

Author comment

"*Pan's Whisper*, like many of my books, started out as a number of separate ideas which merged while I was out walking one morning. The first idea was linked to memories, as I've often wondered why different people can live the same experience, yet remember it so differently. Sometimes when I hear events that I have been part of recalled, I wonder if I was even there.

The next piece of the puzzle was sparked by "The Two of Us" in *The Age's* "Good Weekend" section. The article was about a foster mum and her foster daughter. Their mutual love and respect was inspiring and this started me thinking about the relationship between foster parents and troubled kids.

Finally, I seemed to come across a run of articles, newspaper reports, TV documentaries and even movies about depression and bipolar. As always, I tried to imagine the situation from a different perspective.

All three issues bobbed in the back of my brain for a long time, while I was writing another novel, *Dare You*. They didn't collide to create *Pan's Whisper* until the editing process for *Dare You* was just about done.

From there, the idea did more mulling around in my head. The characters and setting took form and when the main character's voice developed, I started work in my notebooks. Strange, but one of the main characters, Hunter, just 'popped' into a scene. He was meant to be a minor character but kind of took over. I'm glad he did – I love Hunter.

Before I actually write, I spend a great deal of time planning, scribbling and pasting in notebooks, creating characters, plots and settings. I draw maps, create collages, and write notes. This helps me flesh out the characters and the idea. My notebooks are often referred to as my "crazy notebooks" and I have one for each book I've written. [See pages 3 and 4 for some excerpts from Sue's *Pan's Whisper* notebook.]

As always, the finished book is very different to my initial idea, but the central premise remained the same. It deals with a damaged girl who is angry at everyone, but especially herself.

Questions & Activities

- The author uses a dual narrative structure, with action taking place in two time frames: in the present, narrated from Pan's point of view, and in the past, presented from Morgan's point of view. How effective is this device in generating suspense and drawing the reader into the world of the novel?
- In what way does Pan develop as a character over the course of the novel? Draw a chart depicting these changes. To what extent has her identity as an adolescent been shaped by her experiences as a child?
- What role do the following characters play in helping Pan confront and deal with her past: Ari, Hunter, Merle, Nate, Livia, Ian, Rose, Gemma, Zara, Pan herself? Rank the characters from 1-10 in terms of how influential they are in Pan's recovery. Compare your rankings with a classmate's. Are there any differences? Discuss your reasons for placing characters in their relative positions, then together, negotiate a new, mutually agreed order.

Synopsis

Pan's Whisper

By: Sue Lawson
ISBN: 9781742032061
ARRP: \$18.95
NZRRP: \$21.99
No. of Pages: 352

Learning

Areas:
English
ICT
PDHPE

Themes:

- Identity
- Family
- Fostering
- Mental illness
- Trauma & repression
- Healing & renewal

Age Range:

13+yrs
Secondary school

Genre:

YA fiction

Pan Harper is brash, loud and damaged. Ordered into foster care, Pan is full of anger at her mother and older sister, and is certain that she knows the reality of her past – until she meets Hunter, the boy who understands her story better than anyone else, and who just may be the key to unlocking the truth of Pan's memories. But are some memories best left forgotten? And is Hunter worth Pan breaking her most important rule? – Never. Trust. Anyone.

Exploring powerful questions of family and identity and prompting discussion about the often taboo subject of mental illness, *Pan's Whisper* is a valuable book for classroom study.

About the Author

Sue Lawson is the best-selling author of the *Diva* series. She worked as a radio announcer, teacher, nightclub DJ, shop assistant, swimming teacher and babysitter, before she turned a passion for writing into a career. Sue grew up on a farm near Hamilton, Victoria, and after moving all around the state, now lives in Western Victoria, with her husband Bruce, daughter, Courtney and her dog, Milly. Sue continues to teach, write for children and run writing workshops for children and adults.

More information about Sue can be found at her website, www.suelawson.com.au, and her blog, <http://suelawsonsblog.blogspot.com>.

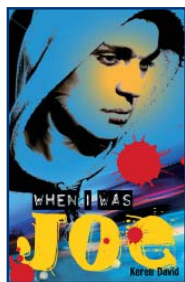
Questions & Activities cont.

