

Teacher Notes

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FLY ON THE WALL

In this moving and hilarious illustrated novel from the critically-acclaimed author of *Pie in the Sky*, a twelve-year-old boy goes on a (forbidden) solo journey halfway around the world to prove his independence to his overprotective family.

Henry Khoo's family treats him like a baby. He's not allowed to go anywhere without his sister/chaperone/bodyguard. His (former) best friend knows to expect his family's mafia-style interrogation when Henry's actually allowed to hang out at her house. And he definitely CAN'T take a journey halfway around the world all by himself!

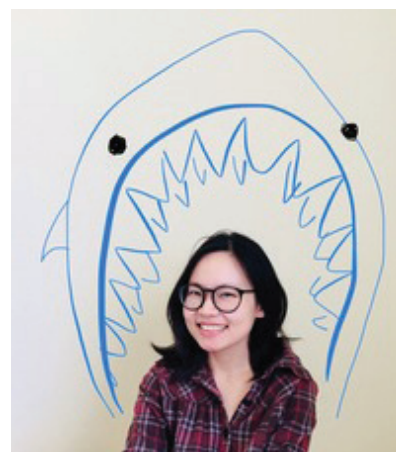
But that's exactly his plan. After his family's annual trip to visit his father in Singapore is cancelled, Henry decides he doesn't want to be cooped up at home with his overprotective family and BFF turned NRFF (Not Really Friend Forever). Plus, he's hiding a your-life-is-over-if-you're-caught secret: he's the creator of an anonymous gossip cartoon, and he's on the verge of getting caught. Determined to prove his independence and avoid punishment for his crimes, Henry embarks on the greatest adventure ever . . . hoping it won't turn into the greatest disaster ever.

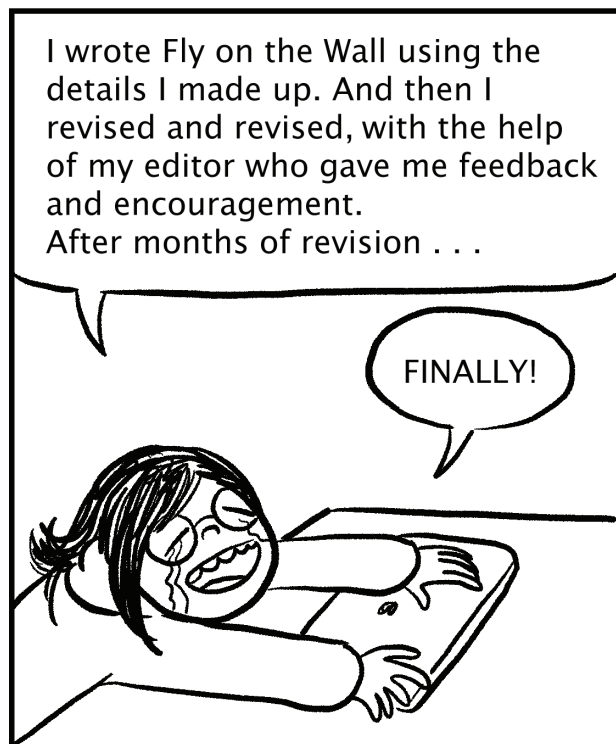
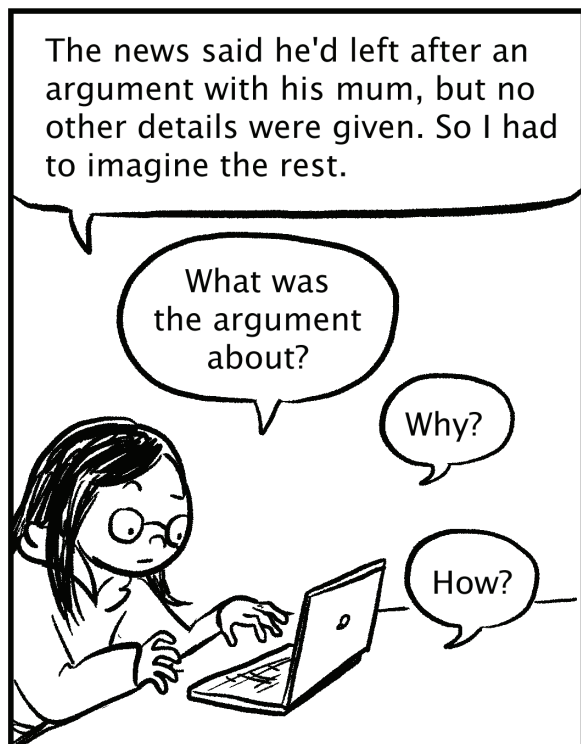
Remy Lai takes readers on an adventure filled with humour, heart, and hijinks that's a sure bet for fans of Jerry Craft, Terri Libenson, and Shannon Hale!

