



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Missing

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

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Outline:

What do you hope for when there is no hope? In search of this answer, award-winning Australian author Sue Whiting delivers a confronting mystery for younger readers.

Mackenzie da Luca's mother is missing – she's vanished without a trace in the jungles of Panama. Now, 116 days later Mackenzie and her dad are in those same jungles. Her dad is desperate to find out what's happened to his wife. And Mackenzie is desperate to make sure he doesn't ...

Author/Illustrator Information:

Sue Whiting lives and works in a sleepy coastal village near Sydney, where she spends her days dreaming up adventures for her characters and trying to write them down. Sue has written numerous books in a variety of genres: fiction and nonfiction, picture books through to YA, including the bestselling *The Firefighters*, and the award-winning *A Swim in the Sea*. Her picture book *Platypus*, illustrated by Mark Jackson, was a CBCA 2016 Notable Book. A former primary school teacher with a special interest in literacy education and children's literature, Sue is a highly experienced speaker who loves sharing her passion for story and storytelling, reading and writing with people of all ages. She also works as a freelance editor, writing coach and mentor.

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.

These notes are for:

- Primary years 4-7
- Ages 10+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Novel

Themes/Ideas:

- Acceptance
- Emotional and Physical Journeys
- Resilience
 - Trust
 - Guilt
 - Hope



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before Reading

Before reading *Missing*, view the cover of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The tagline
- The publisher
- The blurb
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Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? 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.

Compare the tone of chapters one and two. Based on the information in these two chapters alone, have a class discussion about what kind of person you think Mackenzie is – what is important to her? What are her worries? Why does Mackenzie seem so different in these chapters?

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 their child in a crisis?
- What role does trust play in a family?

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

The author employs a technique of alternating chapters between the past and present. Why do you think she chose to write the novel this way? Consider the pacing of the story, the amount of information the reader is given and how it increases suspense. How do you think the novel would be different if the chapters were in chronological order?

What is the meaning of the title *Missing*? Does it have more than one meaning? Does it mean different things to different characters?

How do the characters of Billie Jean and Carlo affect Mackenzie? Do you think they are helpful or supportive? Why? How might Mackenzie's journey have been different if she didn't have Billie Jean or Carlo there to talk to or help her?

The author presents some of Mackenzie's thoughts by repeating the same line several times, for example: "What if he doesn't come back?" p35 and "What about Nan?" p49. Why do you think Sue Whiting wrote Mackenzie's thoughts in this way? What does it tell you about Mackenzie's mental state?

Write a book report on *Missing*. 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.

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.

Hope is a major theme throughout the novel. Discuss how each character deals with the concept of hope, for example: Joe's unwavering hope they will find Maggie in Panama, Nan's lack of hope they will ever find Maggie and Mackenzie hanging all of her hope on the witness protection program theory.

Why do you think Mackenzie believed that Mum was in witness protection? What evidence pointed her in this direction? Did the evidence weigh up or was something else going on? Nan said that it was "the brain's way of coping, of making sense of something that made no sense at all." p 262. What do you think she means by this?

Several characters feel guilt around Maggie's disappearance. Discuss which characters feel guilt and how it affects them, for example: Joe feels guilty about the state of his and Maggie's relationship, he also feels guilty about how it is affecting Mackenzie and Mackenzie feels guilty about keeping the postcard secret from Dad and Nan.



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Discuss how Mackenzie struggles with trust during the novel. Why doesn't she trust her Dad and Nan enough to show them the postcard? How does her Dad's behavior affect how much she trusts him? Why doesn't Mackenzie open up to other kids at school?

How has Mackenzie changed through the course of the novel? Why has she changed? How do you think she will cope with the death of her mother? Is it possible to lead a normal life after such a terrible tragedy? Would you consider Mackenzie as someone who is resilient? Why/why not?

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 *Missing*. 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.

Imagine you are a journalist and write a newspaper report about Maggie da Luca's disappearance. Use objective language and include only facts that a journalist would know. Interview some of the characters to include their side of the story.

Geography

Find Panama on a map. How would you travel from where you are to Panama? What do you know about Panama before reading? What information do you get from the book? After reading the book, research the country in your school library or online to find out more information. Write a one page report on Panama featuring basic facts such as where it is situated, the dominant language, currency, climate, food, flora and fauna. Also include other interesting facts or stories that you come across in your research.

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