

DRAGON SKIN

By Karen Foxlee

CULTURAL SAFETY

Before you begin, carefully consider the steps you can take to ensure that you are providing a culturally safe and inclusive space for everybody in your classroom and school. This may include undertaking cultural competency training, and reading widely and proactively to self-educate yourself.

RECOMMENDED FOR: 10-14 years old **A magical realism fiction book for readers in Years 4-8, UPPER PRIMARY to LOWER SECONDARY**

THEMES: Friendship, community, family violence, coercive control and toxic relationships, single-parent families, death, grief, loneliness, outback Australia, adventure, fantasy, dragons, animals

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CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS: 

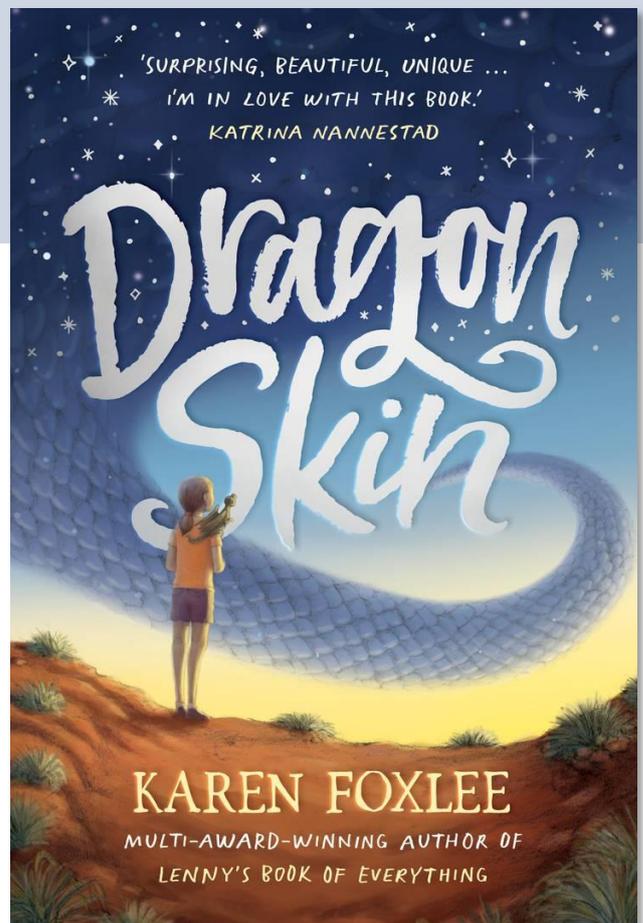
- **ENGLISH:** Literacy, literature and language
- **HEALTH and PHYSICAL EDUCATION**
- **HUMANITIES and SOCIAL SCIENCES:** Geography
- **THE ARTS:** Visual Arts, Music and Drama

NOTES WRITTEN BY: Sophie Honeybourne

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INTRODUCTION

Dragon Skin is a beautifully written story that cleverly connects the fantastical elements of rescuing and caring for a magical baby dragon with the reality of living with grief and family violence. The main character, Pip, goes on a journey of self-discovery where she uncovers her own inner strength and learns about her capacity to help others.

As well as providing many rich opportunities for studying English, the novel also provides excellent opportunities to study content related to Personal, Social and Community Health (through the themes of managing relationships, coping with change and loss, and dealing with issues of family and community safety). The harsh beauty and reality of the setting, an outback mining town and its surrounding country, provides links for Geography studies (the interactions between people and their environments). As a richly descriptive novel, there are also many opportunities for creative responses via the Arts (Music, Drama and Visual Arts / Media Arts).

PLOT SUMMARY

Pip is a lonely girl who lives with her mother and her mother's controlling boyfriend Matt in an outback Australian mining town. One evening, when she is avoiding going home, a flash of light reflects off something in the creek bed and Pip discovers a weak, dying baby dragon.

Pip takes the dragon home to try to save him, and so embarks on a magical journey of friendship, self-discovery and dragon-rearing. Along the way she is guided by absent friend Mika and helped by her new friends Laura and Archie. Over the course of an action-packed week, Pip and her new friends nurse the dragon, Little Fella, back to health and learn a lot about themselves in the process. Pip magically grows her own 'dragon skin' which helps her to deal with the grief of losing Mika, and find the strength to help her mother run away from Matt and begin a new life.

Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR, KAREN FOXLEE

What are the major themes of Dragon Skin?

Dragon Skin is a story about surviving and escaping domestic violence, about grief and loss, friendship and family all enclosed within a magical story of a girl trying to save a baby dragon.

What do you see as the outstanding features of the book?

It is a simple, compelling story for readers aged 10-14. It features, at its heart, a compelling magical story about a girl that must save a small dragon she has found half-dead, whilst dealing with big themes like friendship, loss, domestic violence, and finding courage and strength. It is written in concise yet lyrical language which brings to life the harsh yet beautiful Australian outback landscape.

What was your inspiration for writing this story?

I grew up in Mount Isa, an outback mining town in far north-west Queensland, and I really wanted to bring to

life this landscape. I also wanted to write about domestic violence and toxic masculinity in Australia in a way that a young person could make sense of it.

How did the story develop during the writing process?

Dragon Skin started as a short story about a girl called Pip who finds a half-dead baby dragon lying in the dry creek bed of her hometown. I knew from the start that Pip would come from a very broken, dysfunctional home. I also knew that, in some way, saving the dragon was also about saving herself and her mother from this place, and that everything she learns along the way from saving the dragon, in fact is preparing her for a new life.

The story eventually outgrew its short form. The character Mika emerged as very important, a best friend who understood her as well as, in later drafts, two other important friends in Archie and Laura.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

BEFORE READING *DRAGON SKIN*

The book sensitively deals with some ‘big’ emotional topics: grief and domestic abuse. Either of these may be a trigger for students depending on their backgrounds and experiences. In particular, the story represents coercive control, a form of family and domestic abuse. Prior to reading, it may be a good idea to introduce and discuss these topics with students and ensure that safety protocols are put in place for students who may be distressed.

Discussion topics prior to reading:

- Have you ever felt alone? What made you feel alone? What did the experience feel like? What did you do to feel less alone?
- Have you ever lost someone you love (this may include a pet)? How did you feel? What helped you to grieve? What helped to ease your pain?
- Are secrets good or bad? Can good secrets be bad, and vice versa?
- Think about stories and movies that you have read or watched involving dragons. What are some common characteristics of dragons as represented in these texts?

ENGLISH

LITERATURE



Responding to Literature

- On p.165, the scene after the break begins with “*If you find a dragon you need a friend*”. What do you think is meant by this comment? How might finding a friend make caring for a dragon easier?
- In Act 1, we are introduced to Pip, her Mum, Matt and Mika. What do we learn about each of these characters and what can we infer about their personalities?
 - **WORKSHEET 1:** Create a table for each character, recording some relevant direct quotes in one column and then inferring what the quote reveals about the character in the next column.
 - Continue to record and interpret information throughout the story, adding rows for each chapter.
- On p. 200, Pip can’t think of a name to describe her relationship or job in terms of Little Fella. Laura is a Dragon Singer, and Archie is a Dragon Trainer. What do you think Pip would be, and why?
- Mika finds a kitten, and Pip finds a baby dragon, both of which help them through difficult times. Can you think of another story or movie where a key character has found an animal that helps them handle a challenging situation, or helps them to heal? Why do animals sometimes help humans feel better?

Responding to literature

Y4 Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view.

Y4 Use metalanguage to describe the effects of ideas, text structures and language features of literary texts.

Y5 Present a point of view about particular literary texts using appropriate metalanguage, and reflecting on the viewpoints of others.

Y6 Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots.

- In many stories and movies, dragons are presented as strong, brave and terrifying. How is Little Fella presented differently in *Dragon Skin*? Although he is weak, what qualities does he give Pip? Discuss, then use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the aspects of Little Fella that follow the mythological dragon stereotype and those that don't.
- Pip's mother is mainly referred to as Mum or Pip's mother. The only time when we learn her name is on p. 203 when Matt yells it out. Why do you think that Pip's mother has almost 'lost' her name in the story? How does this affect her character?
- Pip allegedly grows a 'dragon skin'. Did Pip really grow a dragon skin? Why, or why not? If not, why was the idea of a dragon skin included in the story? Introduce the concept of an extended metaphor to students and discuss whether or not the author intended readers to think the dragon skin was real or not.

