

Teacher  
Notes

# Catch a Falling Star

MEG MCKINLAY

TEACHER NOTES

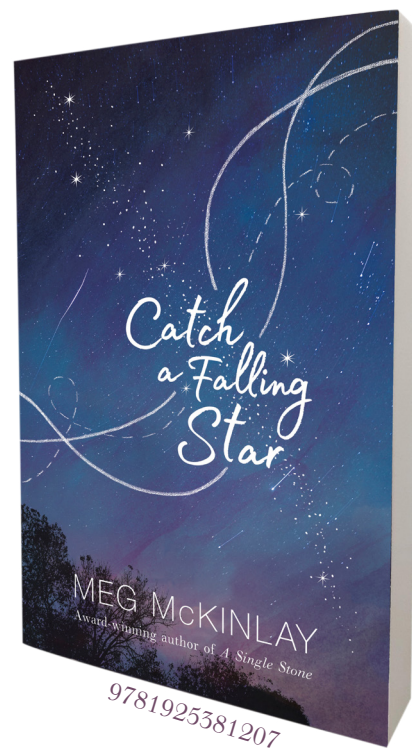
BY ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT

WALKER BOOKS

# Catch a Falling Star

This coming-of-age story by multiple-award-winner Meg McKinlay is about loss and grief, dealing with change and fighting to hold on to what you can, while letting go of what you can't.

It's 1979 and the sky is falling. *Skylab*, that is. Somewhere high above Frankie Avery, one of the world's first space stations is tumbling to Earth. And rushing back with it are old memories. Things twelve-year-old Frankie thought she'd forgotten. Things her mum won't talk about, and which her little brother Newt never knew. Only ... did he? Does he? Because as Skylab circles closer, Newt starts acting strangely. And while the world watches the sky, Frankie keeps her own eyes on Newt. Because if anyone's going to keep him safe, it's her. It always has been. But maybe this is something bigger than splinters and spiders and sleepwalking. Maybe a space station isn't the only thing heading straight for calamity.



MEG MCKINLAY is the author of numerous books ranging from picture books and middle grade fiction through to poetry for adults. Her work includes the much-loved *No Bears*, *Once Upon A Small Rhinoceros* and the critically acclaimed *A Single Stone*, which won the 2016 Prime Minister's Literary Award, among other prizes. Raised in central Victoria, in a TV- and car-free household, Meg was a bookish kid, in love with words and excited by dictionaries. A former academic at the University of Western Australia, where she taught Japanese, Literature and Creative Writing, Meg is now a full-time writer and lives near the ocean in Fremantle, where she is always busy cooking up more books. [www.megmckinlay.com](http://www.megmckinlay.com)

## ALSO BY MEG MCKINLAY



# INTRODUCTION

*I wonder what it would be like to be someone who thinks we actually have control over things. Who believes that if you want to, you can keep them from crashing to the ground. (pages 12–13)*

*It's 1979 and the sky is falling. Skylab, that is. (Back Cover)*

This tender novel is concerned with human nature's twin impulses to rely on scientific evidence or on wishes and magical thinking. Skylab was a bold scientific experiment and its descent a scientific catastrophe. But human beings' responses to it were a mixture of wonder and fear. The heart is pitted against the marvels of science in this heart-warming story about change and loss and letting go.

The death of Frankie Avery's father is inextricably linked to the day Skylab was launched and to the last time she saw her father alive. Her younger brother Newt was actually born on the same date as the launch, which makes the bonds between the space station and this family even more intricate.

Frankie has never really recovered from her father's death and feels that her mother has buried their family's memories of him. Frankie has had to take on a lot of responsibility in the family unit – helping out at home, baby-sitting Newt while her mother works at the hospital. She's used to this but lately things have become more complicated. While Newt is brilliant, he's a magnet for trouble and takes a lot of looking after.

Frankie's best friend Kat is pressuring her to spend more time with her, growing tired of Newt being ever-present. And while Frankie grapples with both the present and the past, other people want her to think about the future. She'll be starting high school soon and her teacher expects her to deliver a talk about her goals in life. But how can she do that when she is, like any twelve-year-old, still discovering her own identity, let alone what she might be doing in years to come?

