

Teachers' notes for Grace's Secrets



Chapter two

Grace slumped to the stone floor, her chest tightening with each breath she took. She willed herself to calm down and breathe. Shallow breath in through the nose, three, four, out through the nose, three, four. Hold, three, four, five, six.

In through the nose...please work...out through the nose. After a while, her breathing steadied, but the wheeze was still there.

Time to go, Grace, she commanded herself. She stood, grabbed the bottom edge of the chute with both hands, lifted her legs onto the wall beneath it, and began to pull herself into the space. As she did, her right hand brushed a lever, just inside the lower lip of the chute. Holding on as tightly as she could with her left hand, she pushed the lever as far as it would go.

All at once, Grace heard the sound of stone moving on stone as air and faint light crept into the chute. She dropped onto the floor and watched as a

CHAPTER TWO

panel of stone wall slid outwards creating a gap, just wide enough for a person to squeeze through.

'Phew!' she cried, and she took a few deep breaths. But what was that smell? It was like a hospital smell and something else – leather. Yep, disinfectant and leather for sure. Weird.

She slipped carefully through the gap and froze. She was facing the wall between the laundry and the kitchen, and the door between the two rooms stood wide open. Although it looked familiar – the same ancient stone as the laundry wall in her castle, the same arch-shaped doorway leading into the kitchens, nothing about it was the same. It seemed dirtier somehow, blackened. Grace began to shiver. It's absolutely freezing down here, she thought, the central heating must have switched off.

Why was the laundry lit with real candles? Where were the fake olden-day lights made to look like candles? Grace leant back against the panel of stone and it began to move.

'No,' she cried as the piece of wall slid back into place. She ran her hands over the wall, but it felt as though it had never been there. I guess

ABOUT THE BOOK

SYNOPSIS

When twelve-year-old Grace trades her tropical home in Western Australia for a faraway castle, Victorian costumes and a village trapped in time she thinks it's the fresh start she desperately needs. But unsolved problems have a way of following...

A map of the castle's secret passages sends Grace on a time-travelling mystery that will challenge her very existence and all that she loves. Can Grace save herself as well as her family? And how will some of her favourite children's authors help her on her quest?

Grace's Secrets is the first book in an exciting new literary time-travel series.

AUTHOR

Louise Park is a former primary school teacher and now full-time children's book author. Her popular books are widely published and she has spoken nationally and internationally at conferences, writers' and readers' festivals, public libraries and school events about writing, publishing, the power of reading and writing, and anxiety in children. She also runs staff development days and writing workshops for adults and children.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Betrayal
- Dislocation
- Healing
- Nineteenth century children's literature
- British-Australian identity
- Australian history and convicts
- Time travel

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

- Literacy
- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability
- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding

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FOR THE CLASSROOM

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Comprehension questions:

- Why did Grace and her mother move from Australia to Britain?
- What is Grace's ancestry? How do you know? [Note, we only know of one British ancestor for certain.]
- Grace did not steal her friend's GoPro. Can you guess what caused Grace's friends to accuse her? [Note, the story does not answer this question.]
- What helps Grace heal from her friends' betrayal?
- Which children's authors appear in the story?
- What differences from Australia does Grace experience in modern-day Britain?
- What differences does Grace experience in nineteenth century Britain?
- How many cases of theft are there in this story? What are they?
- What strategies does Grace employ to adapt to these new environments?
- What do Grace and Ellie have in common?

2. General discussion questions:

- What is betrayal? What are some effective ways to deal with it and eventually heal from it?
- Is moving countries a good strategy for dealing with problems?
- What are some effective ways to deal with being in a new place/different culture?
- Is it always wrong to steal?
- How do Australian and British cultures differ from each other? What are the similarities?

- What relationship does Australia have with Britain, and what is the history of the relationship?
- Do you think Grace feels more at home in Britain or Australia? Why?
- In what way does British-Australian identity differ from other Australian identities?
- What are convicts? Why and when did Britain send convicts to Australia? What effect does Australia's convict heritage have on contemporary Australian identity?
- Has reading this book changed your sense of Australian identity? If so, in what way?
- What difference do the famous authors make to this story? What would change if they weren't there?
- This is the first book in a series. Can you guess which famous authors Grace meets in her next time-travel adventures?
- Which authors would you like to meet in real life? What would you say to them?
- What time and place would you like to travel to? Can you imagine a setting? Who and what would be there?

3. Language:

- How does Louise Park use language to convey Grace's changing emotional states?
- Can you find examples of simile in the writing?
- Setting is important in this story. How does the author use language to create a sense of the wonderful in her settings?

