

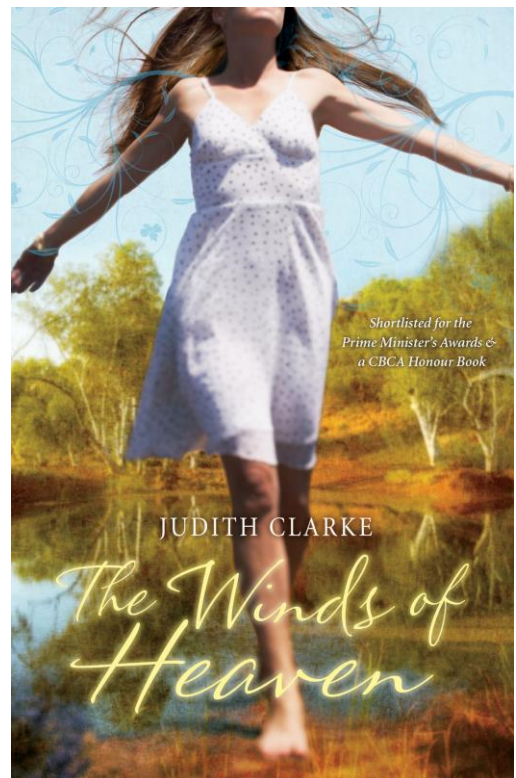
Teachers' Notes
by Judith Way

The Winds of Heaven
Judith Clarke

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Recommended for ages 14-18 yrs

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INTRODUCTION

STORY SUMMARY

The Winds of Heaven is an award-winning story of friendship and loss viewed through the eyes of Clementine, who looks back on her time at school and her relationship with her charismatic cousin Fan. Fan was a golden child who shone with radiance, but her constant searching for something unknown left her tarnished. As Clementine learns to find her way in the world, she grows apart from Fan, not knowing how to relate to her anymore. However, the cousins never lose their incredible bond, forged in the intensity of a 1950s Australian childhood. This poignant story will resonate with readers long after turning the last page.

USE IN THE CLASSROOM

This is a novel for English class study with older teenagers. Judith Clarke is known for her beautiful prose. Her novels showcase sensitive, thoughtful and engaging writing about relationships, especially within families, and a deep feeling for place and society in Australia over a range of time periods. *The Winds of Heaven* is suitable for the study of literary writing as well as the novel's themes and the issues they raise.

Fan, one of the main characters in *The Winds of Heaven*, is an adventurous, life-loving child but as a result of the disadvantages she suffers, the life is gradually squeezed out of her. She becomes an isolated single mother in a rural town, suffers depression and commits suicide. At the centre of the story is the question of Why? – the heartbreaking question that all suicides leave behind them. One of the achievements of Clarke's writing is that the reader is sympathetic to Fan's 'solution' (which might be seen as consistent with the more poetic parts of her life) but can also see the possibility of so many alternative solutions which would not lead to death. Why didn't Fan see them?

In addition to this central theme, a number of others are canvassed in these notes:

- Mental health
- Sisters and family relationships
- Corporal punishment, violence and bullying
- Indigenous culture and issues
- Love and relationships
- Australian life in the 1950s and 60s
- Role of women in 20th century Australia

Various activities and discussion topics are suggested as ways in to this beguiling text.

THE CRAFT OF WRITING

- Why did the author choose 'The Winds of Heaven' as the title? What do you think it means?
- Why do you think that the author wrote both a prologue and an epilogue? What does it do to the form of the book?
- '...and you could smell feelings, too... anger and hatred and disappointment and jagged little fears. The anger smelt like iron and the disappointment smelled like mud.' (p.37) How does the author use specific words and ideas to make the reader rethink their understanding of feelings?
- The stars and the sky are mentioned often. Why do you think this is?
- 'It was the way the thing seethed...like Aunty Rene. (p. 49). Find other examples of simile and metaphor. How do these devices enrich the story?
- "And now she's hangin' round with boongs!" (p.57) Why does the writer use this derogatory word for Aborigines? What is she trying to show?
- 'And that Home Boy, that David Lowell...' (p. 86). How can one word make such a difference to meaning? What does the word 'that' convey?
- Chapter 17 and 18 (pp.256-278) use present tense, when the author previously used past tense. Why the change? What does it achieve?
- Does the author have a responsibility to her readers to portray Fan's final decision as wrong? What responsibilities do authors have to their readers?
- How does the author use language to develop a sense of place and time in rural and urban Australia in mid 20th century? Find some examples to illustrate your answer.
- "'I bet you've never had so much money in your hand in your whole **tiny little** life.'" (p. 241). "'...little Clementine.... little cheer-up letter.'" 'My crazy little Clementine' (pp. 252-4) How can the use of one or two words imply so much?
- Fan found poetry to be a lifeline. How can words affect people so much?
- Why does the author choose to introduce Cash's daughter at the end of the book? (pp. 290-1) What does it signify?
- What do the 'blue hills' represent to Fan?