Frankie used to love learning about the planets with her amateur astronomer father, but with their old Space Shack now derelict and the telescope gone, she has been cut adrift and is in a kind of free-fall, just like the space station orbiting ever closer to Earth. But when things do come to a head, she and Newt and their mother discover that things can be a whole lot brighter when they communicate with each other.

The novel engages with themes and curriculum topics such as: science versus magic, grief, loss and guilt, friendship and love and the power of words. It might be used in several subjects falling under the key Curriculum Areas: Humanities and Social Science, English and Science.

# AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

## THESE TEACHER NOTES ARE FOR

- Primary levels 4-6
- Ages 9-12

## KEY LEARNING AREAS

- English
- History

## THEMES

- Science versus magic
- Grief, loss and guilt
- Friendship and love
- Power of words

|                                       |                                     | Year 4                              | Year 5                              | Year 6                 |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>English</b>                        |                                     |                                     |                                     |                        |
| <b>Language</b>                       | Language for interaction            | ACELA1488<br>ACELA1489              | ACELA1502                           | ACELA1516<br>ACELA1517 |
|                                       | Text structure and organisation     | ACELA1490                           | ACELA1504<br>ACELA1797              | ACELA1518<br>ACELA1520 |
|                                       | Expressing and developing ideas     | ACELA1498                           | ACELA1512                           | ACELA1523<br>ACELA1525 |
| <b>Literature</b>                     | Literature and context              | ACELT1602                           | ACELT1608                           | ACELT1613              |
|                                       | Responding to literature            | ACELT1603<br>ACELT1604              | ACELT1609<br>ACELT1795              | ACELT1614<br>ACELT1615 |
|                                       | Examining literature                | ACELT1605                           | ACELT1610<br>ACELT1611              | ACELT1616              |
|                                       | Creating literature                 | ACELT1607<br>ACELT1794              | ACELT1612<br>ACELT1798              | ACELT1618<br>ACELT1800 |
| <b>Literacy</b>                       | Texts in context                    |                                     | ACELY1698                           | ACELY1708              |
|                                       | Interpreting, analysing, evaluating | ACELY1690<br>ACELY1691<br>ACELY1692 | ACELY1701<br>ACELY1702<br>ACELY1703 | ACELY1711<br>ACELY1713 |
|                                       | Creating texts                      | ACELY1694                           | ACELY1704                           | ACELY1714              |
| <b>Humanities and Social Sciences</b> |                                     |                                     |                                     |                        |
| <b>Inquiry and skills</b>             | Questioning                         | ACHASSI073                          | ACHASSI094                          | ACHASSI122             |
|                                       | Researching                         | ACHASSI076                          | ACHASSI095<br>ACHASSI097            | ACHASSI125             |
|                                       | Analysing                           | ACHASSI077                          | ACHASSI099                          | ACHASSI127             |
|                                       | Evaluating and reflecting           | ACHASSI079<br>ACHASSI080            | ACHASSI104                          | ACHASSI132             |

\*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian Curriculum ([www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)). However, this is not an exhaustive list of Australian Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text. Information is current as at February 2019.

# DISCUSSION POINTS & ACTIVITIES

## A. CRITICAL LITERACY – BEFORE AND AFTER READING THE NOVEL

Critical literacy depends on an understanding of both the conventions of a text, and the notions and expectations we bring to it as a reader. These expectations can be determined by a previous knowledge of a writer's body of work, from critical reception such as reviews or media coverage. Consider these and other points as you read and discuss this novel:

- What do the front cover text and back cover blurb indicate about the novel? How did these align with what you read?
- What does the book's title seem to suggest?
- Compare the novel to Meg McKinlay's other novels such as *A Single Stone*, *Surface Tension* and *Annabel Again*.

