

Teachers' Notes
(Primary and Middle Years)
by Michelle Prawer

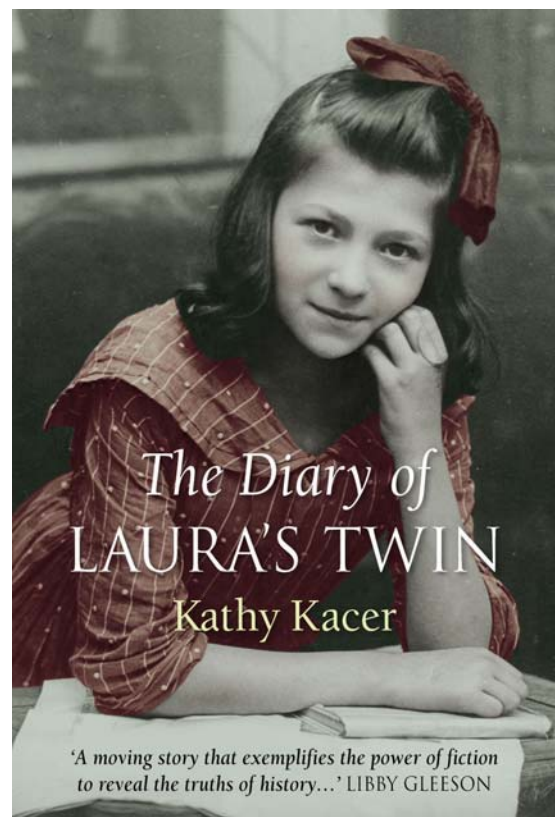
The Diary of Laura's Twin
Kathy Kacer

ISBN 978 1 74175 667 8

Recommended for ages 11 – 14 yrs

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Introduction	2
Plot summary	2
An investigation of ghetto life	3
Structure of the book	4
Activities	5
Themes	6
Holocaust	6
Antisemitism	6
Group responsibility	7
Truth and history	8
The need to study history	9
Activities	10
Resources and further reading	12
About the writers	16



83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest, Sydney
NSW 2065
Australia

PO Box 8500
St Leonards
NSW 1590
Australia

ph: (61 2) 8425 0100 | info@allenandunwin.com
fax: (61 2) 9906 2218 | www.allenandunwin.com

Allen & Unwin PTY LTD
ABN 79 003 994 278

INTRODUCTION

While this is indeed a war story, this book does not leave the reader with a sense of hopelessness or despair. Indeed, the passing of the diary to the next generation and the perpetuation of the memories are uplifting and hence this book would be suitable for years 5 and 6, the clear and simple prose style being an advantage. The alternating time periods/voices offer opportunities to discuss plot structure and this age group should respond readily to the themes.

The issues for discussion within the text however could certainly take this book into the English/SOSE classroom at year 7 and 8. In English, it would be useful for a study of diary writing and the use of factual events as the basis for a fictional story. The story also provides ample scope for study of character development. In SOSE, it fits in to studies of war and peace; similarities and differences between children today and in the past; World War 2 and the Holocaust; and confronting prejudice today. The book also directly confirms the value and uses of history and is a departure point for discussions of truth in history.

***The Diary of Laura's Twin* won the 2008 National Jewish Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature. Presented each year by the US-based Jewish Book Council, the awards aim to honour some of the best and most exciting authors in the field of Jewish literature.

PLOT SUMMARY

The rabbi of Laura's synagogue has asked her to become involved in a twinning project as part of the preparations for her Bat Mitzvah. This involves remembering a person from the Holocaust who was unable to celebrate this event due to the persecution of Jews at the time. Initially reluctant and overwhelmed by her studies, projects and preparations for this big celebration, Laura eventually promises the rabbi that she will nevertheless meet with Mrs Mandelcorn, an aged member of the community. The visit is uneventful and having enjoyed a slice of cake and a drink, Laura leaves with an old diary which she promises to read.