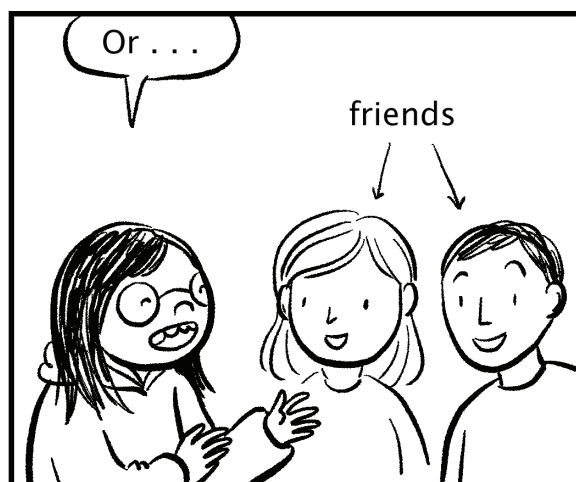
Remy Lai studied fine arts, with a major in painting and drawing. She was born in Indonesia, grew up in Singapore, and currently lives in Brisbane, Australia, where she writes and draws stories for kids with her two dogs by her side. She is the author of the critically-acclaimed *Pie in the Sky* and *Fly on the Wall*. Follow Remy on Instagram @rrremylai

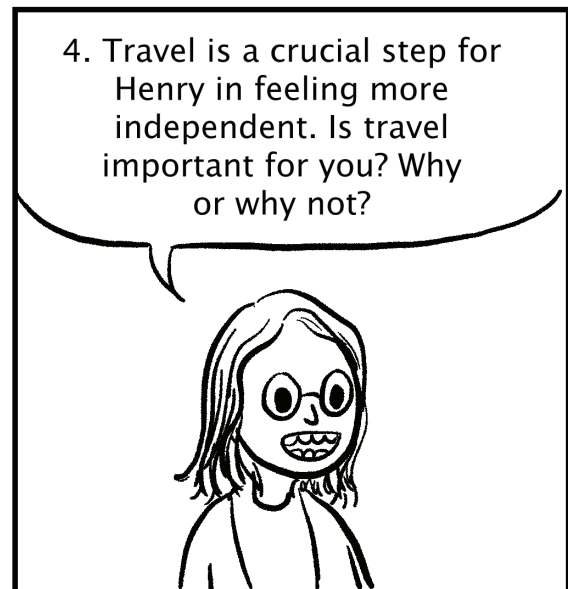
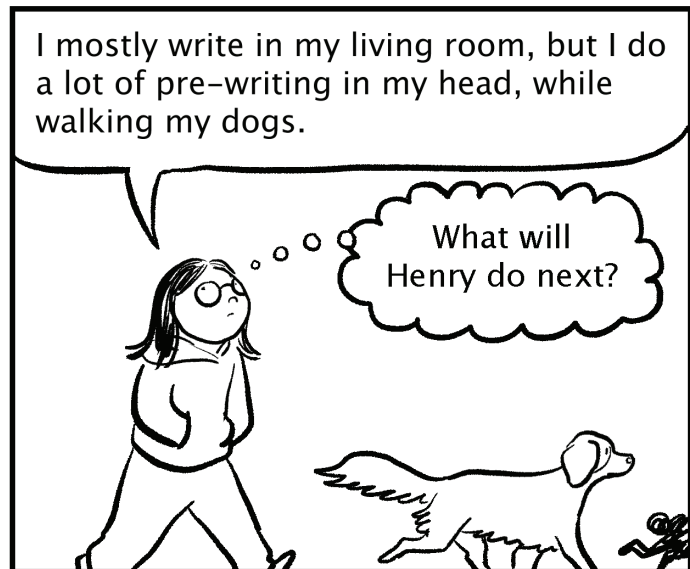


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Discussion Questions and Activities

Before Reading

Examine the front cover of the book. What do you think this story will be about? Now read the blurb and revise your predictions. Once you have finished reading the book, revisit your answer to this question to see how accurate your predictions were.

Exploring the Book

Remy Lai uses a number of literary devices in *Fly on the Wall*. Find other examples of each device from the list below and discuss how this device affects the reader.

- Simile “Henry’s family hovers over him so much he’s like a helipad.” (page 191).
- Idiom “pot calling the kettle black.” (page 263). (see further activity on idioms below)
- Metaphor “Her words were daggers.” (page 192).

How does the idiom “fly on the wall” apply to Henry, and why do you think Lai chose an idiom for the title of the book?

Throughout the first section of the book, there’s regularly a ‘countdown to flight’ with hours and minutes remaining shown at the top of the page. How did this make you feel as a reader? Did you get nervous as the countdown got closer?

“TV Kids often get into trouble, but at the end of the day, TV Parents always sit them down for heart-to-heart talks.” (page 84)

Henry often compares his life to TV (especially Popo’s wuxia dramas) or movies. How does that make him feel? What are some of the downsides to comparing real life to fictional life?

Compare the characters of Nor and Henry. How are they similar or different? How does Nor help Henry? Do you think they’ll stay friends? Why or why not?

