

These notes are for:

- Upper Primary / Secondary
- 8 +yrs old

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Geography
- History
- Science
- Art

Example of:

- Junior Fiction
- Novel
- Mystery

Experience of:

- Reading & Writing
- Reflecting on text
- Listening & Speaking
- Research

Themes:

- Environment
- History
- Friendship
- Family
- Humour

Values:

- Honesty and Trustworthiness

Classroom Ideas may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Below

Below

By: Meg McKinlay
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\$15.99 (\$18.00 CAN)
No. of Pages: 224



Outline:

What secrets lie beneath?
When Cassie and Liam start swimming at the lake neither of them realises the dark secrets that lie beneath.
As summer heats up and the lake waters become lower and lower, the shocking truth is slowly uncovered. And soon, both their lives will change – forever.

Author Information:

Meg McKinlay grew up in Bendigo, Victoria, in a book-loving, TV- and car-free household. A poet as well as a children's writer, Meg developed an affinity with the Japanese language after going on an exchange year in high school, and went on to complete a PhD in Japanese Literature. Along the way, she worked a variety of jobs including swim instructor, tour guide, translator and teacher. These days, she lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia, where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese, and Creative Writing. Meg divides her time between teaching and writing, a balance that swings wildly between chaos and calm. She is always busy cooking up more books and you can visit her on the web at www.megmckinlay.com

How to Use These Notes:

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the text *Below* by Meg McKinlay. Multiple copies of the text are recommended for shared reading. This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

Classroom Ideas for *Below*:

Before reading *Below*:

- Discuss the following: What is the role of the author? What is the role of the publisher? Who else is involved in the making of a book? What age do you think the intended audience for this book is?
- Look at the front cover. What mood is created by this cover? How is this done? Discuss the tagline. How does it create suspense?
- From the front and back cover what information can you learn about the book? What do you think this book is about? How do you think the book will begin/end? Write your own story called *Below* based only on this information.

Activities and Discussion Questions:

- Read page 15, "I clamped my mouth shut and felt the coughs detonate inside, puffing out my cheeks like tiny explosions." This is a simile. What other similes can be found in *Below*? Create your own simile to describe an experience in an unusual way.
- On page 32, Cassie's Mum asks, "How can you know where you are if you don't know where you have been?" Discuss as a class, what you think this statement means. Do you agree? Split the class into two and have a mock debate about the validity of this statement. Have one side argue for how a person's past affects who he/she currently is. Have the other half discuss how the past is irrelevant because it is a person's current actions that determine who he/she is. Ask students to write about an experience in their own lives and how this has shaped them today.
- Research your family tree. How many generations can it be traced back? Draw a diagram of your family tree.
- Ask your parents, grandparents or older relatives for stories about where they grew up. How do you think the place they grew up has affected who they are today? Write about the account.
- Research an actual town that was drowned by a dam. How did the residents feel about the dam? What happened to the residents after their town was flooded? Do you think the accounts you found told the whole story or were there bits left out? What makes you draw this conclusion?
- Page 51 refers to some science experiments that Cassie did about surface tension. Try these experiments for yourself. For the first experiment you need a glass of water filled to the rim and some coins. Gently place each of these coins into the water, narrow edge first. Observe the shape the water takes as coins are added. How many coins fit in before the glass overflows? Is this more than you expected? For the second experiment, lower a needle or paperclip into a bowl of water with a fork. Pull the fork back at the surface of the water and be careful not to wet the needle or the paperclip as this will cause it to sink. It may take a few tries but you should be able to get the needle or paperclip to sit on the surface of the water. Draw up the results of the experiments with details of the aim, equipment, process, results and conclusion. Make sure you include a diagram of the experiment.
- Page 66 claims that "history is written by the winners!" Have a class discussion about what this means. Why would this happen? Is this always the case or are there accounts of history sometimes not written by the "winners"? What does this mean for the way we view our history?
- Certain lines in *Below* are italicised, for example, page 14 states, "six laps a day without fail, Cassie, okay?" How does this set them apart from the rest of the text? How does it affect the tone of these lines to have them in italics?
- Draw a map of the neighbourhood where you live. Make special note of any landmarks and the street names.

Activities and Discussion Questions cont.

- On page 114, Cassie's Dad describes his artistic process, "... what I like to do is look at the photos, capture the essence of the thing, then put them away and just work from the mind's eye." What do you think Cassie's Dad means by this statement? How do you think this process would apply to different genres eg. in photography, painting and sculpture? Create a portrait of a family member that captures his or her "essence." Present to the class what you were trying to emphasise about them. In what ways did your artwork reflect the original photo or person? In what ways is it different? How do you think these differences came about?
- Create a newspaper article about an important event that occurred during your life. Remember to have an eye-catching heading and keep it brief, sticking only to the most important details. Make sure you include a by-line, interviews, witness statements etc.
- On page 7, Cassie refers to old Lower Grange as being "drowned", but on page 32, she refers to her mother teaching about the town being "flooded." What do each of these words imply about different feelings towards the town being turned into a dam? How does the use of these words position the reader? What other words could have been used?
- Create your own mosaic of an important landmark in your local area.
- On page 181, Cassie talks about telling stories, "She had done all these drafts, all these versions. All of them telling the story of the town. All of them telling the same story differently." Have students write their own accounts of something they were all involved in. Read the stories aloud to the class. How were they different? Did they even tell the same story? Was any story more official than any of the others?
- Create a character chart for the main characters of *Below*. Detail the following for each character: age, appearance, hobbies, personality traits, skills, family and role in the book. Also include a diagram of each character.
- How does the metaphor on page 158 work as a metaphor for the overall narrative of *Below*? "A heavy red glaze could cover a network of tiny hairline fractures that would shatter something utterly if you struck it hard enough in just the right spot." What could be seen as the "tiny hairline fractures" in the story? What did Cassie do to strike the metaphorical fractures in the right spot? What in *Below* "shattered" when the fractures were struck?

After reading *Below*:

- Write a review of *Surface Tension*. Did this match your original expectations of the book?
 - Research Meg McKinlay. Where did she grow up? How do you think this has affected her writing? What other books has she written?
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Meg's inspiration for writing *Below*:

"When I was in about Year 8, my class went on a camp to a town called Tallangatta, in north-eastern Victoria. Tallangatta is near Lake Hume and was actually drowned in the 1950s to make way for the expansion of the lake. When we were there, the water was quite low, and you could see some of the remnants of the old town above the surface, including the beginning of a road that led down into it. I remember being taken by the idea of setting off along the road and following it underwater all the way into the town. It doesn't make sense, but because there was a road, it felt possible somehow. That image sat in the back of my mind for years until one day the line "The day that I was born, they drowned my town" came to me, and the rest of the story slowly built itself around that."