THEMES

MENTAL HEALTH

- ' "You're such a little worrier, Clementine." ' (p. 12). What is the difference between worry and anxiety? Which do you think affects Clementine?
- '... If Aunty Rene even heard Caroline's name she'd scream and scream and scream.' (p. 21). Aunty Rene seems to be very 'highly strung'. How does that affect Fan and to a lesser degree, Clementine?

- "He was crazy, you know.... Mad as a meat axe..." (p. 104). Do you think Mr Meague had some mental issues, or was his behaviour towards his students simply a sign of the times?
- Aunty Rene had changed, '...the seething had gone out of her...' (p. 112). Do you think it's possible for one person to change so much in 5 years? What might have been responsible for her change?
- "Sometimes it was afternoon before she could get herself going properly." (p. 166).
- "...she'd gone out and left Cash alone in the house... She'd walked for miles that night..." (p. 168) "She forgot a lot of things these days." (p. 170). When does post natal depression become dangerous? What type of support was there for mothers with 'the baby blues' in the 1950s and 60s? Why didn't Fan ask her sister Caro for help?
- Fan's mother used to say every morning, " 'One of these days when you get home you'll find me with my head in the gas oven.' " (p. 259). How might that have affected Fan?
- "And she'd open her eyes and there Mum would be, sitting at the kitchen table reading the paper or calmly slicing vegetables for tea. Fit as a fiddle, right as rain. As if she'd never said that stuff to you in the morning before you left for school, as if that had been another person altogether." (p. 260). Do you think that Aunty Rene has an untreated mental illness?
- Mrs Darcy and the farmer who gave Fan a lift both knew things weren't right with Fan (pp. 267-71). Do you think they had a responsibility to help her? Why or why not?
- A number of people showed Fan kindness (p. 277). Why didn't she accept their kindness?
- How do you think Fan's ultimate actions might affect the lives of Cash, Madeline, Caro, Clementine, Aunty Rene and even young Fan?
- Research and make a list of places available today to assist those with mental health issues.
- Draw a Venn diagram of Aunty Rene and Fan. How are they similar? How are they different?

SISTERS AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- Aunty Rene and Clementine's mum; Fan and Caroline are sisters; yet Fan and Clementine are cousins. Does blood make you a sister or is it a connection, a feeling? "...there would never be anyone she loved so much as Fan." (p. 54)
- " 'It's gonna happen,' she shrieked. 'I know it is.' " (p. 58) Why does Aunty Rene think that Fan, who is ten years old, will fall pregnant?
- Why did Clemmie steal the pictures of Johnny Cash for Fan? (p. 148)
- " 'And did the old man ever come back? You know, that old black man was your friend?' 'No, he didn't. I waited and waited.... But he never came.... I missed him,' she said

tremulously. 'I missed him like anything. More than - more than *anyone*.' "(p. 123) Why would Fan miss the old man more than Clem, her purported 'sister'?

- "She stared down at the floor. The linoleum was a greyish-blue colour, the pattern long worn away, and so thin in patches that it was no more than a blackish net of threadwork above the wooden floor. But beneath Fan's bed... the lino was as good as new, and you could see its pattern, grey fluted columns and stone urn-shaped vases spilling out great branches of purple flowers." (p. 125) How does the decay of this patterned cornucopia reflect the lives of Aunty Rene and Fan?
- "Aunty Rene lingered....and then said softly... 'I was like you when I was young.' 'Oh!'. gasped Clementine, horrified, stifling an urge to cry out: *Oh no, no. You couldn't have been!*" (p. 131). Do you believe Aunty Rene's statement? Why or why not?
- Fan went out with Geoff on Clem's last night in Lake Conapaira. Who would you have put first?
- Write the letter that Clementine meant to send to Fan.

INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND ISSUES

- Why does Fan keep her *miyan* a secret from her mother? What role does he play in Fan's life? Why is he so important to her?
- " '...he might be away from here...sometimes when he's asleep his spirit goes out walking.' "(p. 46) Compare and contrast Fan explanation of dreams to how you view dreaming.
- " 'He might be old, and he might be some kind of storyteller... But he's still a boong, isn't he?' " (p. 57) Is Aunty Rene's attitude towards Aborigines a sign of a racist Australia in the 1950s, or is it something else entirely? Explain your thoughts.
- Daria's views on the peasants (pp. 91-92) seems very similar to Aunty Rene's thoughts on Aborigines. Why do you think this is?
- " 'Figures.' he said... 'Those kind of girls, they always get mixed up with Blacks.' " (p. 251). What is Clementine's boyfriend Phillip implying? What prejudices does his statement show?

