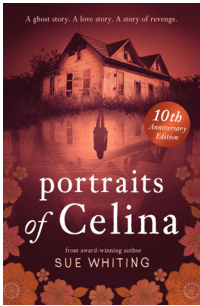




# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## Portraits of Celina

Author: Sue Whiting  
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PAPERBACK

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia      Ph +61 2 9517 9577  
Locked Bag 22                      Fax +61 2 9517 9997  
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

For enquiries please contact:  
educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au

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### Outline:

A haunting and page-turning classic from an award-winning author.

Celina O'Malley was sixteen years old when she disappeared. Now, almost forty years later, Bayley is living in Celina's old house, sleeping in the same room, wearing her clothes and, most strangely, hearing her voice. What does Celina want with Bayley?

But Bayley has her own problems, she's dealing with her father's death, the move to a new town and her family falling to pieces around her. Bayley needs to solve the mystery of Celina before it's all too late.

A ghost story. A love story. A story of revenge.

"Once again Whiting has captured the angst of being a teenager and finding one's place in the world ... Whiting writes seriously good stories that draw you in and keep you hooked until the end. 4 ½ stars (Highly Recommended)." - **Good Reading Magazine**

"Thirteen to seventeen-year-old girls will be absorbed by Bayley and Celina's stories. The narrative moves quickly and relationships drive much of the interest. The lake and bush setting create a powerful, atmospheric backdrop to the action, and the natural elements enhance this gothic Australian mystery." - **Magpies Magazine**

### Author/Illustrator Information:

Sue Whiting is an award-winning children's and YA author, editor and former primary school teacher. Sue writes for many age groups, from picture books through to YA, including the bestselling *Missing*, the acclaimed *The Book of Chance* and several CBCA Notable Books.

As a storyteller and schools' performer, Sue has informed, inspired and entertained thousands of kids across the country. Sue is passionate about the power of story and is an advocate for reading and writing for pleasure.

### How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

<p><b>These notes are for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary years 7-10</li> <li>• Ages 13+</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Learning Areas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> </ul>	<p align="center"><b>National Curriculum Focus:*</b></p> <p align="center">English content descriptions include:</p>				<p>*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.</p>
<p><b>Example of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young Adult fiction</li> <li>• Novel</li> </ul>	<p><b>Themes/Ideas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love • Relationships</li> <li>• Revenge • Supernatural • Thriller • Suspense</li> <li>• Mystery • Murder</li> </ul>	<p>Year 7</p> <p>ACELA1528 ACELA1529 ACELA1782 ACELT1619 ACELT1620 ACELT1621 ACELT1622 ACELT1625 ACELY1765 ACELY1621 ACELY1723</p>	<p>Year 8</p> <p>ACELA1541 ACELA1545 ACELT1626 ACELT1806 ACELT1627 ACELT1628 ACELT1807 ACELT1629 ACELT1630 ACELT1632 ACELY1729</p>	<p>Year 9</p> <p>ACLEA1550 ACELA1552 ACELA1553 ACELA1556 ACELA1561 ACELT1633 ACELT1771 ACELT1634 ACELT1635 ACELT1772 ACELT1811</p>	<p>Year 10</p> <p>ACELA1563 ACELA1564 ACELA1565 ACELT1639 ACELT1640 ACELT1812 ACELT1815 ACELT1749 ACELY1751 ACELY1752</p>	



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

## Sue Whiting on writing *Portraits of Celina*

The idea for *Portraits of Celina* snuck up on me.

I was busy writing a totally different book at the time, but something wasn't working in the manuscript, so I gave it to my daughter to read. After some scathing but "right on the money" feedback, I ditched that particular story. But the setting and backstory I had created intrigued me and I couldn't let my characters go. So I decided to go exploring and see where it took me.

At this point, the character of Celina O'Malley was just part of the backstory, an element of the tragic history of the house at Tallowood, which my protagonist, Bayley Anderson, and her grief-stricken family move in to, in a desperate attempt to mend their lives.

But, much like the way Celina wheedles her way into Bayley's life in the novel, Celina wheedled her way into the forefront of my brain and subsequently into the main storyline. She didn't want to be merely backstory; she wanted a bigger role. And what Celina wants, Celina gets.

So without ever intending to, I found that I was writing a rather creepy ghost story. And I am thankful to Celina and her persistent, demanding nature. Celina may have got her own way again, but I got to write her story. And it was some story.



## Sue Whiting on scaring her readers

"Give them pleasure. The same pleasure they have when they wake up from a nightmare." Alfred Hitchcock

I didn't set out to write a creepy story. But it seems that I have.

Early responses from readers of *Portraits of Celina* are that the novel is "seriously creepy". This comment is often followed by grimaces and shudders, and then the sharing of favourite "freak out" moments. All relayed with huge grins and much wide-eyed glee. Fantastic and appreciated feedback for me as the author, but it got me thinking what a weird lot we human beings are! Why do we gain pleasure from reading stories that scare us?

The answer can be found in biology and evolution. Feeling fear is a primeval response that has contributed to our species staying alive and thriving, that has saved us from many dangers.

The science goes like this. When we are confronted with a dangerous situation, the brain immediately releases a surge of hormones, in particular, adrenaline, but also others such as dopamine. These hormones trigger our fear response that allows us to react swiftly. Our bodies go on high alert, we are charged with energy and our senses are intensified. Essential things for survival.

