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# MEET ME AT THE MOON TREE

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## Teachers' Notes

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ISBN: 978 0 7022 6617 1 / AUS \$16.99

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**SYNOPSIS**

When Carina's dad passes away, she clings to her promise to never stop looking for a moon tree in the forest behind their new country home. Captivated by stories of how these magical trees were planted from seeds that travelled around the moon, the scientist in Carina checks every tree, attempting to stay forever connected to her dad.

Her mum and brother Jack are struggling to accept their loss, becoming increasingly angry, agitated, and disengaged as the hurt worsens. Gramps, meanwhile, is desperately trying to keep this fragile family together.

With the help of her new cockatoo friend from the forest, Carina eventually finds her moon tree and begins to believe in its magic. Maybe there is a way she can still talk with her father in this enchanted place and say her final goodbyes.

*Meet Me at the Moon* is a tender and moving story about grief, magic and science told against the backdrop of broken yet slowly mending hearts.

**THEMES**

- Love
- Grief
- Acceptance
- Hope
- Courage
- Science
- Trees
- Magic

**WRITING STYLE**

*Meet Me at the Moon* is told from the first-person, present-tense perspective of Carina, a ten-year-old girl whose father has recently died from cancer. Powerful depictions of grief reveal a family that is falling apart. Carina's voice is innocent and endearing, as she honestly believes in the magic of the moon tree and the possibility that she can still talk with her dad. Her naivety, however, eventually renders her hope and courage wibbly, shattering her completely. The poignant use of figurative language evokes compassion and empathy in readers as each

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family member struggles, yet there are glimpses of healing. Well-formed motifs of trees, science and nature frame this story, symbolising growth and renewal, bringing readers on a journey of loss, acceptance and love. It is suited to middle readers and will allow audiences to navigate loss when they encounter it for themselves.

**STUDY NOTES**

- In your own words, explain what moon trees are. Why does Carina describe them as ‘magical trees’ (p. 2)? How are they magical in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*?
- Using evidence from the text, describe the relationship between Carina and her dad. Who in your life do you share a close relationship with? What is special about your bond?
- Carina and her dad are both described as having their heads ‘in the clouds’ (p. 2). What does this mean? Why is there ‘nothing wrong with that’ (p. 2)?
- Why is Carina so determined to find a moon tree? What is she really looking for?
- Why do you think Carina’s mum is so keen to move to the country? Why does she spend all of her time renovating the house?
- Describe the relationship between Carina and her brother, Jack. How does this change from the beginning to the end of the text?
- How are memories like seeds (see p. 6)? Discuss the idea of ‘memory seeds’ used throughout *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*.
- What is it about trees that Carina loves so much? Discuss the use of personification on p. 7 when Carina explains why she became a dendrologist.
- Create an illustrated table that shares the criteria for moon trees.
- In the role of Carina, record a notebook entry of your experiences in Forrest.
- What does Gramps mean when he says ‘sadness comes in all shapes and sizes’ (p. 9)? How do the characters in the books experience their sadness differently? How do people in your life experience sadness? Share in a reflection.
- How do the promises Carina made to her dad affect her decisions in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*?
- What role does the yellow-tailed black cockatoo play in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*? Why, although they usually are in pairs, is Colin on his own? What does this symbolise?

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- In what ways are Gramps and Carina similar? Describe their relationship. How would this story be different if Gramps wasn't in it?
- Make predictions about the anger that Carina '[sucks] down' and stores in her appendix (p. 14).
- Imagine you are Dad. Write a set of Post-It note messages for Carina that shows your understanding of his character.
- How important is Treebeard to Carina? Give evidence to support your thinking.
- How is magic used as a theme in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*?
- Carina notices changes in her mother's face (p. 19). Why does she wonder if her mum sees anything different in her?
- What do you think Carina wishes for when she sees a shooting star?
- Why does Carina worry that her mother may 'end up so far away she can't find her way back' (p. 20)?
- Why doesn't Carina want the blinds of her new room to be closed (see p. 20)?
- What do the stars represent in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*?
- How are Carina and her dad like moon trees?
- Explain what Carina likes about releasing a 'long-held breath' (p. 25). What is she really releasing?
- How does meeting Betty help Carina?
- Why does Carina get embarrassed when Gramps calls her Rina-roo in front of Betty?
- How does Carina 'grow a forest of memory seeds' at her new home (p. 31)?
- Why is 'keeping old friends' like Thea hard (p. 32)? What advice would you give Carina about this?
- Why does Carina make friends with Colin?
- Why does Carina wish she was like Treebeard (see p. 35)?
- Why does Jack read Carina's notebook? Come back to this question and reconsider your response after finishing the text.
- Why doesn't Carina want to go moon tree hunting anymore? Why does she feel like a 'squashed bug' (p. 41)?
- Why does Carina have a 'wibbly-wobbly feeling' in her stomach every time she thinks about the moon tree (pp. 41–2)?
- Explain what Carina means when she says, 'I think there are things you know with your head and things you know with your heart' (p. 43). Why is she scared of 'not finding the tree and...scared of finding it'?
- In the role of Carina, write a journal entry about missing people 'even when they're right in front of you' (p. 43).
- Why do Jack's words have such a lasting impact on Carina?
- In what ways does spending time with Gramps help Carina?