Y7 Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view.

Y8 Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate opinions and arguments about aspects of literary texts.

Examining Literature

- On p. 10, Mika's voice appears in Pip's mind:

'Stay calm Pip . . . Keep your nerve. Eat your spaghetti and think. What do you need to save a dragon?' Relief made her sink back into her chair. She was always so glad when he spoke to her. Just when she thought he'd gone for good, there he was.

Mika's voice continues to appear in Pip's head throughout the text. Discuss the role that his character plays in the story and how it helps to reveal Pip's inner thoughts.

- Throughout the story, Pip's mum scrolls through her phone, entering different searches on the internet. Find examples chronologically in the text, then discuss what these reveal about her thoughts and feelings as the story unfolds. How do these searches help to move the plot forwards?
- Laura is an interesting character in the text. We first meet her on pp. 43-44:

'Have you got a dad, Pip?' Laura Denning, who sat in front of her, had turned to whisper. It was said in a sickly-sweet voice. Pink ribbons braided through her hair.

Examine further references to Laura on pp. 95 and 145, underlining key descriptive phrases. Compare these with the last two pages that Laura features before she is grounded (pp. 294-295), again underlining key descriptive phrases. How does the narrator's opinion of Laura change throughout the story?

- The cave is a key part of the setting, but could also be read as a symbol in the text. Explain that a symbol is something that can have a bigger or different meaning, such as a colour that makes us think of qualities or characteristics (black = dark, evil) or objects such as doors that can make us think of transitions or changes. Using this understanding of symbolism, what might the cave be a symbol of in this story? How might the symbol of the cave relate to some of the themes in the story?
- The author creates a threatening tone around Matt without directly describing acts of violence. Closely read pp. 111-112. Underline or highlight words and phrases that the author uses to build this sense of threat (e.g. *a rumble of words, like stones . . . cried . . . flinched . . . louder . . . exploded . . . anger . . . blood.*)

Examining Literature

Y5 Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses.

Y6 Identify the relationship between words, sounds, imagery and language patterns in narratives and poetry such as ballads, limericks and free verse.

Y7 Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches.

Y8 Recognise, explain and analyse the ways literary texts draw on readers' knowledge of other texts and enable new understanding and appreciation of aesthetic qualities.

Y8 Identify and evaluate devices that create tone, for example humour, wordplay, innuendo and parody in poetry, humorous prose, drama or visual texts.

Creating Literature

- Little Fella brings out different, perhaps hidden, qualities in people. For example, he makes Pip brave, Laura more vulnerable, and Archie more focused and confident. What qualities would he bring out in you and why?
 - Write a written response, starting with: ‘If I met Little Fella he would help me to become more ...’
- Throughout the story, there are references to how life might be different for Pip in Townsville. Verbally compare the environments (beach vs outback), towns (bigger town vs smaller, isolated town), lifestyles (things to do, places to visit), schools and also the personal impact of leaving Matt. Use this information to write an email from Pip to Laura once she has settled in Townsville, describing her new life.
- Imagine that Mika and his mother did make it over the river in order to safely escape. Write a letter from him to Pip, referring to a special place that he has found and enclosing a special stone for her. Include a description of where he is living, a description of the stone and an explanation of how the stone might help Pip.
- Discuss what might have happened to Little Fella after he flew off. Do dragons live in the outback of Australia, or did he come from another world or dimension? Use a similar style to that of the author to write an epilogue about Little Fella’s next adventure.
- Closely read pp.319-321, which describe the moment when Little Fella leaves. The author’s use of language is highly figurative, with stylistic elements of poetry. Highlight some of these key phrases, then select and rearrange them in the form of a poem. Think carefully about the organisation of phrases on a line, and any stanzas you might include.
- Provide examples of fractured fairytales and movies where the perspective of the story is changed to that of the villain. Discuss the fact that Matt is the villain in *Dragon Skin*, because the story is presented from Pip’s viewpoint (and also her mother’s).
 - Choose a key scene in which Pip describes Matt (suggestions include pp.111-112, 274-275). Identify and describe how he is presented in these scenes.
 - What are his behaviours, thoughts and opinions? Are these necessarily ‘true’? Why might he act like this?
 - Discuss how you could flip the point of view of the scene to that of Matt, then rewrite the scene from his perspective.
- A key part of the plot in *Dragon Skin* is the fact that Pip is slowly taking on dragon ‘characteristics’ even if she is not physically changing into a dragon. Analyse descriptions in the story that refer to these changes (e.g. p. 276).
 - Discuss which animal might best represent your characteristics, then draft and write a transition scene, which describes how you either physically turn into this animal or take on some of its characteristics.

