of people that’ll pull the threads of you until you come undone. It’s the small, kind things they do when you least expect it’ (p9). Reflect on a time when this has happened to you as either the giver or receiver of kindness.
- Why do you think the shop assistant doesn’t stop Tiny when she steals from the pharmacy?
- Pip Harry uses figurative language throughout her novel to enhance the reading experience. Discuss the impact these devices have on the text. Examples include:
 - There’s an iron fence outside, and people are strung out across it like Christmas lights p5
 - Alcohol coming out of his pores like a rotten perfume p5
 - I pulled my backpack off my shoulders, sweating bullets p11
 - I felt like a criminal in the floodlights p12
 - Letting the hours go past like thick honey p12
 - The stench hits me like a slap p31
 - My heart is a mixed-up Rubik’s cube p41
 - It’s like I’m underwater and he’s dragging me back to the surface p47
 - I climb the stairs to my room with feet like bricks p61
 - Feeling the baby move inside me like a fish blowing bubbles p67

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- I smell like a plate of food left out in the sun p68
- His bedroom was like Aladdin's Cave p75
- Kids are scooped up like fish out of the water p91
- I feel brown snakes wrapping around my neck and dripping venom down my throat p96
- The ocean I've rammed into a small cup pushes out with the force of a blowhole p104
- Sadness wraps around him like a quick-moving fog p113
- The panic rises slowly, like a wave rolling into shore p174
- Pain still sitting like a bubble of acid in my throat p175
- I'll go before Nola's mum sees me in her house, like a stain on a white sheet p183
- The street hangs on me like second-hand smoke p187
- Mum arrives in a tornado of lateness p197
- I feel like I'm floating down a river of new ideas p236
- Both Hope Lane and Nola's school have posters with positive affirmations on them (see pp 6, 14 & 216). Discuss these posters, unpacking their messages. Which of these messages most resonates with you? Discuss with a friend.
- Why does Tiny describe her days as 'misery wrapped in loneliness' (p12)?
- Nola is reluctant to undertake her community service at Hope Lane, and is eager to quit after her first visit. What makes her change her mind? How does her experience at Hope Lane help her to discover her own identity? Why do Eddie and Aimee keep encouraging Nola to return to Hope Lane and the writing group?
- How does Nola's upbringing arm her with the ability to stand up for herself and her beliefs?
- Why does Nola lie about her parents' sexuality? Why are they disappointed that she has done this?
- What do Nola and Tiny have in common? How do they help one another to grow and change?
- Why does Eddie put so much of himself into Hope Lane? How does his volunteer work help him on his personal journey?
- Why does Tiny say that Hope Lane is filled with people who 'reached for the champagne, but ended up with a fistful of broken glass' (p31)?
- Discuss members of the writing groups such as Drew, Pee Wee and Hattie. How does your opinion of these characters change as the narrative progresses? Why has the author included these characters in her story?
- How has Pip Harry used the dual narrative structure to help make her story a 'page-turner'?

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- How did you feel when you read that Tiny had used rose-scented soap after her labour? How does this piece of information draw you further into the text?
- Why does Nola feel a sense of 'pity and curiosity' towards Tiny (p52)?
- Why does Tiny say that she'd 'be a kid again in a minute' (p53)?
- In the role of either Tiny or Nola, write the very first piece of writing they give to one another. Swap your piece with a counterpart in your class. Compare what you wrote with those from the text.
- What can we tell about Nola from her 8th birthday party (p59)?
- How does the relationship between Nola and her mother strengthen during the novel? What enables this to occur?
- What role do Meredith and the Street Library play in helping homeless people? Why does Meredith believe in the positive impact that reading can have on someone's life?
- Nola admires that Eddie has a passion. How important is passion to one's sense of purpose or achievement? How can passions be nurtured? In small groups, discuss your passions.
- Why does Nola's dad tell her 'it's time for you to start living a more authentic life' (p77)? What does he mean by this? How did this statement make you feel about your own life?
- Discuss Eddie's comment to Nola that 'different is a good thing ... Different isn't always easy, but it makes you interesting' (p128).
- When Tiny writes her poem about drowning, Nola questions whether she should try to throw her a life-raft or if Tiny has to build one for herself. What do you think? Discuss?
- Reread the description on p134 that explores how Tiny is feeling now that she has started medication. Discuss Pip Harry's use of the dinghy, rough seas and cruise ship to explore Tiny's slowly evolving sense of control.
- How does Siena help Tiny? Why is Siena's own story instrumental in helping Tiny?
- Why has Pip Harry deliberately contrasted the school formal with homelessness? What point is she making?
- What does Nola mean when she says she finds Eddie 'substantial' (p144)?
- Discuss the tender moment when Nola sits down and eats McDonald's with Ray and Kerry. Why is this such a powerful scene?
- What does Nola's mum mean when she says 'you're shedding your skin. Making way for the relationships and the people that really count' (p164)?
- Why is Tiny so determined to find Zak?