As Laura turns the pages and imbibes the story of Sara Gittler, a girl so like herself and indeed of the same age, who is locked in the Warsaw ghetto during the Second World War, Laura's attitude to her own Jewish identity changes. She becomes aware of the persecution, degradation and imprisonment of her own people; she understands the need to learn about the past and indeed after reading the diary, she accepts the imperative of being a witness to the past, remembering it and learning from it to ensure that these mistakes do not plague the present. In addition, she learns the need to stand up to injustice even if this is an unpopular stance or a challenging one.

And so when Laura's best friend Nix hides the truth about an anti-Semitic act of desecrating Jewish graves at the local cemetery, Laura applies the lessons learned from the diary to encourage and support her friend in reporting the names of the guilty classmates. Fearful of repercussions and wary of the impact of her statement to the police, Laura is able to advise Nix of the importance of speaking out and exposing truth. Having read in Sara's diary of the silence of the citizens as Jews were rounded up, beaten and deported, Laura is acutely aware that silence in the face of immoral actions can never be condoned.

Ultimately, it is Sara's diary that teaches Laura this most powerful lesson of her Bat Mitzvah which she is able to apply to her own reality. What a surprise it is when she discovers that Sara's tragic story of loss and suffering is indeed the story of Mrs Mandelcorn!

AN INVESTIGATION OF GHETTO LIFE

Sara's incarceration in the ghetto forced her to make harrowing choices about what indeed was important to her.

Besides the agonizing decision over Feliks, it was impossible to decide what to take when we went to live in the ghetto, but even more difficult to decide what to leave behind. (p.48)

It seems like each of us brought something special and personal into the ghetto – something to remember the life we once knew. (p.31)

- What would you bring if fate forced you to select the items most important to you?
- How do you go about deciding this?
- How do these items symbolize who you are?

What can you understand about life in the ghetto from the passage on page 32?

'If you ask me... I hadn't seen a bird in so long....'

Compare the appearance of the bird to the appearance of the flower in the famous poem 'I Never Saw Another Butterfly' written by a child in Theresienstadt concentration camp. After you've read the poem (below), discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think butterflies and birds don't visit the ghetto?
- What does this tell readers about life in the ghetto?
- Why does the butterfly wish to kiss the world goodbye and why does Deena feel an urgent need to record this bird in a painting?

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
 Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
 Against a white stone...

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
 Kiss the world goodbye

For seven weeks I've lived in here
Penned inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court
Only I never saw another butterfly

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
 In the ghetto
(Pavel Friedmann)

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

It is in the structure of this book that much of its power lies. Draw student attention to the way the narrative is interspersed with diary entries and ask the following questions:

What is achieved by using this device?

How does this structure allow the reader to make links which Laura is only able to make toward the end of the book?

What are the possible limitations of this device?

Discuss the way two separate stories are able to create both separate tales and also one unified tale simultaneously.

What would be the difference if the same story were told as a third person narrative?

Are there other books written using this style?

ACTIVITIES

1. Creative writing activity to focus on this structure

Students are given the profiles of imaginary characters prepared by the teacher. These are distributed at random and students are then asked to write several diary entries for their character. These entries are passed on to another student in the class who then incorporates the diary into a story of his creation. The complete story is then read out to the class and could be collated into a class anthology.

2. Wider reading

Teachers bring a box of diaries to class for wider reading (see suggested bibliography which includes both humorous and serious books, fiction and non fiction and collections of letters) Alternatively, excerpts can be read to the class from different diaries. Students discuss some of the following ideas relating to **each** of the excerpts:

Why do you believe the writer chose the diary style for this particular story?

Is the voice of the writer authentic? Provide evidence for your view.

Does the diary style work equally well for comedy as it does for more serious views? Provide evidence for your claim

Bibliography of books using diary structure

The Diary of a Young Girl, Anne Frank

Zlata's Diary, Zlata Filipovic

Letters to a Princess, Libby Hathorn

The Diary of Adrian Mole, Sue Townsend

War Without Friends, Evert Hartman

The Upstairs Room, Johanna Reiss

My Story series (all written as diaries)

Letters from the Inside, John Marsden

Diary Z, Stephanie McCarthy

3. Comparing past and present

...the girl who had written the stories wasn't all that different from herself; they were the same age, had siblings, close friends, and enjoyed some of the same things. The exception to this was that Laura and Sara were living in radically different circumstances. (p.37)

Students are directed to divide their page in half and label one column 'Past' and the other 'Present'.