Creating Literature

Y4 Create literary texts that explore students’ own experiences and imagining.

Y4 Create literary texts by developing storylines, characters and settings.

Y5 Create literary texts using realistic and fantasy settings and characters that draw on the worlds represented in texts students have experienced.

Y5 Create literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and stylistic features of selected authors.

Y6 Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways.

Y7 Create literary texts that adapt stylistic features encountered in other texts, for example, narrative viewpoint, structure of stanzas, contrast and juxtaposition.

Y8 Experiment with particular language features drawn from different types of texts, including combinations of language and visual choices to create new texts.

Interpreting, Analysing, Evaluating

- Use the following comprehension questions to help students understand key points in the text:
 - In the middle of p. 53, Pip whispers “*We have to leave*”. How has the scratch from Little Fella begun to change Pip?
 - On pp. 54-55, Pip reveals that she feels like she has been ‘chosen’ by Little Fella and also by Mika. Why is this important to Pip? How does it make her feel?
 - On p. 73, Pip thinks “*What if the dragon scratch changed me?*” What clues are there in the next 25 pages that reveal some of the changes Pip is going through? Which changes are physical, and which are emotional or mental?
 - The second time that Pip sings a dragon song, on p. 136, we learn more about the effect that the song has on her, and also the connection it forges between her and Little Fella. Discuss why the dragon song is important for both Pip and Little Fella.
 - Laura first sings a dragon song between pp. 188-191. Read the scene carefully, then compare and contrast to when Pip sings the song. Why has the author included different dragon songs in the story? What are we beginning to understand about dragon songs? How do they help to build characterisation and move the plot forward?
 - On p. 197-198, we learn about the first stone that Mika gives Pip. Read the descriptions of the other stones that Mika gives her (pp. 220, 257, 303). Create a chart to record: a visual description of each stone; a physical description; the context in which the stone was given; how the stone helped Pip (i.e. what it helped her to think or feel).
 - Pip returns the stones back to the creek on p. 320. Why does she do this? What change does this symbolise in Pip?
 - Mika describes Marty, the man who threatened him and his mother, on pp. 223-224. Highlight key-words and phrases and compare these to the descriptions of Matt. What language has the author used to make these two characters so threatening and frightening?
 - Laura’s house is described in detail over pp. 232-239. Re-read these pages, recording information about the house and its contents. How has the author used the setting of Laura’s house to characterise Laura and her family?
 - On p. 274-275, there is a shift in terms of how Pip thinks of Matt. What is this shift? Which phrases reveal that she is no longer as frightened of him?
 - From p. 276 to the end of the book, there are moments when Pip ‘sees’ her dragon skin growing and splitting. How does the growth of the dragon skin correlate with what is happening in Pip’s life, her grief for Mika and her fear of Matt?

Interpreting,
Analysing and
Evaluating

Y4 Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts.

Y5 Use comprehension strategies to analyse information, integrating and linking ideas from a variety of print and digital sources.

Y6 Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse information and ideas, comparing content from a variety of textual sources including media and digital texts.

Y7 Use comprehension strategies to interpret, analyse and synthesise ideas and information, critiquing ideas and issues from a variety of textual sources.

Y8 Use comprehension strategies to interpret and evaluate texts by reflecting on the validity of content and the credibility of sources, including finding evidence in the text for the author’s point of view.

- On p. 287-289, the three children talk about what they did to save Little Fella. What did each character do? How did this experience change each character?
- We finally find out what happened to Mika on p. 316-318. How is Pip feeling about this? How do we know?
- In the final sequence, when Pip and her mum leave, Pip “felt like she could breathe for the first time in years”. What does this phrase mean?
- List all the things that have caused Pip to feel like she can’t breathe, then explain how each one has been dealt with in the story.



Creating Texts: Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive...