## B. THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

The novel deals with the following themes and curriculum topics:

### Science Versus Magic

*Newt hates it when people talk about wishing on stars.* (page 94)

In this novel magical thinking is pitted against science. Frankie was raised as a young astronomer by her father Charlie Avery, and her brother Newt is a keen young scientist. The history of Skylab, "One of the world's very first space stations" (page 11), is related intricately to this family's personal history by key events. Newt was born on the same day and month as its launch – 15 April – albeit two years earlier, in 1971. Skylab's launch date in 1973 also represents the last time Frankie saw her dad, as he went missing not long after. Years later, Frankie finds in Newt's room the front page of a scrapbook in which her father planned to work with Newt to track Skylab's progress (pages 138–9). He encouraged Frankie to love astronomy and both she and Newt are sceptical about "magic" and the crazy theories people develop about Skylab (page 136). Newt becomes obsessed with the factual details of Skylab and is determined to share his

knowledge with both his family and other kids in the schoolyard. He draws on science to try to point out the futility of trying to protect yourself with a cardboard helmet: "Even if only a tiny piece hits you, the velocity would—" (page 125)

Despite their love of science, though, both siblings succumb to the power of wishes. For example, Frankie joins the millions of others who think that by "meditating" together they can stop Skylab from falling. (page 88) Newt believes that maybe his dad is still out there somewhere and that Skylab's return might uncover him. Through a complicated process of magical thinking, Newt becomes convinced that the Greek myth which explains the formation of the Ursa Major – or "Great Bear" – constellation could be analogous to the disappearance of his father. In the myth, Callisto was turned into a bear by an angry goddess and later shot with an arrow. She was saved from death by being "plucked into the heavens and set among the stars." (page 169) When Newt reads the story of a pilot who disappeared after seeing a spaceship nearby and has since, according to psychics, been discovered living "safe and sound" (page 170) in the Great Bear constellation, preparing to "return to Earth by the end of this year" (page 170), logic and wishful thinking collide to form an unexpected theory. What if a similar thing happened to his father? Maybe he isn't dead after all, but was saved by Skylab? If Newt can just find out "what time they took off" (page 158), he can work out whether Skylab was near Dad's plane when it crashed. And if his theory is right, when Skylab returns, perhaps his father will too.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** When Newt and Frankie talk about Skylab and their dad's death (page 212), Frankie concludes that "things don't always have to make sense, you know." (page 213) Wishing doesn't make any sense but they both harbour secret wishes, perhaps suggesting that there is room for some middle ground, as Frankie also implies in her class talk: "And even though it's science it feels a bit like magic, as well." (page 232) While both Newt and Frankie value the rational world of science, they also want to believe in magic or

wishes although they might deny this impulse. Do most of us rely on a combination of both?

### Grief, Loss and Guilt

*Because as I look at Kat I realise something. That nothing bad has ever really happened to her. She doesn't know things can change at any moment, that the bottom can drop out of the world. (page 112)*

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Frankie, Newt and their mother have not recovered from the death of their dad/husband six years earlier in 1973. His abandoned “Space Shack” is a constant reminder that he is gone. Frankie also feels guilt that she didn't say goodbye to her dad (page 114) and has always regretted that. Her speculation about his ill-fated flight – what he might have seen and felt – is vivid and raw. (page 45) Discuss the interplay of grief, loss and guilt in this novel.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Frankie loves her mum but grows conflicted about the ways in which she has buried memories of Dad – by putting family photos away, selling his telescope and locking up the Space Shack. Frankie longs for the family to speak of him, to get out the photos and look at them together, rather than pretending he was never there: “Because looking at [the photos] makes you sad. It makes you think He was here and now he's gone. But the thing is, it makes you happy, too. It makes you think He was here.” (page 66) How important are these memories to both Frankie and Newt in healing their sense of loss?

