

Teachers' Notes
written by Donna Mulazzani



SIGGY AND AMBER

by Doug MacLeod

Summary

Sigismund Townshend wants to find a girlfriend who is *“smart and amazing. And funny and probably not blonde”*. Although unfortunately for Sigg, he lives in Samsara; a *“small seaside town where there’s a shortage of smart, amazing, funny people”* (p.3). Whilst his best friend, Fergus McHarig is quick to remind Sig that he fails to possess any of these qualities, he remains undeterred from his dream; he just has to remember to stand sideways so that she can be impressed by his good profile.

When Sig meets Amber at the Samsara Youth Club dance, it’s *“love at first sight”*. *“She’s ... different”* (p.10) and quickly impresses him with her quick wit, dark hair and purple fingernails. They trade ghost stories and, despite his drunken state, he’s convinced he’s making a good impression; that is until he vomits all over her shoes. Suitably unimpressed, Amber flees the scene, leaving Sigg to face his disapproving mother and her boyfriend Darren, who believes that *“you have to draw the line somewhere”* (p.6).

Despite his torturous hangover, Sigg *“can’t stop thinking about this girl’s neck”* (p.28) and is distressed by the thought that *“she might be the one”*. He’s given her an incorrect phone number, *“vomited on her”* (p.27) and is convinced that not only will she never forgive him, but he will never see her again. With only a first name, a Scooby-Doo tee-shirt and suburb to work with, Sigg sets off on a quest to find and then *“apologise to her”* (p.47). The mysterious magic of a fetch charm helps to lead him to her, but at the advice of his sister, he is still *“going to have to work very, very hard to make her forgive”* him (p.47).

Fortunately for Sig, whilst Amber doesn’t immediately forgive him, she finds him *“kind of interesting”* (p.85) and agrees to go on a date. But perhaps it is he that finds her the most interesting, what with her bald brother, life support machines and two mums. Enraptured by her *“slightly off-colored tooth”* (p.86), he agrees to take her to Tallis Point to see the ghost of Mr. Henderson; despite the risk that *“she might explode”* (p.86). Sadly for Sigg the course of love does not run smoothly and they are charged with *“trespassing on prohibited Commonwealth*

land" (p.104) and Amber is forbidden to have anything to do with him. Whilst Amber does indeed forgive him for vomiting on her shoes, he must now work to win the forgiveness of her mums.

Forlorn and lovesick, it is only with the help of his *"artistic"* sister, Helenka, that he is given the opportunity to secure his *"future happiness"* (p.199) and *"do something absolutely amazing"* (p.201) that will persuade the mums to forgive him. Siggy is finally absolved for his *"appalling lapse of judgment in taking Amber to Tallis Point [and is] permitted to see [her] again"* (p.209). It delightfully appears that love is in the air as Fergus eventually wins the heart of Pippa Nutting despite her ruined coat, his *"goose fart"* (p.156) voice and a love of Highland dancing; Sig's mum and Darren are engaged; and even Sub Lieutenant Mark Prebble attempts to woo Helenka with bomb fragments.

Amidst the highs and lows of winning the girl of his dreams, and *"half a million dollars"* (p.2), Siggy also manages to solve the ghostly mystery of Mr. Henderson's death and upholds the secret that *"magic happens"* (p.219).

Before Reading the Novel

Consider the cover of the book.

- Are you able to get a feeling about the story based on the cover and blurb?
- What does it give away that could help you piece together what might happen in the book?
- Record your ideas so that you can revisit them during your reading of the novel.

Character Profiles

Siggy Townshend

Sigismund Townshend is a well grounded young man who is kept in check by his best friend and family. Adolescence is marked by various rites of passage, and Siggy's teenage years are no exception. He does, however, manage to take most challenges in his stride and emerge with his integrity intact. He is a refreshingly honest young man who wears his heart on his sleeve; doing anything he can to secure the affection of the girl he loves. Siggy is considerate of others and goes out of his way to ensure his conscience is clear of any wrongdoing. He has a particular interest in the supernatural and uncovers the truth about a secret that has haunted a local family for years.

A boy. A girl. A ghostly puzzle.

