

Teachers' Notes



The
Cloudchasers



Steven Hunt and David Richardson

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The logo for 'The Cloudchasers' features the title in a stylized, reddish-brown font. Above the word 'Cloudchasers' is a small, glowing orange sphere, possibly representing a sun or a cloud. The background of the logo is a soft, white, cloud-like shape.

The Cloudchasers

Synopsis

The curtain opens on a world that is dark and bleak. Chimney stacks and alleyways abound. Trees and open spaces have all but vanished. This is the world of greed and control. Conformity is assured through imposed discipline. Creativity and imagination are forbidden, the Banker enforcing this through punishment and re-education in 'the Institute of Creative Conformity'. The vivid and highly creative illustrations lead us into this world, reflecting the authors' intentions, taking us, into the emotions of the characters. We look into the face of Alice and respond to the eyes of a child who is living in pain and confusion through lack of understanding. The text runs with this, broadening and moving the narrative forwards.

But suddenly we are taken up into the clouds, into a place of light as Alice escapes into a world of colour, beauty and music. She has always seen this world in the clouds. She has always had hope. There *is* a different world – and discovers that she only has to imagine, and this world will open up for her.

Alice and Spinner discover excitement. Thomas learns about playing and as their balloon takes them up and out of the world of darkness, they find that by believing and taking action, they can make a difference.


Through their adventures into this world of fantasy, it becomes clear to them that the balloon will take them on a difficult journey, but that they don't have to accept the imposed world of darkness. They can create their own world of light.

We meet a cast of rich characters – each of them on the side of either darkness or light. The over-abundant Banker, whose created world of ugliness denies the beauty of childhood discovery and imagination. The Catcher, oozing maggots and weevils, scooping up children who dare to draw, to sing, to create. Alice's teacher, a puppet of the Banker, allowing only rules and tunnel vision – no thinking. We see these rules reflected in Thomas, a child they have painted on a blank canvas. A child with initiative blocked by fear. But through the kind eyes of the old man and his music, the friendly help of the Lighthouse Keeper and the Showman and the indomitable spirit of the children, we see the hope of humanity shining ahead.

But not all questions are answered. We are left wondering, our own imaginations given space to fly.










Themes


The world created in the story is frightening. Thomas has never played and is immobilised without his book of rules. He has no initiative. As the Showman says of the children, 'it was almost as though something inside them became lost... or was stolen.' The Banker has created a world of control. There is no kindness, just imposed discipline and enforced obedience.

But imagination and creativity leak through and lead Alice and her friends to freedom. To a world of colour and free thought.

Authors' Motivation




Steven and David have worked together for many years, in film and advertising, but mostly on other people's projects, which was not always creatively satisfying. Both wanted to work on something based on their own original work. *The Cloudchasers* resulted from the blending of two concepts: Steven had the idea of creating a new type of book, a hybrid between a picture book and a graphic novel, and David had the germ of an idea for an animated film. They decided to team up and merge the two concepts, and after a lengthy development process, *The Cloudchasers* was born.





The central concept arose from their own childhoods. Steven and David have always been obsessed with drawing, creativity and imaginative storytelling. Steven grew up in country England and David grew up in country and coastal Victoria. They both loved the same kinds of books and stories as kids: Doctor Who, classic fairy tales, Tintin books, comic books and adventure stories, and were drawn to sagas of epic adventure, fantasy, and stories of light and dark. They wanted *The Cloudchasers* to capture the feel of the stories they loved as kids, and in some ways, the character of Alice is based on themselves – kids who loved creativity, but were constantly coming up against the ‘real’ world and people who wanted to stop others from being artistic.

Other key influences on the story were the films of Hayao Miyazaki and the work of authors such as Jules Verne, Roald Dahl and Jonathan Swift. Steven and David wanted the look and feel of the book to be reminiscent of Europe and England in the early 20th century, but to take place in an alternate reality – that is, nowhere recognisably real. It was important to them that, aside from being a rollicking adventure, the book would express universal themes about the vital importance of creativity and the imagination, and of being true to yourself and your beliefs.





Authors

David Richardson

David has pursued an active interest in screenwriting since graduating from the Swinburne Film and Television School (now VCA) and has written many feature-length screenplays. He has been funded by Film Victoria and the Australian Film Commission to develop different screenplays and he co-wrote the action/comedy feature film SENSITIVE NEW AGE KILLER. In 2004, he was selected to attend the UK based Arista script development workshop, and in 2005 he attended SPARK, the prestigious script development workshop run by the Australian Film Commission and the AFTRS.

At SPARK, David was able to work closely with many well-known local and international directors and screenwriters. David co-wrote SCIENTIA with Stephen Amis, which was granted Indievision production funding in 2008, and he and Stephen were selected for the ARISTA workshop once again. David has many writing projects in development and is finishing his first novel. *The Cloudchasers* is his first book.



Authors

Steven Hunt

Steven Hunt is an award-winning graphic designer and illustrator. He studied Art and Design at Somerset College of Arts and Technology, Birmingham Polytechnic and St Martins in the UK.

Steven has worked in advertising agencies as an art director and designer and ran his own production studio, directing television commercials, feature film titles, short films and digital illustrations and animations. He won The Best Designed Children's Book Series at the Australian Book Publishers Association design awards and has been a finalist at the Australian Effects and Animation Festival.