### Friendship and Love

*“Did you know that even though the planets have their own orbits, they can still affect other planets? They can draw them in closer. Or move them further away.” I look at Kat and she's got the biggest smile on her face. (page 233)*

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Kat is jealous of the time her best friend Frankie spends with her baby brother Newt. “It was because of Newt. I had to – Isn't it always?” (page 123) This tension escalates until Kat

explodes: “He's eight. You don't have to look after him every second.” (page 127) They argue (pages 200–3), but later re-unite the night that Skylab falls and Kat apologises: “I'm sorry about before. About everything.” (page 222) Kat also gives Newt a piece of Skylab. They reconcile and are stronger than ever as Frankie realises that friendship is a matter of give and take, of ups and downs. “Because we're not fighting, even though we were before. And maybe we will again. Maybe you have to sometimes if you want to stay friends.” (page 229) Discuss this last quote.

### Power of Words

*Sometimes all people want to hear is that there's no cause for alarm. Sometimes telling them that is better than worrying about the truth. (page 185)*

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The novel is concerned with and celebrates the power of words and the need for honesty in their usage. Frankie observes media reports which put a particular spin on events, using innocuous words like “Expected. Arrive. Tumble.” (page 81) for the unknown trajectory of Skylab as it plummets dangerously to earth. Later, as the danger escalates, she observes the ways in which language changes in such reports: “They're saying ‘plummet’ now instead of ‘arrive’ and ‘tumble’. They're saying ‘line of fire’ and ‘charred remains’ instead of ‘sprinkle’ and ‘spectacular’.” (page 186) Frankie's dad's death was treated similarly: “When they said Radio contact lost and it sounded like all you needed to do was adjust an antenna and he'd be back again, right as rain. Later they said Search Abandoned. Hope Lost.” (page 36) “And then I wonder if NASA would ever actually say there was cause for alarm, and if so, at what point?” (pages 182–3) After Skylab re-enters, NASA, and hence the media, report that it has “come down safely over the ocean” (page 227). It is the residents of south-west WA who have to point out that it has “actually fallen on our heads!” (page 227) Donald Trump's famous catchphrase “fake news” has become symbolic of a wider discussion about both the duty and the right of journalists to report accurately. How does the media currently utilise words?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Many individuals also use language carelessly or manipulatively. Kat uses carefully chosen words in an effort to gain high marks; Frankie’s mum prefers not to speak about her feelings and bottles them up. Frankie grows tired of her mum thanking her for all she does (page 62), coming to see her words as hollow. Those feelings come to a head when she discovers her mother playing a game with a young patient (page 162) when she has left her children at home after school, as usual. Frankie is also tired of clichés, of adults speaking about her and Newt and saying that “They’ll bounce back.” or “They’ll turn out fine.” (page 164) However Frankie herself isn’t always able to be frank, either, as in the exchange with her mother about the novel *Storm Boy* on page 167. It isn’t until the night Skylab falls to Earth, though, that Frankie is finally able to share her feelings honestly with her mother – about her absence and her distance – breaking down in front of her and saying “We’re not tennis balls ... We’re not biscuits ... I’m not fine.” (page 217)

What was the main message of *Catch a Falling Star* about the use of, and honesty in words?

[See also Voice, Style and Language 5. below.]

## C. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

### Plot & Structure

1. This novel is structured chronologically but also includes Frankie’s memories of the past. [See Voice, Style and Use of Language 3. below for page references referring to Frankie’s past.]

**DISCUSSION POINT:** How important are these flashbacks in understanding the action?

2. Pacing, Tension and Suspense are essential in crafting a novel’s structure. Each chapter should begin and end with an enticing statement, for example: Beginning: “It’s 2.53 on a Friday when I find out the sky is falling.” (Ch 1, page 7) Ending: “But I’m not laughing now.” (Ch 20, page 171)

**ACTIVITY:** Study and discuss the pacing of the novel, and therefore how the reader’s engagement is influenced by these beginning and endings.

**ACTIVITY:** Use one of the chapter beginnings to write your own story loosely connected to the characters and events in this novel.

3. The novel works (as many novels do) as a series of narrative arcs, with set-up, confrontation (or conflict) and resolution in a number of scenes, and then a major plot turning point.

**ACTIVITY:** Draw a narrative map or chart showing the key causal events and points at which the narrative rises, falls, and then rises again to this major turning point.