List all the similarities focusing on these categories: family life, anti-Semitism, community response.

Discuss why the book has been structured around such similar young girls. What is the message?

Does it work? Provide evidence for your claims.

THEMES

This book provides the opportunity to discuss the following themes:

- the Holocaust and particularly the suffering of children
- anti-Semitism
- the responsibility of nations of the world to speak out against injustice
- truth and History
- the need for and purpose of studying history.

The following are ways of exploring each of these ideas.

1. HOLOCAUST

Divide students into small research groups to examine the following key concepts explored in the text:

- ghetto life
- Warsaw ghetto uprising
- Children in the ghetto
- Death camps
- Janusz Korczak

(Students should be given carefully selected resources to ensure that age appropriateness is considered). Each group is asked to present their findings to the class. This presentation should involve historical information, personal accounts and graphics. It could be presented as a play, as a class talk, as a newspaper of the time or as an essay.

2. ANTISEMITISM

Teachers should help students to define the term 'anti-Semitism'.

Teachers should assist their students in an examination of the local Jewish Press

<http://www.ajm.com.au/news/news.asp?catID=82> for evidence of continued acts of desecration of Jewish sites and anti-Semitic actions and innuendo. Evidence of vandalism against Jewish sites in Melbourne alone has grown significantly in recent times. A visit to the web site of the Anti Defamation league (http://www.adl.org/main_Terrorism/default.htm) will also reveal the extraordinary number of anti-Semitic acts perpetrated each year. Surfing the internet will reveal sites dedicated to inflaming hatred against Jews. Students should discuss the following:

- Is it possible to justify the hatred of a nation?
- Is it right to do so?
- Why would people do so?
- What is the link between fear and hatred?
- What is the role of education in preventing this?
- Why do you believe Jews have been targets of hatred throughout history?

3. GROUP RESPONSIBILITY

Examine the following passages carefully.

Laura shook her head. She didn't want historical information about events leading up to World War II. She wanted more than that. She wanted to know what Sara seemed to be asking – why had the world stood by and allowed these events to unfold in the first place.' (p. 69)

It was as though she were standing in front of a stranger. Laura's mouth fell open. 'I'm upset because it's the Jewish cemetery. And they didn't just do some stupid things. They did horrible things to the graves of people – Jewish people. And I'm upset because I'm reading all this stuff about a Jewish girl in the war and nobody was there to help her and these kinds of things were happening to her and her family. And I'm upset because you don't seem to get any of it. That's why I'm freaked out!' Laura's voice was rising. How could Nix be so uncaring, so uninterested? (pp.97-8)

'Well, you've got to tell someone – your parents, the police.'

'No way!' shouted Nix. 'Those guys could be expelled from school for this. They could get arrested. Don't you get it? If one of those guys finds out I'm the one who told on them, they could come after me.'

'But you're the one who told Adam to stand up to them.' Laura was fighting to stay calm...

... 'I'm not getting involved in this. Let the police figure it out on their own.' (p.105-6)

'But my friend is totally wrong by not saying anything, isn't she? I mean she's being a complete coward. She's only thinking of herself and not the victims here.' ... *'My teacher at school said that the Holocaust didn't happen in the gas chambers. By then it was too late. It happened with acts of discrimination just like this one – one after another with no one doing anything about it.'* (p.132)

Mrs Mandelcorn had reminded Laura that people get scared when they have to stand up in the face of threat. 'When faced with that kind of danger, people feel isolated – like they're all alone in the world.' (p.135)

Discussion

- What do these passages tell us about the link between silence and crime?
- What do they tell us about the need to stand up to injustice?
- Look up the term 'moral responsibility'. What does it mean?
To what extent should we make our voices heard against the injustices of the world?
Is there a limit to moral responsibility?
- Present an experience in which you stood up for another in spite of the threat to your own safety or find an article in the newspaper where this sort of behaviour has been displayed.

4. TRUTH AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO HISTORY

Libby Gleeson's comment on the front cover is worthy of exploration.

