

TEACHER NOTES

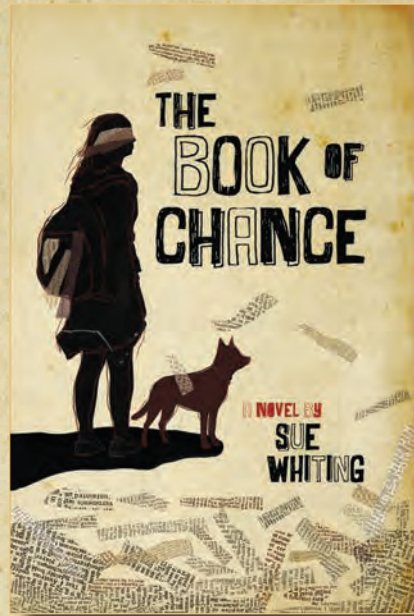
THE BOOK OF CHANGE



A NOVEL BY
**SUE
WHITING**

WALKER BOOKS

THE BOOK OF CHANCE



The Book of Chance By Sue Whiting
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Chance is in Year 7 and thinks she has it all - a loving mother, dog Tiges, best friend and almost-sister next door. But when a reality TV team makes over her house, she discovers newspaper cuttings from the past that cause her to question the world as she knows it and everyone in it. Then she finds herself caught between two realities, identities and worlds. Face-to-face with the truth, Chance has a very difficult decision to make, which almost splits her in two. This powerful story explores what is true and what is fake in today's world. And while Chance is all about the truth, she ponders whether "Maybe being truthful was really just a big lie."

SUE WHITING

Sue Whiting is a children's and young adult author and editor who lives and works in a small coastal village south of Sydney. She has written numerous books in a variety of genres: fiction and nonfiction, picture books through to YA, including the best-selling, and the CBCA 2019 Notable Book, *Beware the Deep Dark Forest*.

Sue is passionate about storytelling and the power of story to transform lives, and aims to write stories that are thought-provoking, page-turning and full of heart. *The Book of Chance* is her 68th published book, and her third novel for upper primary / lower secondary readers. Join her on her adventures in story at <https://suewhiting.com>.



A Q&A with Sue Whiting

- Tell us about the inspiration behind *The Book of Chance*.

The initial inspiration came from a real crime that was committed in 1998 but not solved until 2017. As I watched the case play out on TV and social media, I became transfixed, maybe even a little obsessed, and before long I began to worry about the young teenage girl embroiled in the thick of it all, and to wonder what it would be like to be that girl. How did she feel? How was she going to cope? What would become of her? These wonderings collided head-on with my preoccupation with the current challenges we face in finding truth in a world that is bombarded by Internet trickery, fake news and social media – the collision resulting in the writing of *The Book of Chance*.

- What was your writing experience like for *The Book of Chance*?

As with most writers, I am filled with self-doubt when embarking on a new book and I always find writing the first draft particularly daunting. I had a unique challenge with *The Book of Chance* though, as I had planned, pitched and was contracted for a book with two parts: part one being the story of Chance making her startling discovery and part two the aftermath, her life after the discovery. However, when I started developing Chance and her world, the story became much bigger than I anticipated – there were so many layers to explore – and my instincts told me that to do the story justice, I had to dispense with the original plan and just tell the first part of the story. Fortunately, my publisher was very trusting and allowed me to go with my gut.

I also found it difficult to manage the many threads woven into the story – both in finding ways to weave them in authentically, but also in terms of research. My search engine history would show some “interesting” searches, from how to obtain fake documents, to the forensics of crime scenes, emergency foster care, cyberbullying and the plight of South Sudanese refugees. I also needed to get some firsthand information and I

conducted many interviews with both experts and school students. But even with these challenges and the periods of self doubt, overall the experience was extremely rewarding as I very quickly came to love Chance and her black and white view of the world – which is so unlike mine – and when things started to fall apart for her, I felt her pain keenly. And now I hope my readers do too.

- Chance comes up against challenges that many young people face with authenticity and social media. What made you decide to cover this topic? Why do you think it’s important for kids today to consider?

One of the issues relating directly to the core mystery of the novel involved Chance coming to terms with the fact that her life had been a lie. As I pondered on this, I started to think about how difficult it is to know what is true and what is not. This is especially so in today’s world of social media, which allows people to present manufactured lives, fictions really, and be flooded with images that are often doctored and filtered, while at the same time providing some kind of strange anonymity that seems to give people misguided bravado to say things they would never say to someone in person. How do young people – who often are already vulnerable and lacking in self-esteem – navigate this? It is an extremely troubling situation and to me the only way to help our youth deal with it is to provide opportunities to talk about it. So while the social media thread is definitely a subplot, I hope it will be thought provoking and potentially a springboard for important and much needed conversations.