4. The events which make up the plot of a novel are imagined by the writer to further develop characters and themes.

**ACTIVITY:** Choose one incident in this novel and what it demonstrates about the characters involved.

5. Plot Denouement or Conclusion.

**ACTIVITY:** Invite students to summarise the denouement of this novel and what it meant to them. (You may be surprised by the variety of interpretations.)

### Characters

1. This novel includes several central and minor characters:
  - Frankie Avery (Narrator)
  - Frankie’s nearly eight year old, very intelligent brother Newt
  - their mother
  - Frankie’s best friend Kat Blair and her over-protective mother
  - Frankie’s teacher, Mrs Easton
  - The relief teacher, Mr Despotovski
  - Her classmates Jeremy Ricardo, Damien, Trevor, Jenny King, Rachel, Dale, Darren Mackie, Marcus Simmonds
  - Revhead Ronnie, the school bus driver.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Which of the characters did you like most/least and why?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Were there any “minor” characters you would have liked to have seen feature more in the action?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** How does Frankie’s character change in the course of the novel?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Newt is a single-minded character: “He’s going to do what he’s going to do, no matter what anyone else says. He always has.” (p 140) or “The only time he puts himself in a group is when he accidentally wanders through one on the way to somewhere else.” (p 125) How would you assess his nature and character? Write a description of him from what you have read in this novel.

2. Characters are sometimes described metaphorically using similes, metaphors and other figures of speech, eg. “It’s like he spins a little world and disappears inside it.”(page 66)

**ACTIVITY:** Find examples of character descriptions which employ such literary devices.

3. Characters can be further described using details of their setting which “echo” or suggest their characteristics, eg. Read this passage: “We’re on the bus after school ... to plant his foot and cruise.” (pages 16–7). The description gives the reader a hint regarding the natures of each of the characters mentioned.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Find other examples of this narrative strategy.

4. Characters can also be described in contrast to each other.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Which characters are contrasted in this novel?

5. Dialogue can also add to the characterisation, for example, Frankie and Kat speak to each other here: “I’ve finished with these ... I’m still thinking about it.” (page 80)

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Discuss what this dialogue reveals about the two characters,

**ACTIVITY:** Invite students to locate examples of any of the above strategies for describing a character in this novel.

## Voice, Style and Use of Language

1. Narrative Perspective, Person and Tense.

**ACTIVITY:** Did you feel that the first person perspective suited this narrative? How might it have worked differently in third person or second person?

**ACTIVITY:** This is written in present tense but Frankie’s narration often uses the past tense as well. How does this mixture of tenses influence the narrative?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Who else might have narrated this story, and how might that have changed the action? For example, write about an incident in this novel in Newt’s voice instead of Frankie’s. How does this change the narrative?

2. Voice is created by a range of devices including syntax, choice of words, and literary devices such as metaphor and simile. The use of language in descriptions is potent in this novel. For example: “She said the earth was a patchwork of colours and the ocean was a bowl full of sky” (page 45); “The Shack squats at the end like an old man bent against the wind.” (page 89); “It’s a clear night and the sky is a carpet of stars.” (page 91).

**ACTIVITY:** Read this passage: “In the distance, there are hundreds of fiery pieces ... The rattle of dice in a plastic cup... like fireworks” (page 207) Discuss the techniques used within it.



**ACTIVITY:** Find other examples of such techniques. Speak with students about the need to use language which is inventive and original. Use the table below as a template to record appropriate quotes.

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Simile          |  |
| Metaphor        |  |
| Personification |  |

3. Frankie's thoughts regarding "things that fall from the sky" are inserted between chapters:
- Pages 14–5 between Ch 1 and 2
  - Pages 44–5 between Ch 5 and 6
  - Pages 69–70 between Ch 8 and 9
  - Pages 93–4 between Ch 11 and 12
  - Pages 121–2 between Ch 14 and 15
  - Page 163 between Ch 19 and 20
  - Page 172 between Ch 20 and 21
  - Page 192 between Ch 22 and 23
  - Page 206 between Ch 24 and 25.

They are also printed in a different font. Analyse the different tone Frankie adopts in these sections.