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- Why is Carina worried about making memories without Dad? How does she overcome this?
- What is the importance of science and magic to Carina?
- How is Carina like a *Mimosa pudica*?
- Carina finds the courage to tell Betty about moon trees. Why is it important to find someone 'who likes me for me' (p. 57)? In a reflection, write about a true friend of yours who accepts you for who you are.
- Discuss Carina's comment that 'being brave doesn't mean you're not scared' (p. 58). When have you felt both brave and scared? Share with a friend.
- What does Carina mean when she describes missing her dad as sometimes being 'a quiet buzzing in my ears and sometimes...like being dunked by tidal waves again and again and again' (p. 61).
- Carina and her dad performed a lot of science experiments together. Choose an experiment to do with a family member and share your findings with your class.
- Discuss the contribution of figurative language in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*. Examples include:
  - The sharp tang of eucalyptus fills the air (p. 8)
  - The rain makes the bark shine bright in blue, grey, copper and pink, like someone spilled different paints all over it (p. 9)
  - My damp jeans stick to my skin like icy-cold cling wrap (p. 11)
  - The corners of her lips are pinched like a paper fan (p. 13)
  - Mum's sadness makes her hide away, like a turtle in its shell (p. 21)
  - The sun filters through the trees on both sides of the road, making tiny golden diamonds dance across my lap (p. 24)
  - The trees are swaying, leaves rustling like they're spilling all their secrets (p. 24)
  - She's short with a cloud of white hair (p. 26)
  - I feel like a science experiment (p. 28)
  - The air is so dry every breath feels like licking sandpaper (p. 32)
  - The rain...pings like bullets on the tin roof (p. 39)
  - It makes me feel like a jittery sparrow (p. 42)
  - When Jack says something mean, it sticks in my head like bubblegum on the bottom of my shoe (p. 45)
  - My heart thunders like a band of brumbies (p. 47)
  - The words burst out of me, like a can of lemonade all shook up (p. 47)
  - The words zip around inside me like fireflies (p. 59)
  - He has the short-term memory of a potato (p. 59)
  - I feel the telltale prickle of tears (p. 64)
  - I have a lot of twisty thoughts to untangle (p. 73)

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- My heart has shrunk, smaller than an acorn (p. 73)
- The sun is barely peeking over the horizon (p. 74)
- It's so awkward my skin is crawling (p. 81)
- Mum's eyes flick over me, quicker than a fly (p. 82)
- It makes my chest puff out, like I swallowed a bike pump and inflated my lungs to bursting (p. 85)
- There's a storm cloud hanging over her head and any time I get too close I end up dodging lightning strikes (p. 92)
- Water droplets slide down my shins, glinting like crystals in the sun. Like Christmas lights (p. 94)
- My heart protests with booming thuds (p. 96)
- I had as much grace and coordination as an octopus on rollerskates (p. 97)
- Holding herself all stiff like she's a robot that's run out of oil (p. 99)
- I run...like I'm soaring through a dream, the sky full of fairy-floss clouds (p. 119)
- She screamed like a bush stone-curlew (p. 129)
- The tree has an energy that buzzes like powerlines (p. 131)
- I barrel into her, clinging to her waist like a koala (p. 135)
- When we finally pull up at the campground, we have to Velcro ourselves apart (p. 149)
- The forest is like a cold compress against my head (p. 158)
- The gum trees *swish-swoosh* in the playful breeze, like they're laughing (p. 158)
- Her tone feels like ice shoved down the back of my t-shirt (p. 169)
- We ride until the sweat sticks like honey to our skin (p. 172)
- Worry makes my head feel spiky, like a tangle of blackberry bushes (p. 174)
- The wind whips through the leaves like howling ghosts (p. 195)
- That thought stings like a nail through my heart (p. 204)
- The ferns stretch out to swipe at me (p. 211)
- A clap of thunder rumbles like an angry dragon (p. 213)
- My whole foot would blow up like a pufferfish (p. 219)
- How does the 'magic' of the snow globe help Carina (pp. 65–6)? In the role of Carina, write a journal entry after the globe is broken by Jack.
- In your own words, explain what 'the wibbles' are.
- Why does Carina feel that no one else in her house understands memory seeds (p. 71)? What is she worried may happen to her memories of Dad?
- Carina feels that she and Thea 'grew into different shapes and now we don't [fit]' (p. 72). Have you ever felt like this over a friendship? What advice would you give to Carina? How is the 'companion planting' Gramps does in his vegetable garden a metaphor for friendship?