"A moving story that exemplifies the power of fiction to reveal the truths of history."

Discuss the ramifications of this with students.

- How can fiction explore real historic events?
- Is this an honest way of exploring/learning about history?
- If the events explored are real, can a fictional account ever do justice to the truth?
- Is history always truth?

Extension activity

Morris Gleitzman's *Once* is a fictional account of a young child's Holocaust experience. The child appears to know little about his own persecution and what is happening to his people. In it Gleitzman incorporates a figure who is based on Janusz Korczak.

Read *Once* and then undertake a class discussion/study of it. Discussion should revolve around truth and authenticity and teachers should direct students to examine whether or not they find Gleitzman's protagonist believable/naïve/acceptable.

Discussion should lead to an examination of the portrayal of history in fiction.

- Can fiction trivialize history?
- Does it lead to a watering down of history?
- Can it be dangerous?

If there is no time for reading this additional text, teachers can read excerpts out loud for comment.

Extension work

Examine the idea of 'Revisionism' in history. Google 'David Irving' and explore the way in which he attempts to 'revise' history. Discuss this phenomenon with your students looking at the concept of truth in history. What factors can impinge on the telling of events?

Write a story which tells of an event in your life involving your family members. Pass your story to another member of the class and ask them to rewrite the event from the perspective of another family member. Pass both stories to another student and ask them to rewrite the story from a third perspective. In small groups, read the 3 different accounts to one another. Which account is correct? Is there a correct account of the event?

Examine the transcript of a court case to see the way in which one event can indeed be seen to have several truths.

Debate the topic: That history is a matter of perspective

OR

That there is no place for fiction in the exploration of fact.

OR

That fictionalizing history is dangerous

5. THE NEED TO STUDY HISTORY

Laura believes that her Bat Mitzvah is about *"looking forward....not looking back."* (p.6)

Laura shook her head. No that couldn't be. She had made a choice about her Bat Mitzvah, she reminded herself. She was working on goals for the future, not dredging up stuff from the past. (p.15)

Teachers should encourage their students to explore the idea inherent in this statement and examine the reasoning behind the study of history.

'Today you have honoured me more than you can imagine. But more than that, you have honoured my parents, grandparents and David' (p 171)

- What is to be gained by looking back?
- What would be lost if history were not examined?
- Why do young people need to know?

'I had to be a witness to what was happening to my friends.' (p 125)

Following this discussion, students can be asked to write a section on 'History' for the school handbook for prospective students of the school. In it they should reflect on the ideas raised in the above class discussion.

ACTIVITIES

Discussion – use of images

Teachers should draw students' attention to the photographs distributed throughout the book. Teachers could lead a discussion of the way the photos of real events and real individuals work in creating the sense of a true story.

- Is this honest or is this trickery?
- Do the photos manipulate the readers into an acceptance of fiction as truth? If so, how?

Creative writing

The teacher should visit a few op. shops and collect black and white photos of all sorts of people. Some of these should be famous individuals, others are to be anonymous snaps. Teachers distribute them to students. Students are to write the life story of the character as if they are real characters of the time period chosen by the teacher. (This can be tailored to the period of history being studied in class. If ancient history is the topic then clearly photos can not be used but drawings can) Students then read their story and display their photo to the class whereupon a discussion about

authenticity of voice and setting can take place. Teacher should reveal in the end which of the photos is actually of a well-known individual.

Art/English activity

Create a photo journal of your life to date. Put short captions under each picture ensuring that the caption adds to the telling of your history rather than stating what is evident from the picture. Share your picture story book with other class members.

Teachers should discuss the cover with students:

- What role does the cover play in perpetuating the idea that this story is a true account of a real event?

Look at the back cover and ask students the same question.