4. This novel is full of humour, for example, the description of Skylab (page 35) or the class teasing Mrs Easton about Skylab and her husband Merv (page 97).

**ACTIVITY:** What other humorous passages did you notice in this novel? Use the table below as a template to record appropriate quotes.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Sarcasm      |  |
| Irony        |  |
| Exaggeration |  |
| Black Humour |  |

5. This novel makes use of other texts as literary reference or a point of thematic comparison. For example, Colin Thiele's classic Australian novel *Storm Boy* is the subject of an assignment given to the class by Mrs Easton (page 40). Frankie writes an essay which wins her top marks: "*Storm Boy* is about death, I write. It's about life, too. And love." (page 120) She

empathises with the character Storm Boy and later describes Newt's running after Skylab as a "*Storm Boy* dash across the hills as if nothing can stop you, because it can't, because you're fixed on one thing only and it's the most important thing in the world." (page 208) Identify and read the passages which compare this family's situation to the novel *Storm Boy* and discuss how the two relate to each other.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** What was Frankie's assessment of Storm Boy?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Read Jeremy's analysis of character in *Storm Boy*. Is he addressing the topic accurately?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Marcus Simmonds makes fun of Frankie when she mishears what Jeremy had said in his talk, and she replies to Mrs Easton: "Um ... the sky's falling?" Markus retorts: "Oh, no, Chicken Little. We must go and tell the king." (page 9) This also makes reference to the very first line in the novel. How does the cautionary folktale *Chicken Little* relate to this novel?

### Setting

1. Description of detail: A vivid, convincing setting relies on description which makes it visually come alive for the reader, by its observation of detail, rather than describing a static picture, for example, "Birds. From the heat, sometimes. Up north, it gets so hot, birds fall clean at your feet." (page 44)

**ACTIVITY:** Find quotes in which description of detail enhances the reader's perception.

2. Literary Devices: Place is evoked by evocative description, employing a range of literary devices. "In spite of myself, ... a hole in the roof." (page 36)

**ACTIVITY:** Analyse how this passage works to create a sense of the place. What devices does the writer employ in this passage?

3. Description should be informed by all the senses – sounds, tastes, smell as well as vision. For example, “There’s a burning smell in the air, almost electric. The bush is stirring around me – not just with night-time noises but others, too. Birds have been dragged from sleep. They rustle and squawk, try their morning calls and then stop, confused. Dogs are barking somewhere, everywhere.” (p 209)

**ACTIVITY:** Locate other such examples as you read the text.

## Genre

### 1. Rite of Passage Fiction

Novels for middle grade or pre-teen readers often employ the “rite of passage” trope, as YA novels do, in order to explore the maturation of the main character(s).

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Mrs Easton has asked her class to prepare a “Fantastic Futures” talk about their aspirations for the future. But Frankie’s anxiety escalates since “now” is worry enough for her without thinking about her future and seemingly impossible secret desire to be an astronomer. Kat’s self-assurance in contrast (page 48) to Frankie’s self-doubt is constantly in evidence. She finally does give the talk, though, and confesses her dream: “I want to be an astronomer.” (page 230) What gives her the confidence to speak out?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Reading *Storm Boy* is a class project (p 40) but its themes also relate to Frankie’s situation and character.

### 2. Historical Fiction

Historical fiction can encompass works not simply set in earlier centuries but in previous decades, too, for evoking recent history can entail just as much research on the part of the writer.

**ACTIVITY:** This is set in 1979. What details did you notice in the novel which pinpoint the time

period accurately? (For example, no one has a mobile phone which limits what we have come to expect of communication!)