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- How does reading letters from her dad help Carina?
- What does Carina mean when she refers to her mum's smile as 'silk flowers' (p. 82)? Why does she also see this 'silk-flower smile' in Nanna June?
- Create a character profile of Carina's dad using evidence from the text to share your ideas.
- Carina says that 'sometimes it's the idea of doing something that's scary and not the thing itself' (p. 96). Write a journal entry of a time this was true for you.
- Why does Carina feel like a 'new stick' (p. 101) when she and Gramps go into town?
- Stop reading after Carina finds the moon tree (p. 118). Write the next few paragraphs before reading on.
- What does Carina mean when she says, 'Gramps tries to be strong all the time, but even the tallest redwood sways in the wind' (p. 124)?
- In the role of Carina, write your letter to Dad after finding the moon tree (before reading her letter starting on p. 125).
- Why does Carina say that the memory seeds she has been planting 'keep growing into weeds' (p. 138)?
- Why, when Nanna June asks Carina how she is, does she say, 'It's a big question. And the answer is even bigger' (p. 140)?
- Nanna June says, 'if you don't let out your feelings they turn into poison' (p. 141). How does Carina liken this to her appendix?
- Why does Carina say that 'hope is magnetic' (p. 144)? Why is 'not hoping' harder than hoping? How does doubt 'eat up all your hope' (p. 146)?
- Why does Carina feel as though she is 'borrowing' Betty's dad (p. 151)?
- In the role of Carina, write a journal entry about your day at the swimming hole with Betty and her family.
- Explain what Carina means by 'riding a seesaw of feelings' (p. 156).
- What does Carina mean when she says, 'Every happy thought I have has a shadow clinging to it' (p. 174)?
- Discuss the impact for Carina of the following statement: 'Betty and me are beetroot and lettuce' (p. 178).
- Carina says, 'When I slip between the two mother shield ferns, it feels like I'm stepping through a portal into another world' (p. 180). Why does she feel this way?
- Why do you think Carina's dad lied to her about the moon tree?
- Why does Carina feel alone when lost in the forest? Is she alone?
- Discuss Carina's realisation that she and her mum have been 'missing each other because we didn't stay still' (p. 227).
- How do Jack's letters help Carina?

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- How does the family meeting help the family to move forward?
- How does the author use the analogy of flowers and trees to explain how Carina's family functions both before and after her dad's death (see p. 234)?
- How does talking about her feelings help Carina's wobbles to become 'less wobbly' (p. 235)?
- Why does Jack write the letters from Dad? What does this tell us about him?
- Explain Carina's scientific theories of how wishes come true.
- How is the death of Carina's dad like a black hole? How have stars, stardust, the moon, and magic been used to help tell this story?
- Discuss the tree motif throughout *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*. How is Carina like a tree?
- How is hope an important theme in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*?
- How does writing letters help Carina? What helps you to express yourself? Why is this important?
- Write a series of questions to ask different characters in *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*. Take turns answering these questions in Hot Seat rotations.
- Discuss the symbolism of the tin can telephones and their vibrating strings.
- Throughout *Meet Me at the Moon Tree*, Carina mentions various scientists who have linked science with 'magic', including Isaac Newton, Marie Curie, Alexander Fleming and many more. Choose one of these to find out more about. Share the science behind one of their discoveries with your class.

**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

Carina's story began with an article about the world's strangest trees. Trees have always held a special place in my heart. As a child I spent countless hours playing in the forests of my country town, bringing to life the story worlds of my favourite books: books about haunted forests, trees that were gateways to magical lands, trees that could talk and walk and fight against Dark Wizards. So as I read about rainbow eucalyptus, the Crooked Forest of Gryfino and the Dragon's Blood Tree, one small entry in particular sparked my curiosity: moon trees.

On the 31st of January 1971, the Apollo 14 mission set off for the moon. On board were three astronauts and over 400 tree seeds. NASA scientists were curious because science, like storytelling, begins with curiosity: would zero gravity impact the seeds' growth, they wondered. So the seeds were sent into



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space and when they returned to Earth they were germinated, planted and grew up to be known as moon trees.

A story unfolded in my mind instantly: a young girl's search for a moon tree. Her love of science. Her aching grief for her recently deceased father. Her deepest, most desperate desire to believe in the kind of magic that might bring him back to her.

To my great joy, writing Carina's story allowed me to explore a fascinating question: are science and magic so different? At first it seemed to me they were incongruous: how could a girl who loved science also believe in magic? But Carina showed me that science and magic are two sides of the same coin. They're both about opening up your mind to the world around you, taking bold leaps of faith and feeling, allowing curiosity to guide you down unexpected paths.

Through this lens, I wrote a story about grief, about the power of healthy friendships, the intricacies of family, and the beauty of the natural environment. It's a story about the mysterious world of trees, the fascinating way they communicate, the communities they form, the way that, even in death, they keep life thriving around them. Mostly, it's about the magic of science and a daughter's love for her father, a love so strong it is its own kind of magic.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Shivaun Plozza is the award-winning author of *Frankie*, *Tin Heart*, *The Boy, the Wolf, and the Stars* and *A Reluctant Witch's Guide to Magic*. Her writing has been shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year, YALSA's Top Ten Best Young Adult Books of the Year, and the Gold Inky. She won the Davitt Award for Best Young Adult Crime Novel in 2017. She lives in Geelong with her cat, Fenchurch. *Meet Me at the Moon Tree* is her latest book.