- Consider carefully a way of portraying the cover of your own photo journal so that it is an authentic portrayal of your story.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Nix nodded. 'That veteran came to talk to us last year about how he fought in World War II. He got some kind of medal for being part of the landing in Normandy in France. He said he was away from his home and his family for more than a year. But it was romantic, remember? He said he'd come back to his wife, even though it was dangerous and he was being shot at all the time.' (p.11)

Living Historians

- Just as in Nix's class, invite an older community member to address your students. This could be a Holocaust Survivor (contact The Melbourne Holocaust Centre **Address:** 13 Selwyn St. Elsternwick Melbourne Australia **Tel:** (61) (03) 9528 1985) in keeping with the theme of the book but can indeed be any community figure whose past is of interest: a refugee from any war-torn country, an Aboriginal elder, a craftsman who learned a trade which is no longer common (watchmaker, tailor, ironmonger etc). Invite them to tell their own history to the class. This could be a weekly event over a term or a semester and the following activities can be run:
 - Design a series of questions for the interview and write up the article.
 - Using the voice of the Living Historian, write a diary entry in their name
 - Discuss the importance of the younger generation meeting and sharing stories with the older generation

- Present your Living Historian to the school community at an assembly and explain the way in which he enriched your understanding/sensitivities/appreciation.

Designing a memorial ceremony

This book focuses on celebrating and remembering and indeed Laura's Bat Mitzvah becomes the vehicle for the achievement of both of these goals.

Design a ceremony which could be presented to your school community which both commemorates and celebrates the life of a victim of the Nazi Holocaust. You will need to research the person and then decide how best to encapsulate their life, their lost potential and their demise. (Visit Makor library on Hawthorn Rd, South Caulfield ph. 03 9272 5611 and look at the vast collection of biographies housed there, particularly the 'Write your Story Collection')

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE HOLOCAUST

The World Must Know: the history of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust memorial museum

By Michael Berenbaum
ISBN 0316091340

The Holocaust: the world and the Jews, 1933-1945

By Seymour Rossel

*The Holocaust (picture information book)

R.G. Grant
ISBN 0 7502 2083 X

NON-FICTION TITLES ABOUT CHILDREN IN THE HOLOCAUST

I Never Saw Another Butterfly: children's drawings and poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944

By Hana Volavkova
ISBN 0805210156

The Children We Remember

By Chana Byers Abells
ISBN 0064437779

The Diary of Anne Frank

By Anne Frank

*Witness: voices from the Holocaust

Anthology of recollections
ISBN 0732810269

BIOGRAPHIES OF CHILDREN WHO SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST

There Will be Tomorrow

By Guta Goldstein
ISBN1876733020

Hannah Goslar Remembers: a childhood friend of Anne frank

By Alison Leslie Gold
ISBN 0747540276

I am A Star: child of the holocaust

By Inge Auerbache
ISBN 0140364013

Child of the Holocaust

By Jack Kuper
ISBN 0708817262

Mischling, Second Degree: my childhood in Nazi Germany

By Ilse Koen
ISBN0140313567

WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Non-fiction

In Times of War: an anthology of war and peace in children's literature

Ed Carol Fox, Annemie Leysen, Irene Koenders
ISBN 1862054460

Children and War

Robin Cross
ISBN 0 7502 1223 3

*The Way of a Boy (Ernest was seven when he was interned on Java with his mother by the Japanese)

Ernest Hillen
ISBN 0 14 017975 5

Fiction

Two challenging picture story books:

*The Tie Man's Miracle: A Chanukah Tale (the Holocaust)

Steven Schnur
0688134637

*My Dog (civil war in former Yugoslavia)

John Heffernan
1876289120

Novels

*Number the Stars (Annemarie becomes involved in the Danish underground work to save her friend, Ellen, and other Danish Jews)

Lois Lowry
ISBN 0 00 673677 7

*And the Stars were Gold (A displaced Polish boy's journey across Europe in WWII)

Gale Hiçyilmaz
ISBN 1 85881 481 2

*Elli: coming of age in the Holocaust (an example of fiction)

Livia Bitton-Jackson
0586062580

*Let the Celebrations Begin

Margaret Wild
ISBN 1862910235

*The Miracle Tree (56pp, illustrated. Three people divided for twenty years by the devastation of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki)

Christobel Mattingley
ISBN 0 7336 229 0

*Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes (Famous story of one girl's struggle with the effects of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima)