Amber Good

Part of Amber's charm is that she is unlike most of the other girls who live in Samsara. Her dark hair and Goth appearance sets her apart from the usual blonde beauties, yet this is exactly what Siggy likes about her. Amber is creatively honest and quick witted; making her a good match for Sig. She is kind hearted and forgiving by nature; her acceptance of others' differences is an endearing trait in this young woman.

Fergus McHarig

Tall, dark and handsome, Fergus is Siggy's best friend and his mentor on all issues relating to romance. His Scottish charm usually ensures his success with the ladies, although he is not entirely forthcoming about his love for Highland dancing. Whilst brutally honest about Siggy's shortcomings, he is also a very loyal and protective friend. Fergus often provides the comic relief in the novel and has an unusual fondness for writing reviews of kitchen gadgets.

Themes

The Supernatural

- The mysterious thread is introduced when Siggy and Amber first meet and swap ghost stories. (p.15)
- Siggy and Fergus saw *"the ghost of a man ... even though his lips didn't move ... [they] heard the voice"*. (p.18)
- Siggy takes Amber to Tallis Point, on their first date, in the quest of finding the ghost.
- Whilst sailing, Amber and Siggy hear *"the sine wave tone again ... and see little flashes of phosphorescence in the waves"*. (p.124)
- Siggy confides in Zebulon that he has seen his *"great-grandfather's ghost"*. (p.49)
- Amber is found with the help of a fetch charm. (p.55)
- Zebulon questions Siggy as to why his great-grandfather's ghost would *"appear for you and not for me?"* (p.136)
- Despite being *"desperate not to believe in ghosts"* (p.171), Sub Lieutenant Mark Prebble shares his scrapbook album with Siggy and *"the hazy shape that appears in every photograph"* that *"looks like the shape of a man"*. (p.169)
- The mystery of Mr. Henderson's death is solved when Amber and Siggy see *"both man and boat disappear below the surface"* of the ocean; *"Jack Henderson drowned"*. (p.188)
- Siggy shares his discovery with Zebulon; *"I think your great-granddad was trying to warn me. Fergus and I used to go fishing near where Jack Henderson drowned."* (p.217)

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Families

The text acknowledges the fact that modern families take a variety of forms:

- Siggy's mum is a sole parent *"since her husband left"* and whilst *"she's been seeing a string of men"*, (p.162) she's finally found happiness in the form of Darren, owner of an office supply store.
- Amber has two mums who got *"married in Massachusetts"* (p.80)

Truth and Forgiveness

The humour within the text is particularly effective due to the characters propensity for bending the truth.

- Whilst Siggy is honest when he tells Amber that he has seen a ghost, she *"puts on the straight face of someone who is about to tell a massive lie"* (p.15) when sharing her story.
- Fergus leads a *"double life"*. *"Once a week he puts on a kilt and becomes that extraordinary superhero: Highland Dancing Man"* (p.5). He fears that he will be mocked by his peers; therefore only Siggy knows of his secret passion.
- After vomiting on Amber's shoes, Siggy is determined to make it up to her and is prepared to do *"some amazing thing ... to make her forgive"* him (p.135).
- Despite allowing Amber to *"endanger her life"* (p.143) and being charged with trespassing on *"prohibited Commonwealth land"* (p.140), Siggy is a good person and desperately tries to redeem himself.
- Siggy ensures that Zebulon knows the truth about his great-grandfather's death.

Text, Style, Mood and Structure

- Doug MacLeod heavily relies on humour to engage his readers. Have students recount their favourite part of the text and discuss why they found it so amusing.
- The ghostly mystery of Jack Henderson captivates Siggy and Amber. Students could research a range of ghost stories or write their own to entertain others.
- Siggy and Fergus have the unusual hobby of writing reviews for kitchen products on Amazon. Have students write their own reviews of some household gadgets.
- The exhibition of Helenka's sculptures is a great success. Have students create the advertising that promotes this event. They could even design a new sculpture to appear in the show.
- Fergus eventually wins the heart of Pippa Nutting. Have students write, and then perform, the scene where he finally captures her affection.

The text offers the opportunity for students to explore some personal and creative writing of their own:

DOUG MacLEOD

- Zebulon paints the safety barriers because he “*wanted to make some magic happen*”. (p.219) What could you do to make your own magic happen?
- How would you make it up to someone if you vomited on their shoes?
- Imagine you had your own fetch charm. What would you want to fetch?



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