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- Reread Eddie's poem after discovering that it was written by his father. In the role of Eddie, write a reflection about the poem and its importance to you.
- Write a journal entry to share your understanding of the symbolism of Siena's and Tiny's tattoos. Why have they both decided to permanently remind themselves of the respective notions of 'never broken' and 'hope'?
- How is Tiny's poem about her tattoo a reflection of her personal journey?
- Discuss Zak's funeral. Why is this such a sad and sparse scene?
- Why, when affirmed about her involvement in the Fresh Voices Festival, does Nola say 'I didn't do anything. They did' (p217)?
- Discuss Eddie's opening words at the Fresh Voices Festival that 'everyone has a story to tell' (p239). How is this theme integrated into *Because of You*?
- Conduct your own group story exercise similar to the one in *Because of You* (see p108).
- The writing group uses sensory objects to help with their creativity and writing. Have students bring in objects to inspire the class's writing. Use X-charts and Y-charts to help brainstorm words and phrases based on these senses.
- Research further into the pink triangle aspect of the Holocaust.
- Write a piece using the headline stimulus 'Secret Millionaire Leaves Fortune in Surprise Donations'. Similarly, use stimulus from magazines and newspapers to use as story starters.
- Choose one of the characters in *Because of You* on whom to write a free verse poem suitable to give them. Write a short note explaining the inspiration behind your choice of words and ideas about that person.
- Compare Tiny's life at the start of the text with the end. Represent this comparison visually.
- What comment is the author making about the power of words, stories and having a voice in helping people to feel valued and heard?
- When Meredith establishes The Street Library at St James place, she comments that 'city spaces are for everyone' (p223). Discuss the way in which the theme of belonging to the city frames *Because of You*, with particular reference to the opening and closing lines of the novel.
- Choose a character who has benefitted personally as a result of their volunteer work, such as Siena, Meredith, Eddie, Nola or Dr Robinson. In the role of that character, write about your experiences with the Hope Lane project.
- Invite school counsellors to discuss mental health and pathways for help. Visit the websites of organisations such as *Beyond Blue* and *Kids Helpline* listed on p249 of *Because of You*. Likewise, invite a social worker to speak with students about this important vocation.

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- In small groups, brainstorm ways in which your class can help homeless people in your area. Consider putting these ideas into action.
- View the following BTN clip about homelessness
<http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3633710.htm>
- Visit the Choir of Hard Knocks website to find out more about the Melbourne choir consisting of homeless and disadvantaged people. See YouTube footage at the following link
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP7UvjGyx3w>
- View the following YouTube clip about Orange Sky Laundry
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlwZg9NBUw> and visit their website
<http://www.orangeskylaundry.com.au/>
- Visit the Vinnies CEO Sleepout website <https://www.ceosleepout.org.au/> and YouTube clip <https://www.ceosleepout.org.au/sydneylive/>
- With older students, view Parts 1 and 2 of Australian Story about former heroin addict and screenwriter Luke Davies. Discuss the way in which writing has helped Luke to overcome his sense of hopelessness.
<http://www.abc.net.au/austory/content/2016/s4665628.htm> and
<http://www.abc.net.au/austory/content/2016/s4670742.htm>
- Investigate food rescue organisations such as Oz Harvest, Foodwise and Food Bank.
www.ozharvest.org/
<http://www.foodwise.com.au/foodwaste/business-food-waste/food-charities/>
<https://www.foodbank.org.au/>

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AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I was inspired to write *Because of You* after I spent several years volunteering in a homeless shelter in Sydney's Darlinghurst. I worked with a group called Word Association, who visited the shelter for a few hours each week to lead creative writing exercises with homeless and marginalised people. The group of writers who attended sessions were incredibly diverse and interesting and the writing was often of a very high standard. In fact, the writers were invited to the Sydney Writers' Festival to read their work, and the session was a sell-out – not a dry eye in the house! I knew at some stage I wanted to capture my experience with Word Association in a young adult novel, through the eyes of two teenage girls – one homeless and one a volunteer – and tell a story about how friendship and writing can heal and provide hope.

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 relationships website realitychick.com.au and has had short stories published in the *UTS Writer's Anthology* and *Wet Ink*. Pip lives in Singapore 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. UQP published Pip's first two YA books, *I'll Tell You Mine* and *Head of the River*.

www.pipharry.com