Now, for many, when these hormones are released in non-dangerous situations, where there is little or no risk of physical harm, this heady rush of hormones results in a type of exhilaration, or at the very least, exciting, pleasurable feelings. All thrill, but no price! Perfect.

I can assure you it is very unlikely that I will ever bungee jump off a bridge, go skydiving or swim with sharks. I'm not even that keen on roller coaster rides. For me, there is no better place to get my dose of thrills and chills than curling up on my sofa in the safety of my own home caught in the suspense of a nail-biting novel, experiencing fear vicariously.

So I am pleased to have written something a little creepy – something that allows readers the same pleasure as waking from a nightmare!

Enjoy the rush.



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

## Discussion Questions and Activities

There is only one portrait of Celina in the novel, but the title refers to “portraits”. What is the significance of the title of *Portraits of Celina*? Does it have more than one meaning?

*“Looking back, I realise it was the first time I experienced how cruel life can be. How swiftly a simple act can change it. It wouldn’t be the last.”* (Page 8)

Which events are Bayley referring to in this quote? Discuss the use of this foreshadowing as a literary device. How would the beginning of the story change without it?

### CHARACTER:

Write a character study of each of the following. Include a description of their appearance, personality and list adjectives that could be used to describe them.

- Bayley
- Celina
- Oliver
- Kath
- Amelia
- Seth
- Gran
- Bud

Choose three pairs of characters and describe their relationship.

The basis for healthy relationships is honesty. Discuss this statement in relation to the relationships in the novel. How does honesty figure in Bayley’s relationships with the people close to her? (Oliver? Mum? Amelia? Deb? Seth?) Is Bayley an honest person? Is she justified in being dishonest or in keeping secrets?

*Portraits of Celina* is written as a first-person narrative through Bayley’s eyes, meaning the information the reader has about characters and events is how Bayley has interpreted them. Pick a key sequence in the novel and rewrite it from Oliver’s perspective. How does Oliver feel about Bayley?

How does Bayley develop as a character over the course of the novel? Identify specific points in the story that signal growth or change. Present these on a timeline.

### DEALING WITH GRIEF:

The death of Bayley’s father has a profound effect on Bayley and her family. Write about how each character is affected by their grief and how they begin to deal with it by the end of the novel.

Has moving to Tallowood helped? Or has it hindered their recovery? Is it possible to “run away” from your grief? Is, in your opinion, a “fresh start” a good idea?

Kath, Bayley’s mother, is pulled between providing for her family, being present for her grieving children and dealing with her own grief. How well do you think she handles the situation? Imagine you are Kath and write a diary entry exploring Kath’s conflicting emotions and what you think would be on her mind.

How does grief affect Bob/Robbie? Celina’s parents? Do you think Celina is grieving? What evidence can you find to support this?

### THE MURDER:

At what point did you realise Bud was the murderer? Did it spoil the suspense of the novel, knowing so soon?

Bud has been holding onto the knowledge that he killed Celina thirty years earlier. How has his guilt manifested itself over the years? Does Bud feel remorseful about murdering Celina?

Write a newspaper report on the discovery of Celina’s fate and the killer’s identity at the end of the novel. Make sure to write an unbiased story based only on the facts that you would have gained from interviewing key witnesses.

### THE HAUNTING:

How does the ghost of Celina O’Malley communicate with Bayley? Write a list of these methods. Can you pinpoint the moment when Bayley realises she is being haunted?

The spirit of Celina heavily influences Bayley’s behaviour at times. Discuss how it would feel to have an uncontrollable outside influence changing your behaviour.

Bayley and Celina have a very similar physical appearance. What is the significance of this connection?

Have a class debate based on the following statement: Celina’s actions (as a ghost) were justified even though she put Bayley in danger. Have groups argue both sides of the statement using evidence from text.

Celina is revealed as being very manipulative. In what ways does Celina manipulate Bayley? What impact does this have on Bayley’s life?



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## PERCEPTIONS:

How does Bayley perceive Celina? Does her view of Celina change during the course of the novel? Outline Bayley's view of Celina at various points of the story. (Beginning/middle/end.) Why does it change? Is the change justified?

How do Bayley's perceptions of Celina differ from Deb's? From Gran's? Robbie's? Whose are correct? Do people you know have different perceptions of the same person? Why is this so?

On page 249 Bayley notes: *"And it occurs to me that you can never really know anyone. Not without crawling inside a person's head."* Discuss this statement. Do we ever really know anyone? Does the person sitting next to you really know you? Do your parents, friends, etc.? How does social media figure in this idea?

## CELINA'S WORLD:

List things from the book that demonstrate life in the seventies. How has the world changed? What things have stayed the same?

Have a class discussion about the evolution of friendship dynamics from Celina's youth to Bayley's. How have new technologies changed the way that friends interact?

Research the hippie culture of the 1960s/70s. Write a one-page report on hippies covering their beliefs and interests.

## GENERAL:

Keep a "Vocab Journal" while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar and look up their meaning. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and write a note next to each explaining why you like that word/phrase.

Write a book review of *Portraits of Celina* that discusses what you liked/disliked about it, who you think is the intended audience and who you think would like to read it. Compare this book to other books by Sue Whiting and other books that are on a similar subject. Use persuasive language to encourage the reader to agree with your point of view.