Eleanor Coerr
ISBN 0340266074

*No Gun for Asmir / Asmir in Vienna (Asmir becomes a refugee when war comes to Sarajevo in the 1990s – an example of faction)

Christobel Mattingley
ISBN 0140367292 / 0140380353

*Andi's War (A young girl's family is broken apart during the Greek civil war)

Billi Rosen
ISBN 057115340

*Year of Impossible Goodbyes (Having fought with the resistance against the Japanese occupation of Korea in WWII, Sookan's family then seek freedom in the dangerous escape to South Korea during the Korean War)

Sook Nyui Choi
ISBN 0 440 40759 1

*Secrets in the Fire (Young girl living in war-torn Mozambique with the danger of land-mines)

Henning Mankell
ISBN 978 1 86508 181 6

*Parvana and *Parvana's Journey (Young girl living in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and then as an internally displaced refugee)

Deborah Ellis
ISBN 978 1 86508 694 1 & 978 1 86508 999 7

*Little Brother (Searching for family under the Khmer Rouge)

Allan Baillie
ISBN 0140341994

*Hana's Suitcase (Story of a young girl, Hana, who does not survive the Holocaust. Her story is traced by a group of youngsters in Japan.)

Karen Levine
ISBN 978 1 74114 167 2

*Dark Hours (German children are trapped in a basement during the firebombing of Dresden.)

Gudrun Pausewang (trans. by John Brownjohn)
ISBN 9781741149210

Milkweed (Jewish boy in WWII Poland survives on the streets. Some disturbing content; best for older teenagers.)

Jerry Spinelli

ISBN 9781843624851

WEBSITES

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
www.ushmm.org/

and for suggested approaches to teaching the Holocaust, see
<http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/>

Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre, Melbourne
www.jhc.org.au

(13-15 Selwyn St. Elsternwick 95281985)

The Sydney Jewish Museum
www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au

(148 Darlinghurst Rd., Darlinghurst)

FILMS

The Wave. Set in an American high school, this movie explores the story of a teacher who wants his students to understand the power of propaganda and how Hitler was able to turn an entire nation against the Jews.

Shoah: an oral history. This film is a 5 part detailed history which interviews Polish peasants, train drivers, survivors. The account is compelling.
120 mins

Schindler's List. The story of Oscar Schindler and his attempt to save Jews
Steven Spielberg
187mins

The Diary of Anne Frank

George Stevens

163 minutes

B&W

20th Century Fox

LIBRARIES

Makor Jewish Community Library has copies of all of most of the items in the bibliographies above.
Go to their web site: www.vicnet.net.au/~jlibrary

*Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre, Victorian Department of Education and Training, has copies of the asterisked items in the bibliographies above and resource lists on the topics of war, refugees and human rights:

www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/lmerc

Language and Multicultural Resource Centre, South Australian Department of Education.

www.lmrc.sa.edu.au

ABOUT THE WRITERS

KATHY KACER

Kathy Kacer is a Canadian writer. Kathy has won many awards for her writing, including the Silver Birch, the Red Maple, the Hackmatack and the Jewish Book Award. In 1999 she wrote her first book in Canada's Second Story Press Holocaust Remembrance Series for Young Readers, *The Secret of Gabi's Dresser*. Since then she has penned four other books for the series, including *The Underground Reporters*, *Clara's War*, and *The Night Spies*. *The Diary of Laura's Twin* won the 2008 National Jewish Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature in the USA.

The rights to her books have been sold to many countries, including Germany, China, Italy, Thailand, England, Japan, and Slovenia. She has adapted *The Secret of Gabi's Dresser* into a successful play.

A former psychologist who worked with troubled teens, Kathy now writes about the Holocaust for young readers and travels the country speaking about it. She also addresses adults about how to teach sensitive material to young children. Kathy lives in Toronto with her family.

MICHELLE PRAWER

Michelle Praver is a librarian specializing in Young Adult literature at Leibler Yavneh College in Melbourne. She is also Head of English and teaches English to middle and senior level students. She is a VCE assessor, a member of the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge selection panel, a YABBA committee member and actively involved in the Children's Book Council of Australia, Victorian branch.

Michelle is the mother of 7 delightful children who are all keen readers.