- What do you hope young readers will take away from the book?

First and foremost, I hope readers will enjoy a page-turning, suspenseful mystery. But I also hope that the story will make them feel and also think – about social media, about family and friendships, about truth and lies and about being true to oneself no matter what.

Discussion Questions & Activities

Before Reading

Before reading *The Book of Chance*, view the cover of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The publisher
- The blurb

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? What do you think is the significance of the torn pieces of newsprint? What does the silhouetted images tell you about the central character? What is the overall tone of the cover? (Happy? Sad? Intriguing? Mysterious?) Why do you think the torn newsprint is arranged in a circular pattern on the back cover? Revisit your answer after reading the book – how close were your predictions to the actual novel?

Exploring the text

What is the purpose of this novel (i.e. to entertain, to inform or to persuade)? How can you tell? Write a paragraph about the novel using only informative language that is unbiased. Write another paragraph using persuasive language to convince the reader to share your opinion of the novel.

Discuss the title of the book. Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not? If you were asked to choose an alternative title for the book, what would it be? Remember, a good title should capture the audience's attention and give them some idea of what the book is about.

Family

Have a class discussion on traditional family roles, including the characteristics of each role and what relationship you would expect each role to have with the other. Consider questions such as:

- What are the responsibilities of a parent?
- How would you expect a parent to behave around his or her child in a crisis?
- What role does trust play in a family?

How does *The Book of Chance* play into or subvert these ideas of a typical family dynamic? What effect does this subversion have on you as the reader?

Read the pages in *The Book of Chance* about Nadia and Chance's family holiday without the Dengs (page 189-90*), and consider how the Dengs and the Callahans form their own family. How do the characters of Alek and Missa-D affect Chance? Do you think they are helpful or supportive? Why? How might Chance's journey have been different if she didn't have Alek or Missa-D there to talk to or help her?

Have a class debate about whether Nadia is a "good parent" to Chance. The "for" side could consider how she loves and cares for Chance and the life she's given her, while the "against" side could raise the consequences and effects of kidnapping Chance. Remember to use quotes and references from the text, and remind the class afterwards that there may not be a right or wrong answer to this question.

How do we define what it means to be a family, and why? Ask the students to write a short paragraph about someone who is not a blood relative, but they would count as family: it could be another adult, a friend or even a pet (like Tiges). Ask if any students would like to share their paragraph with the class.

Social Media

Consider the Sarah Diego Instagram incident, and how Chance responds to it. Do you think Chance did the wrong thing by posting that comment? Would you consider Chance's comment bullying? Why or why not? How do you think the three girls

handled the situation generally? Chance felt the fact that Sarah started it all by telling a lie was just as bad as the horrible reaction to that lie. Do you think she has a point? Is one thing worse than the other? Does the fact that Sarah posted a lie justify the vicious reactions to it?

What policies does your school have in place regarding bullying and social media? Can you add to or improve these policies? What should you do if you experience or witness a student bullying online?

Chance makes a point about people's posts sometimes being fake – or at best manufactured, doctored or filtered. What are your thoughts on this? Is it okay to doctor photos and use filters? Is it okay to present a life that is not necessarily a true depiction? Does it matter? (No right or wrong answers here!) How “true” are you on social media?

Character

How would you describe Chance? What do you know about her? Create a mind map or character profile of Chance outlining all that you know about her. It could be organised under headings such as physical characteristics, background, personality, interests, strengths, weaknesses, worries and fears etc.

Think about what Chance was like when we meet her, compared to the conclusion. How has she changed and why? Consider how Chance defines her identity, and how that changed when she learnt about Aprelle.

Would you consider Chance as someone who is resilient? Why/why not?

Chance has a very strong sense of justice, of what she feels is right or wrong. Find examples in the text of when she felt something was unjust or unfair (either from Chance's perspective or a

story we hear from Nadia in *The Book of Chance* itself). Why did she think it was wrong? How did she try to fix it?

Both Chance and Nadia feel guilty about their actions and behaviour in the novel. Discuss why they feel guilt and how it affects them. Do you agree with the choices they made? Why or why not? How does their guilt affect their relationship by the end of the novel?

Does anyone in the class have a baby or family scrapbook like *The Book of Chance*? Do you ever look at it? Why or why not? What type of information do you usually find in these types of books? How is the information in *The Book of Chance* the same or different? What do you think motivated Nadia to keep this journal?