- As the character of Merle, write a report on Pan's progress at the end of the novel.
- In your opinion, is it too simplistic to say that Kylie is a bad mother? Do you find her a sympathetic character in any way? To what extent do you feel she is responsible for her behaviour?
- Adopting the voice of Kylie, write a stream-of-consciousness narrative focusing on the events leading up to and immediately after the car accident. Think particularly about her emotions, motivations and sensory impressions.
- Pandora's name comes from a character from Greek mythology who opens a forbidden box. Research this myth. What happens after this event occurs? What escapes from the box, and remains behind? Do you feel this is a deliberate allusion on the part of the author? Discuss the significance of Pan's name in relation to her past. Also consider the references to things hidden or locked inside her. For instance, "Seems to me, we all have these places, like rooms, deep inside us where we lock away everything we can't or don't want to face." (164)
- The book design uses varied font when describing Pan's memories of the car crash. How does this stylistic technique help to create atmosphere and evoke Pan's inner turmoil? Can you think of any other books where font is used to amplify emotion or extend the text in other ways? (Some possibilities include the *Chaos Walking* series by Patrick Ness and *The Savage* by David Almond and Dave McKean.)
- In small groups, identify what you see as the key themes of the novel. Some options include identity, mental illness, trauma and repression, family, fostering and healing/regeneration. Locate quotes that relate to each of these themes and then write an essay in response to the following question: "In *Pan's Whisper*, Sue Lawson uses a variety of narrative structures and language techniques to explore themes relevant to our society today."
- Look at the attached pages from Sue Lawson's "crazy notebooks" (described in her author comment) where she creates collages of images and words that inspire her work. What are some ideas, settings or moods that emerge from these pages?
- Using these pages as inspiration, choose a novel, short story or poem that you have read, and create a collage to represent what you think the author's "crazy notebook" would have looked like, had they used a similar writing process to Sue Lawson.
- Create an alternate cover for *Pan's Whisper* which highlights one of the key themes of the novel. Present your work to the class explaining how you have used visual techniques to promote this theme. Some techniques to consider include colour and tone, composition, juxtaposition/contrast, symbolism, framing, font and lines and vectors.
- Compare and contrast *Pan's Whisper* with *Letters to Leonardo* by Dee White or another book dealing with mental illness. How does each author use character, setting narrative structures and style to explore this theme? How are their attitudes towards this subject matter similar and different?
- Pan's mother, Kylie, suffers from bipolar disorder. Research this illness on the internet. (A useful starting point is the Beyond Blue website: www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=91.592.) Use this information to write a feature article for a magazine or newspaper. Make sure you include the following elements in your article:
 - an arresting headline
 - a by-line
 - subheadings
 - photographs, diagrams, graphs etc
 - an overview of the topic (eg. symptoms, treatment, support services available).
 - facts and statistics to support your opinion
 - quotes and interviews (you can make these up!)
 - opinions from authorities and experts (eg. doctors/psychiatrists, counsellors, and sufferers of bipolar disorder)
 - anecdotes and stories.

For more information about writing a feature article, visit www.squidoo.com/feature-article.

- In the role of a counsellor or psychologist, deliver a speech to the class on how literature can help young people deal with adversity in their lives. Refer to *Pan's Whisper* and at least one other text. (For inspiration, you may like to search Twitter using the hash tag "#YA saves" to read a range of tweets about how Young Adult literature has helped or "saved" readers in their lives.)

If you enjoyed *Pan's Whisper*, you might also like ...



When I Was Joe

By: Keren David
ISBN: 9781847801005
RRP: AU\$18.95/NZ \$19.99
March 2010

When Ty witnesses the murder of another boy, he and his mother are placed in a witness protection scheme. Over the coming months, Ty gradually becomes Joe. But who is he really?



Letters to Leonardo

By: Dee White
ISBN: 9781921150883
RRP: AU\$16.95/NZ \$18.99
July 2009

A unique and powerful story about a fifteen-year-old boy who tries to deal with his mother's mental illness by writing letters to Leonardo da Vinci.