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, VIOLENCE AND BULLYING

- Aunty Rene strikes Fan with the buckle end of the belt. Is it acceptable for parents to discipline their own children in their own way? Explain your thoughts. What does the law say?
- Teachers weren't allowed to cane girls, but Mr Meague found his way round this restriction. (p. 71). Is it worse watching someone else suffer on your behalf than suffering yourself? Why? Do you think this punishment worked?
- "Most girls picked a Home Boy." (p. 72). Why was there so much violence in institutions? Why was it acceptable in the 1950s, but unacceptable now? What's changed in that

time? Who would you have picked if you had to? Are Home Boys fair game or have they suffered enough already?

- "So how come David Lowell thought he could speak to *her*?" (p. 78) Why weren't Home Boys allowed to talk to the girls? How does the treatment of the Home Boys align with the treatment of Aborigines at the time?
- "Surely he could see that Jilly and the others were doing it on purpose. Of course he could." (p. 81). Why did Mr Meague insist on caning Vincent week after week? Couldn't he see that this was a form of bullying, devised by the girls? Or did he know and didn't care? What do you think might have happened if Clemmie had stood up to Mr Meague?
- How were schools different in the 1950s to today? Using the National Library of Australia's website Picture Australia <pictureaustralia.org>, find some photographs of Australian classrooms.
- "Why did some grown up people have to be so cruel? And why did they pick on kids?" (p. 85). Can you answer Clemmie's question?
- Was 'Daffy Brian' a term of endearment or a derogatory term? (p. 85) Does either use make it okay?
- Daria says " '...never, never should one cry.' " (pp. 88-91) Why does Daria say this? What does she mean by it? Is it possible to never cry? Is it healthy to cry or is it weak?
- Daria is called 'The Balt' by her fellow students, even though she is from Hungary. (p. 88). Is this a racist term, or simply an ignorant one? Is there a difference between racism and ignorance? Explain your thoughts.
- Why did Clemmie choose Vinnie Sloane to take her punishment? (p. 96). Why not David Lowell, whom she seemed to despise? Why didn't Vinnie's parents make a complaint about Mr Meague?
- Why are all Home Boys looked upon the same way? Why is David Lowell treated the same as every other Home Boy, even though he is vastly different?
- "Chisholm College was a different world; to her cousin its customs might sound like those of a strange brutal country...." (p. 118). Was Chisholm College all that different to other schools in the 1950s?
- Is Jilly Norris a bully or just a pain? Find examples to illustrate your answer.
- Throughout the book, people quote and sing the song *My darling Clementine* to Clem. Find the lyrics and find their meaning. Is it a nice thing to sing that song to Clemmie?
- Trace the course of legislation regarding corporal punishment in schools in Australia.

LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

- 'Love with the wrong person might have menace at the back of it...' (p. 117) and 'Anything was better than being an old maid.' (p. 138). Clemmie has wavering thoughts about relationships. Which of her statements do you agree with? Use examples of relationships in the book to illustrate your argument.

- Why does Clemmie feel anger when she thinks she sees David Lowell, then loss when it turns out not to be him? (p. 140)
- "...Clementine herself had another girl hidden inside her..." (pp. 150-1). Do we all have someone else hidden inside us? Explain your thoughts.
- Fan was 15 when she got married. (p. 153) Do you think that it was a good idea to get married, even though she was pregnant? What other alternatives might there have been for a girl in Fan's position in the 1950s?
- " 'You think it's them.... (p. 201)

AUSTRALIAN LIFE IN THE 1950S AND 60S

- 'She was growing up so slowly, she hardly seemed to be moving at all... Oh, it was so awful to be thirteen!' (p. 127) and "'Don't be in too much of a hurry to grow up,' Dad was always saying..." (p. 129). Who, in your opinion, is right about growing up? Why?
- What are your thoughts about what Allie's parents did (p. 101)? Is the truth always the best policy or are there occasions when telling a 'white lie' is acceptable?
- " 'You won't want to know us,' said Mrs Sheedy." (p. 179). Why was going to university seen as 'posh', particularly for a girl?
- " 'I don't think too much education's good for a young girl.' "(p. 181). Why did Mrs Sheedy think that? Is she sexist or simply a product of the era?
- "Mrs Southey hadn't been able to get over the fact that Auntie Rene had gone off to live with another bloke when she was still officially married to Uncle Len. 'At her age!' " (p. 184). How has the attitude towards relationships and marriage changed since the 1950s and 60s?
- "...having to get married at fifteen because you were having a baby made you somehow unreliable, even dangerous." (p. 186) Why didn't Clementine's parents want her to visit Fan? Was that fair?
- "Once you got to school, they thought you were dumb if you didn't use the right word for things...They'd thought she was dumb... She was a loser... a no-hoper from a no-hoper family. That sort of thing repeated itself, so she knew that Cash would cop it too... (p. 171). Do you agree with Fan's thoughts about Cash being destined for failure at school? Why or why not?
- "A grey film of asbestos dust from the factory clung to the front of his shirt and the ruddy skin of his arms." (p. 148). What might the future hold for Mr and Mrs Southey?
- " 'Poverty restricts your choices, I want you all to remember that.' " (p. 197). What does Miss Travers mean by this? Can poverty be avoided? If so, how?
- What messages does the book convey about schools in the 1950s?
- Using the National Library of Australia's website Picture Australia <pictureaustralia.org>, find some pictures of school uniforms and what women and girls wore in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