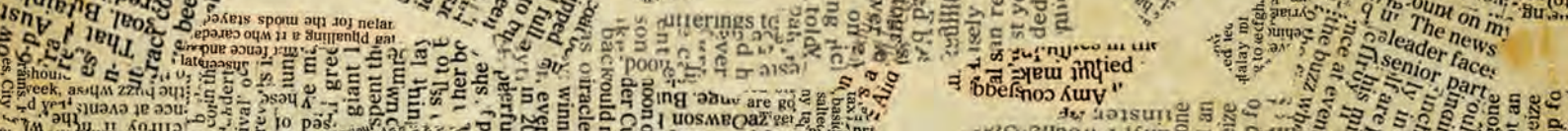
Do you have a favourite character? Who is it and what appealed to you about this character?

Why are stripes important and comforting to Chance? What does that say about her? Alek loves spots – what does that say about her? Do you have something – a lucky charm, a ritual or some such – that helps to calm you in anxious situations?

Setting

The Book of Chance is set in Wollongong, NSW. What did you learn about Wollongong from reading the novel? Make a list. How is Wollongong the same or different to where you live? Research Wollongong and add to your list. Is there anything you discovered in your research that could (or should) have been included in the novel?

Find examples of language in the text (it could be particular phrases of dialogue, descriptions of landscape, etc.) that you think help the book feel distinctly Australian. Why do you think it does this? How would the book feel different if it were set in another country?



Journalism and Reality TV

What are your thoughts on reality TV? Would you like to be involved in a reality TV program? Why or why not?

Do you think Chance regrets the decision to apply for *I Just Wanted to Say Thank You*? Do you think she would have ever discovered the truth about her past if she didn't?

How does *The Book of Chance* present journalism? Is it positive or negative? You could compare the characters of Amos and Tara Bentley, and how they approach Chance's story.

Style and structure

The book is told entirely through first person narration, from Chance's perspective. How did that make you feel? How would the story be different if it was told in third person, or from another character's perspective?

The Book of Chance starts at the present day, then takes the reader back in time. Did the countdown back in time build suspense or anticipation for you as a reader?

Themes

What are the themes in this novel? Identify and list the themes as a class or in small groups. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Truth and lies are at the core of most threads in the book. Chance in particular grapples with what is true and what is not. On page 173* Chance states: "Then I scurried out of the office feeling like a giant fraud, wondering if anyone ever told the whole

truth. Maybe being truthful was really just a big lie."

Discuss this statement. Is being truthful a lie? Why / why not? Is omission the same as lying? Is it ever okay to lie?

"But words carefully chosen can mean more than one thing. They can be slippery. They can be deceiving. That is part of the power and beauty of the written word – that deception. The lie within the truth; and the truth within the lie." (Page 236*)
What do you think this statement means? How does Nadia use *The Book of Chance* to tell Chance's story, and do you think it's truthful?

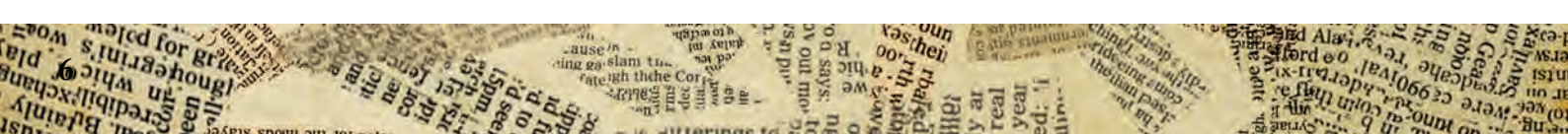
Creative Responses to the Text

Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

A novel will describe the setting and action in words, allowing the reader to visualise using their imagination. A comic strip or graphic novel uses illustrations to show the reader the setting, action and character's emotions. Create a comic strip of a key scene from the novel.

Imagine that a movie was being made of *The Book of Chance*. In small groups, create a soundtrack to accompany some of the key scenes, thinking particularly about the mood you want to convey. You could either make a compilation of existing songs or compose your own musical pieces. Present your soundtrack to the class, explaining why you have chosen the pieces you have. Also choose your ideal cast for the movie and create a movie poster.