Steven held his first solo exhibition of digital illustration works in 2006 at the Walker St Gallery and continues to illustrate and design for major publishing houses. Currently Steven is working on another children's picture book and a novel for teens. *The Cloudchasers* is his first book.





Writing Style

The Cloudchasers is a fantasy adventure with thought-provoking themes, brilliant illustrations, and sometimes quite mature and poetic language. We are shown a 'kaleidoscope of thoughts' and watch Alice as she 'carries hope like a flag tied to the balloon.' The book is a joy to read aloud. Words and pictures marry to tell the story and to produce often quite emotional responses in the reader.

Long and short sentences blend in narrative and conversation to create a balanced chronicle. Onomatopoeic words add sound as chapters begin and end new moments of adventure. Windows open as characters emerge, each reflecting the opposing forces of darkness and light, while we glimpse humour as the two heads of Trader Jack argue with each other.

Editorial Comment

This book was first presented to ABC as a couple of illustrations and a synopsis. The illustrations were so startling and eye-catching that it was impossible to say no. The book developed from a 112 page picture book/graphic novel into a 160 page adventure that will conclude with the sequel, to be published in 2009. The book is unusual in its blend of illustration and text. The digitally created illustrations convey the feeling of a film, drawing the young reader into the *Cloudchasers* world. Mesmerising!

Marketing and Promotion

- Major launch at The Convent, Melbourne.
- Exhibitions of artwork in galleries and museums around Australia.
- Author and illustrator talks in schools and galleries.
- Double-sided poster for display
- On-line advertising via the ABC web site and Yahoo.
- Advertising on ABC TV (the first such advertising for an ABC Children's trade title)
- Cloudchasers webstie – www.thecloudchasers.com



Study Notes

The Cloudchasers is a beautifully illustrated book with a thought-provoking message. It invites discussion and is a joy to read aloud! Most suitable for upper primary students, its language is often mature and vocabulary extensive.

As the concepts raised will encourage extended discussion, the following points could provide a springboard for this within several learning areas.

Discussion Points

- Who owns your thoughts? Can your thoughts and dreams be taken away and if so how?
- Alice knew there was something not right with the society she lived in. Can the 'ordinary' people make a difference? Can one person make a difference?
- What is self - discipline? How do you take responsibility for your own actions? Give some examples from your life.
- Alice rebelled against the ugliness of her situation. Do we have to accept what is done to us?
- Does having too much money take away the need –and/ or opportunity for imagination?
- Does the clothing of the characters affect your response to them? Look at several examples and discuss.
- Alice's mother said 'You horrid girl!' What would you have to do for someone to call you horrid?
- What is anti social behaviour compared to being naughty?
- Older students may like to discuss parallels between the world of the Banker and the world created by Hitler during World War II.
- What did you think was the most important theme in *The Cloudchasers*? Why?

Write

- Lie on the grass and look up at the clouds. Alice saw all kinds of things hiding there. What can you see? Write a list of adjectives and nouns that describe what you see.
- In the clouds you can see a door. Open it and go through. Where do you find yourself? Write a letter to Alice to tell her all about it.
- Describe three ways in which the Catcher could have lost his hand?
- Write your own sequel to the story. What do you think is going to happen next?
- Imagine that you could jump in a balloon and go to any land in the clouds? Write a short poem describing this place

Research

In *The Cloudchasers* there are several clues as to when this book is set. For example the clothing is indicative of the fashion of the time and Alice is ‘dragged by the ear’ to the Governor’s office, something that would not happen today.

Observe younger children playing. Do you think they are using their imaginations? What makes you think this?

Look up the internet or a book in the library to find out how many different kinds of clouds there are such as cumulus clouds. What makes clouds different? Do they have different functions? Colour? Shapes? Go outside and see if you can recognise them.

Art

Find a local newspaper and remove the pages of real estate photographs which show houses that have a sky above them. Paint a brand new sky on top of the photograph sky. Change the mood, the tone, the atmosphere... if it is day, turn it to night. Use any colour except blue ...look at the Expressionist painters who painted green or lilac skies. Empower yourself to change your environment!

Create your own sky by ripping and tearing tissue paper. Choose pastel or sunset colours to create the mood. Use watered down craft glue or aquadhere (glue sticks won't work) on the paper then place strips on top to build up layers of colour. Look at the skies of El Greco's and Henri Rousseau's works to trigger your imagination.

Create your own cloud monster and write about it – what sort of monster is it? Is it friendly? Where does it live? Who can see it?

Look at the clouds in the paintings of Constable. Notice the variation of tone and colour and the different shapes and textures. In pastels draw individual cloudscapes and put them together in groups to form 'Constable's Clouds'



The image shows the front cover of an antique book. The cover is bound in dark brown leather, showing signs of wear and age. A large, rectangular, dark brown leather label is pasted onto the center of the cover. This label is framed by an elaborate, multi-layered border. The innermost border is a simple gold line. The next layer is a wider gold band featuring a repeating geometric pattern. The outermost border is the most decorative, with ornate, symmetrical corner pieces and a central medallion at the top and bottom. The top medallion contains a small, circular illustration of a violin. The bottom medallion is a solid dark circle. The entire cover is set against a dark, textured background.

For further information, latest blogs and
podcasts please visit the website

www.thecloudchasers.com