- Using the National Library of Australia's website Picture Australia <pictureaustralia.org>, find some pictures of rural and urban Australia in the 1950s and 60s. What do these photos tell us about the era?
- Using the website Museum Box <<http://museumbox.e2bn.org/>>, pick out 10 important items from the story and put them inside the box. What would be the 10 most important items in your life? Explain their significance.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN MID-20TH CENTURY AUSTRALIA

- "Engaged at 18... That was the proper way." (pp. 221-2). Why did society have that expectation of young women?
- In the 1950s and 60s, many women depended on men financially. Why was that? Is that the case now? Did it give some men power over women? If so, how?
- Research university life in the late 1950s, early 1960s. What would have been the ratio of men to women?
- Research the average age of marriage and motherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. Compare it to today's data. What are the reasons for the changes?
- How much has the role of women in Australia changed in the last 50 years? Make a timeline using Capzles <capzles.com> or Timeglider <timeglider.com> Explain the changes and why they occurred.

RELATED RESOURCES

NOVELS

Walking naked by Alyssa Brugman.

Looks at suicide and the impact it leaves on family, friends and the wider community.

Wolf on the fold by Judith Clarke.

Family struggle during the era of *The Winds of Heaven*. Fatherless family, the importance of poetry.

Thursday's child by Sonya Hartnett.

Historical Australian setting evokes a strong time and place.

A place like this by Steven Herrick.

Search for identity, teen pregnancy in rural Australia.

Cold skin by Steven Herrick.

First love and sexual awakening in a country town setting.

A charm of powerful trouble by Joanne Horniman.

Features relationships between sisters, children and parents.

My candlelight novel by Joanne Horniman.

The experience of a single mother in an Australian setting.

Guitar Highway Rose by Brigid Lowry.

First love, being 15. Rich Australian rural setting.

Stony heart country by David Metzenthen.
Teenage life in an Australian country town.

Little Paradise by Gabrielle Wang.
The experience of an unmarried mother in an Australian historical setting.

One night by Margaret Wild.
This verse novel looks at family, friends, relationships and single motherhood.

TELEVISION/DVDS

Cloudstreet.
Evocative Australian historical setting during roughly same period as *The Winds of Heaven*.
Family, home and tragedy also feature.

The December Boys starring Daniel Radcliffe.
Set in rural Australia in the early 1960s, also featuring topics such as parentless children.

Harp in the south.
Poverty and family in Australian historical setting.

Going bush starring Cathy Freeman and Deborah Mailman.
Featuring strong rural and bush settings.

The Shark Net starring William McInnes.
Coming of age themes in a strong Australian historical setting.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

JUDITH CLARKE

Judith Clarke was born in Sydney and educated at the University of New South Wales and the Australian National University in Canberra. She has worked as a teacher and librarian, and in Adult Education in Victoria and New South Wales. She now lives in Melbourne.

A major force in YA fiction both in Australia and internationally, Judith Clarke's novels include the multi-award-winning *Wolf on the Fold*, as well as *Friend of my Heart*, *Night Train*, *Starry Nights*, and the very popular and funny Al Capsella series. She is unsurpassed in her ability to convey complex emotional states with acute understanding and compassion. *Kalpana's Dream* was named an Honor Book in the prestigious Boston Globe/Horn Book Awards. Her novel, *One Whole and Perfect Day* was an Honor Book in the American Library Association's prestigious Michael L. Printz Awards for Excellence in Young Adult Literature.

Her other books include:

My Lovely Frankie Allen & Unwin, 2017

Three Summers Allen & Unwin, 2012

One Whole and Perfect Day Allen & Unwin, 2006. Winner, QLD Premier's Literary Awards, Young Adult Book Award, 2007

Kalpana's Dream Allen & Unwin, 2004

Starry Nights Allen & Unwin, 2001

Wolf on the Fold Allen & Unwin, 2000. Winner, CBCA Book of the Year, Older Readers, 2001

Night Train Penguin Books, 1998

Lost Day Puffin Books, 1997

Big Night Out Omnibus Books, 1995.

Friend of my Heart University of Queensland Press, 1994.

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