3. Does this novel fall into any other genre?

## Writing Exercises

1. Expository Writing: Write an essay about one of the Themes & Curriculum Topics above. Use the following resource as an example of the techniques which might be used: descriptive, sequential, compare/contrast, cause/effect/ problem/solution. ‘Expository Writing’  
[http://web.gccaz.edu/~mdinchak/ENG101/expository\\_writing.htm](http://web.gccaz.edu/~mdinchak/ENG101/expository_writing.htm)  
See also: ‘Types of Expository Essays Explained’  
<https://best-custom-writings.com/types-of-expository-essays>
2. Book Cover Blurb: The packaging of a book includes the blurb as well as the cover image, both of which must offer the reader an insight into the contents, and the emotional impact of a novel (without giving the ending away), and must also market the book to its readers. Examine the cover of this novel, assessing how the front cover images and the back cover blurb interact and are descriptive of the novel after you’ve read it. Then make up your own back cover blurb summarising the themes of the novel, in 150–200 words.
3. Conduct a Debate: Invite students to write an argument for the affirmative or negative for the topic: ‘Science is better than magic’.
4. Poem: Write a haiku poem about the Skylab. Use resources such as “Haiku” by Leanne Guenther Kidzone [www.kidzone.ws/poetry/haiku.htm](http://www.kidzone.ws/poetry/haiku.htm)
5. Ballad Lyrics: Write the lyrics for a song in ballad form about Frankie and Newt’s Skylab adventure.

## Quotes for Discussion

1. *I thought that was a good thing. Easier. Like putting the photos away. but you can't put Skylab away. It's coming whether we like it or not.* (page 43)
2. *At one point when I look up, the picture is worse than I've seen it. "Don't worry," Newt says. "It's science. Knowing what doesn't work helps you figure out what does."* (page 73)
3. *"It's not like they're going to let anyone get hurt, Frankie."* (page 112)
4. *The planets don't do that. They're near each other but they don't touch. They follow their own paths, which never cross.* (page 168)
5. *"Did you know," he says, "that even if you wish for something really hard ... I mean, really really hard ... that it still doesn't make any difference?"* (page 213)

## Further Reading Ideas for Class Discussion

1. Read *Storm Boy* and compare to this novel.
2. Create a classroom library of middle grade fiction about similar topics and compare to this novel.
3. Read a passage aloud from the novel and discuss with the class how it works as a narrative.
4. Choose any part of the novel written in dialogue and dramatise it with a number of students in the class. How does their interpretation change the way you read that passage?

5. Test your students' comprehension on aspects of the novel by asking a series of questions such as: Is Kat's mother over-protective?

## D. VISUAL LITERACY ACTIVITIES

1. Create a comic strip version of one of the episodes in this novel.
2. Design your own alternative cover and add the blurbs you wrote in Writing Exercises 2. above.
3. Create a slogan and design a poster to promote one of the themes included in this novel.
4. Draw and collage a picture of Skylab based on your research.
5. Paint a family portrait of Frankie and her family as you see them in this book.

## E. FURTHER IDEAS USING TECHNOLOGY

1. Conduct an author study by visiting websites containing information about, Meg McKinlay, interviews with her, or reviews of her books.
2. Create a book trailer for this novel
3. Design a poster on screen to advertise this novel.

# CONCLUSION

This is a coming-of age novel about the power of love, and of the human heart. It's about families and loss and friends and change. It's an intricately constructed work which traverses the delicate membrane separating science and magic, as well as the intersections between wishes and hope. It's about finding what you want to hold on to and letting go when the time is right.

PRAISE FOR  
**A SINGLE STONE**  
BY MEG MCKINLAY

*... engaging, beautifully written novel that manages to pose big questions about gender and power, and thoroughly entertain. This is a quietly powerful, polished story ... FOUR STARS*

**Books + Publishing**

*I can highly recommend this book. It takes a brave soul to question the status quo.*

**ReadPlus**

*'A Single Stone' is everything I want in book for our young people: beautifully haunting writing; each word carefully considered; a melodic rhythm to the story; and issues so varied and vast that young minds are set alight with imaginings and then burn slow with questions and gathered wisdom.*

**Children's Books Daily**

*This is a fascinating, beautifully written and extraordinary original story.*

**Magpies**

[WALKERBOOKS.COM.AU/TEACHERS](http://WALKERBOOKS.COM.AU/TEACHERS)

TEACHER NOTES

NEWSLETTER

BOOK LISTS

COMPETITIONS

**WALKER BOOKS**