



# Teachers' Notes

## FLYING THROUGH CLOUDS

Michelle Morgan

*Teachers' Notes written by Michelle Morgan*

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<b>Author</b>	<b>Michelle Morgan</b>
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## **SYNOPSIS**

Adolescence is tough, especially for a teenage boy growing up in the Depression. It's even tougher if your dream is to become an aviator, your parents are dead against it, you don't know much about planes, you can't afford flying lessons and your girlfriend's father is the School Principal. But Joe Riley has a plan and won't let anyone stand in his way.

Joe sets out to learn as much as he can about planes and to save enough money for flying lessons. But he is so determined to find a new job and make money that he deceives his family, his school and his girlfriend, Amy.

When tragedy strikes, Joe quits his job and loses interest in flying. But after a surprise joy flight for his birthday, Joe's plan is back on track and his parents are furious. Joe's first flying lesson is everything he has ever dreamt; if only he could tell someone about it. In the hope that he will forget about flying, Joe's parents insist he join the Scouts and go away to camp.

At camp, Joe meets Mac, an old school friend who is in the Air Scouts. They're right there on Seven Mile Beach when Smithy lands and takes off again in *Southern Cross*. But not everything goes well at camp or at home after Joe returns.

When Joe's hard-earned money is stolen, his desperation leads him to take risks and keep secrets that will have serious consequences. His final challenge proves to be one of the best and worst experiences of his life.

## **THEMES**

*Flying through Clouds* is a coming-of-age novel written for teenagers. It deals sensitively with themes and issues such as adolescence, family, friendship, the Depression, resilience, courage, determination, truth, responsibility, survival, fear, loss, grief, bullying, violence, gambling, education and work. It weaves historical detail through the narrative so readers can experience what it was like for teenagers living in Sydney in the 1930s. Many of the issues that teenagers faced then are still relevant today and are excellent topics for further discussion.

## **WRITING STYLE**

*Flying through Clouds* is written in the first person from the point of view of a teenage boy. The use of this voice allows the reader to experience Joe's world and meet all the characters through his eyes. The use of the present tense creates a sense of immediacy as if the reader is right there with Joe. Dialogue is used to develop the characters and build tension and conflict. Interesting historical details are woven through the story, allowing readers to see the similarities and differences between 1930s Australia and today. A compelling blend of humour, pathos and drama engages readers by drawing them into Joe's world.

## **AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

Before writing *Flying through Clouds*, Michelle Morgan knew that she wanted Joe Riley to be the main character. She also wanted to use flying as a metaphor for adolescence. In the process of researching aviators and flying in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Australia, Michelle visited the Gerringong Historical Society Museum and was inspired by first-hand accounts and photos of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith landing and taking off in *Southern Cross* from Seven Mile Beach in 1933. After examining every detail in the exhibition, Michelle was convinced that *Flying through Clouds* should focus on Joe's determination to become an aviator. However, she also realised that the story required more depth and the creation of sub-plots, secondary characters and themes that would resonate with teenage readers today.

## **AUTHOR BACKGROUND**

Michelle Morgan is an author, playwright and songwriter. Her first novel, *Racing the Moon*, was published in Australia by Allen & Unwin in 2014, and released in the UK and US in 2015. Four of Michelle's plays have been performed in Short Play festivals in Sydney, Newcastle and Armidale. She has also co-written several songs with her husband. Her previous experience as a librarian, teacher and researcher has been invaluable to her writing career.

## **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

*Flying through Clouds* is ideal for Years 7 to 10 English and HSIE / History students. It has an appealing blend of humour, drama and adventure and presents many themes relevant to Stages 4 and 5. Although Joe doesn't always make the right choices and sometimes avoids telling the truth, he demonstrates empathy with others and a developing self-awareness that results in a willingness to accept responsibility and the consequences of his actions.

## **MARKETING & PROMOTION**

Michelle Morgan has a website at [www.michellejmorgan.com.au](http://www.michellejmorgan.com.au) with information on her books and writing. She also has a website blog, where she posts articles about her writing process, publishing journey, literary events and other topics. Following the launch of *Flying through Clouds* in April 2017, Michelle is embarking on a book tour to bookshops and libraries to talk about *Flying through Clouds* and to run writing workshops for teenagers. A blog tour has also been arranged to promote the book and Michelle's writing. A media release for *Flying through Clouds* was emailed to selected bookshops, reviewers and bloggers, and advance copies of the book were sent out for review purposes. Interviews and other literary events are also planned for 2017.

## **STUDY NOTES**

### **Setting and Context**

- How do we know when and where *Flying through Clouds* is set? Use online maps and train timetables to chart Joe's movements around Sydney, other parts of New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland.
- How significant to Australia's cultural history are the events and heroes depicted in the text? (eg. the Depression, the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the development of Aviation in Australia, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, Sir Donald Bradman). Research one of these topics and present your findings.
- Choose your three favourite settings in the book and describe the action that takes place.
- How have technology, public health and living standards changed in Australia since the 1930s? Select one of these topics and write a report outlining some of the changes.

## Language and Dialogue

- List words or phrases from the text that set the novel in the 1930s.
- Give examples of Australian idiom used in the dialogue.
- *Flying through Clouds* is written in the first person from Joe's point of view. Why might the author have chosen to use this form over the third person narrative? How does using the first person affect what is revealed?
- The title of the novel has a literal and figurative meaning. Examine the use of other figures of speech, such as simile and metaphor, in the text.

## Character Development & Dramatic Action

- Create character profiles for each of the main characters.
- Compare ways that language is used in the novel to create character.
- Chart Joe's personal journey. To what extent has he been changed by his experiences at the end of the novel? Could he have done anything differently? Have any other characters changed as well?
- Create a storyboard for the main scenes in the novel. Which of these scenes are critical points (ie. turning points and climax) in the novel? To what extent did Joe's actions contribute to these critical points?

## Themes and Issues

- Brainstorm themes and issues that emerge in the text.
- Have a debate on one of these themes or issues.
- Act out a bully vs anti-hero scene from the book.
- Watch a film that deals with some of these themes and compare with *Flying through Clouds* (eg. *The Black Balloon*, *Flirting*, *Looking for Alibrandi*, *Walkabout*)