“It’s not that big a deal to be afraid of things.” But it is a big deal that she decided to fly even though she’s scared of flying. To do something even though she’s scared of it.” (page 275).

Choose a moment in the novel when Henry or another character is afraid. How do they face and overcome their fear?

Henry has a stressful experience at the airport. Have you been to the airport? How was your flying experience similar or different to Henry’s?

Sometimes Henry writes his feelings as poems. Find one in the novel, and compare it to another section of the story. How are they presented differently? Consider both visual and textual elements.

“I had Pheebz, and we had a let-me-tell-you-a-top-secret kind of relationship. It was perfect.” (page 70)
Draw a timeline of what we know of Henry and Pheebz’ relationship using quotes from the book to show key moments. Discuss how falling out with Pheebz affects Henry, and how he feels when they reconcile.

How does Maomi help Henry in the book? Do you have a pet? How is your connection similar or different to Henry and Maomi?

“I didn’t realise how much force is in each step I take until I stubbed my toe.” (page 228).

What do you think this quote means to Henry? When does Henry start to realise the consequences of his actions as Fly? How does that change his actions?

Themes

Anxiety

Henry’s family worries about him a lot. How does this affect Henry’s life, and how he thinks about himself?



Page 15

"My head felt like it does whenever I slurp a Slurpee too fast— a mixture of numbness and pressure as if my brain's being squeezed." (page 69)

Henry can't quite identify how he's feeling in these two moments, but it seems to be some form of anxiety. Have a class discussion about what happens when Henry feels worried or anxious, and some strategies students can use if they ever feel the same.

Bullying

Jie calls Henry bao bao, a nickname that makes him feel upset. How can nicknames be hurtful? What can you do if someone calls you a nickname you don't like?

Throughout most of the book Henry thinks of Tim as the bully, the villain: but do you think Henry's posts as Fly count as bullying? Why or why not? Have a class discussion about the different forms bullying can take and how best to combat it.

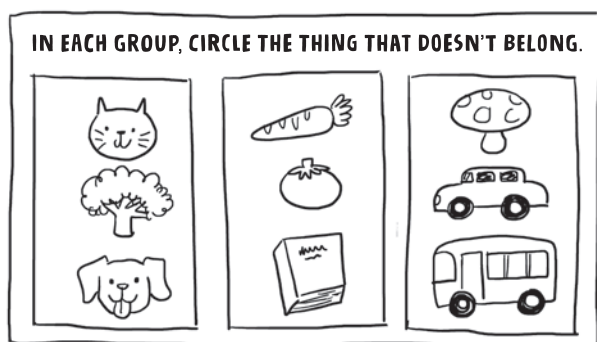
Lies

Fly on the Wall is based around Henry telling one big lie, but he keeps a lot of secrets to himself throughout the novel. What effect does that have on Henry? How do things change when he starts telling the truth?

Do you think Henry did the right thing by lying to his family? Why or why not? What are other ways he could have shown them he wanted to be independent?

Hold a class debate about lying. Have teams of 4 take turns arguing that it is never ok to lie/it is ok to lie under certain circumstances. Use evidence from the book and from your own ideas. The remaining students are the judges, they must take notes and score each team.

Belonging



"I'm the broccoli, the book, the mushroom. But Dad's also the broccoli, the book, and the mushroom. And it's much better to not be odd alone." (page 12)

Henry feels like he doesn't fit in at home with his family or at school. How does that affect his actions in the novel, and his connections with the people in his life? Why is it important to not feel like you're 'odd alone'?

Henry tries to fit in by copying other students in his class. What effect does it have? Do you think trying to turn himself into a version of his peers was a good idea? Why or why not?

Visual Literacy

Fly on the Wall is presented as if it's (almost) all Henry's notebook. How did that change your experience as a reader? Find other books in your library presented as a notebook (for example, the Timmy Failure series by Stephan Pastis). How are they similar or different to *Fly on the Wall*?

Henry's deliberately drew his illustrations as Fly to be different to his normal style. Choose one post from Fly and compare it to another illustration in the book. What differences can you see? Are there any similarities?

Remy Lai's illustrations convey a lot of emotion and meaning for the characters even though there isn't a lot of detail. Choose several illustrations and discuss what the characters are feeling in that moment. How can you tell? Draw a character similar to Henry (or just a stick figure) and try to convey certain emotions using just dots for eyes and lines for eyebrows, a nose and a mouth.

Rewrite a section of prose (text) in Lai's comic style. Think about how you can convey the story, dialogue, emotions and action using just illustration and speech bubbles.

Further Activities

Create an illustrated plan for a fun day with your friends or family like Henry's plan on page 16, including specific times, safe transport and activities. You could include going to the park, reading a book, playing a game or eating lunch. Share your plan with the class, including how you would adapt if something in the plan went wrong!

Thinking about your plan, what might you need to pack for the day? Draw your list of items.