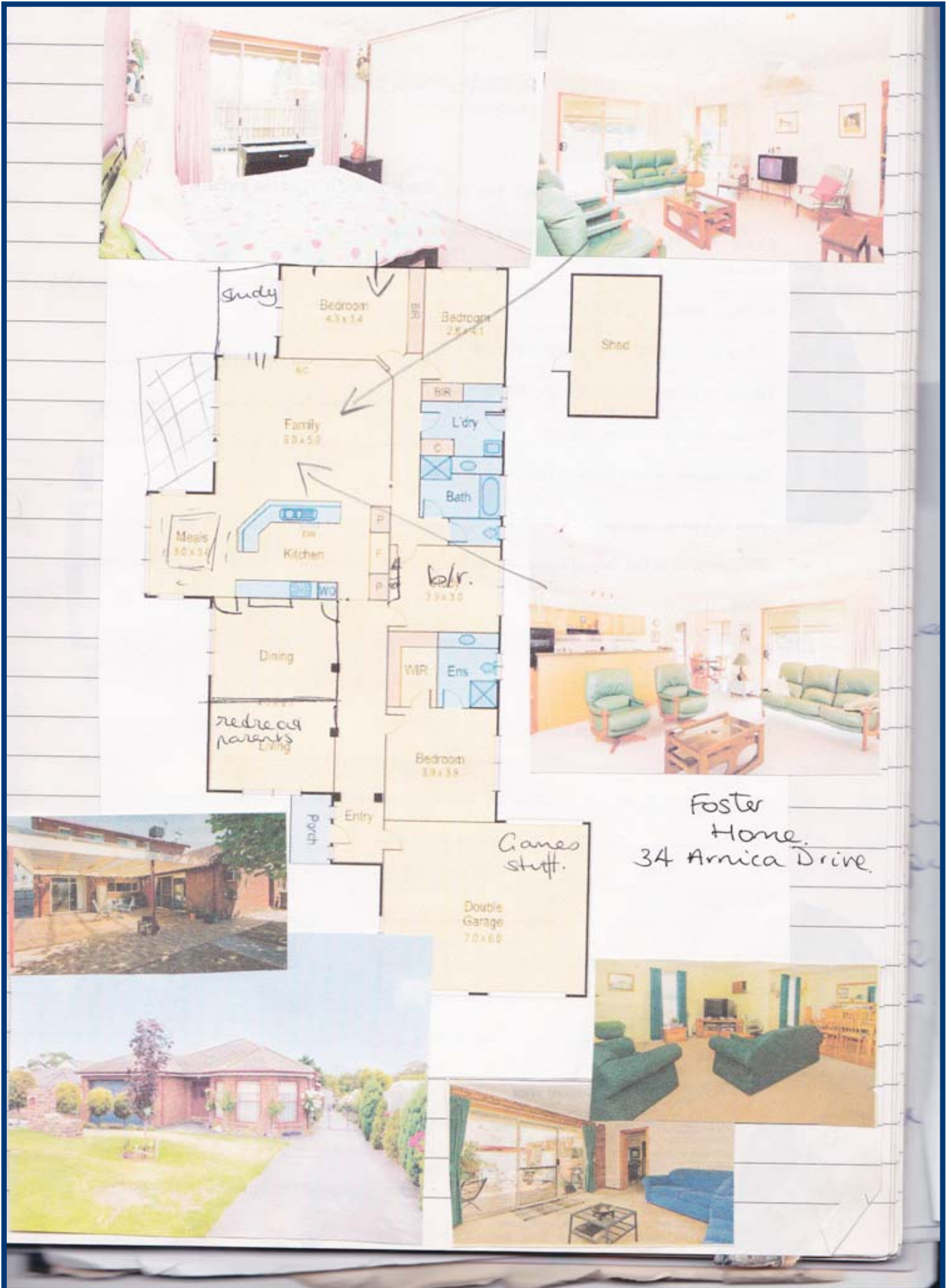
The Sky is Everywhere

By: Jandy Nelson
ISBN: 9781406326307
RRP: AU\$24.95/NZ \$31.99
June 2010

Seventeen-year-old Lennie Walker spends her time tucked safely in the shadow of her older sister, Bailey. But when Bailey dies abruptly, everything changes.

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Pages from the notebook Sue Lawson kept while she was writing *Pan's Whisper* (discussed in the "Author Comment" section)



Study

Bedroom 4.3x3.4

Bedroom 2.5x4.1

Shed

Family 5.0x5.0

Meat's 3.0x3.0

Kitchen

L'dry

Bath

bdr. 3.9x3.0

WIR

Ens

Bedroom 3.8x3.5

Double Garage 7.0x6.0

Games stuff.

redneck parents living

Entry

Porch

Foster Home
34 Arnicia Drive