Choose a scene in the novel and rewrite it from the perspective of another character. Focus particularly

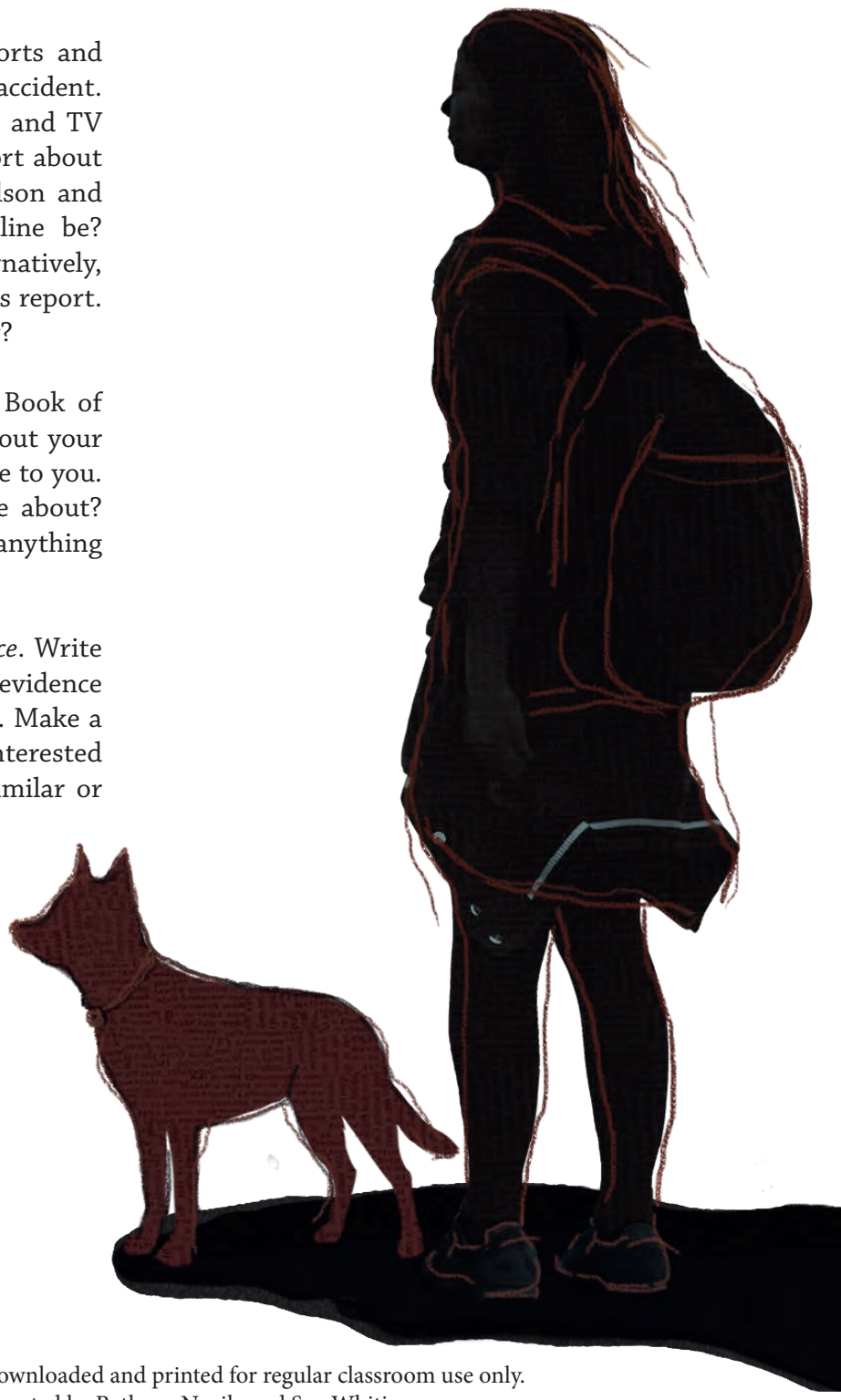


on the character's attitudes and feelings, rather than simply recounting events. How might another character see and experience events differently to Chance?

There are many references to news reports and articles about the Perth fire and the car accident. Study the language used in print, online and TV news reports and then write a news report about the breaking news regarding Aprelle Wilson and Nadia Callahan. What would the headline be? (Refer to headlines on page 149*.) Alternatively, you could script, enact and film a TV news report. How would Tara Bentley present the story?

Create your own journal similar to *The Book of Chance* – *The Book of ???*. It could be about your own life or about the life of someone close to you. What significant events would you write about? Why? How truthful will you be? Is there anything that you might leave out? Why?

Write a book report on *The Book of Chance*. Write about what you thought of the book, using evidence from the text to support your evaluation. Make a recommendation about who would be interested in this book and draw connections to similar or related books.



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