Creating Texts

- The story includes lots of practical information about how Pip looks after Little Fella. Record this information, then use it to create an explanatory text (such as a set of instructions, or a manual) about ‘How to care for a baby dragon’.
- Read a variety of informative texts about animals. Use the same style to create an informative text about baby dragons. Begin by writing digital notes based on information from the book. Then reorganise the notes under the sub-headings: classification, appearance, behaviour, habitat, diet, threats. Draft and publish the text digitally.
- Read the descriptions of Little Fella towards the end of the book. Use these to create a detailed drawing on him and label aspects of his appearance using descriptive noun groups from the text (e.g. delicate, lacy wings).
- Mika and Pip have a series of special places in the story. Identify these in the text, then list them. Use these to create a map, or even a special tourist guide to ‘Magical places for kids in Mount Isa’.

(Y4) ...texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features.

(Y5) ...print and multimodal texts, choosing text structures, language features, images and sound appropriate to purpose and audience.

(Y6) ...texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience.

(Y7) ...texts, selecting aspects of subject matter and particular language, visual, and audio features to convey information and ideas.

LANGUAGE

Text structure and Organisation

- Unusually for a novel, the book is organised in ‘Acts’. Look at a variety of novels from the young adult section of the school library to look for similarities in the way they are structured. Identify which literary format usually includes acts (stage plays). Discuss why the author might have chosen to use the word act instead of ‘part’ or ‘section’.
- Continuing with the structure of the text, instead of chapter numbers, there are images of rocks, sticks and stones.
 - **WORKSHEET 2:** Look through these images. What might they mean? Are there any patterns in terms of how they relate to the content or purpose of each chapter?

Text Structure and Organisation

Y5 Understand how texts vary in purpose, structure and topic as well as the degree of formality.

Y6 Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects.

Expressing and Developing Ideas

- Examine the language used to describe the creek on p. 4. Which words or phrases help to personify the creek and give it a sense of personality?
- Find examples in the text of physical descriptions of Little Fella. Explore the noun groups used to build description, including the adjectives that classify or describe key nouns and any additional information provided after the noun.
- Choose a sequence of pages related to a key plot point (the references included in the comprehension questions are a good starting point). Examine the variety of sentences used, including their length. What effect does a combination of long and short sentences have? How do they work to engage the reader and build tension?
- On p.156, Pip smells Laura’s words. They “*smelled tangy, like crushed dandelions. Her words smelled nervous*”. Discuss the imagery associated with ‘crushed dandelions’. What does this simile reveal to the reader? Experiment with your own similes to describe how words (linked to feelings) might smell.
- We first learn that Pip is sure she will go to Townsville on p. 268. How has the author used personification of waves and trees to convince the reader that Pip knows, and will go?
- Explore the imagery and descriptive language associated with Matt. Choose a short description (such as those on p. 3, 119, 199, 202, 258, or 274). Identify some of the language used to describe him, his behaviour or how Pip feels when he is around. How ‘strong’ are these words? Discuss how this ‘strong’ descriptive language builds the tension and threat-level in the book.
- Find examples of Pip’s mum’s ‘scrolling’ or internet searching (e.g. on p. 62, 183 or 253) . The text in these sections is essentially a series of descriptive, informative noun groups strung together without any punctuation. Identify where the noun groups begin and end, then discuss what they collectively reveal about Pip’s mother’s thoughts and feelings. Suggest further ones that could be added to: 1) describe Pip’s mother’s negative thoughts about herself and her appearance; 2) describe ways she might be thinking of leaving; 3) how she might be seeking help.
- Convert the story of Pip saving Little Fella into a picture book for younger children. Start by writing down an overview of the key plot developments (e.g. discovering Little Fella, he almost dies, Pip saves him, he scratches her, other people find out about him, they also save him, he thrives, Pip begins to have ‘dragon’ qualities, he flies away, Pip and her mother find the strength to leave).
 - Read a variety of children’s picture books, discussing how language is used sparsely yet carefully and also identifying how the images need to combine with the language to tell the story.
 - How could you use images to ‘tell’ the story of Pip taking on dragon characteristics and becoming braver? Choose one plot point, write the text, and then develop an image to accompany it that works with the text to create meaning.

Expressing and Developing Ideas

Y5 Understand the use of vocabulary to express greater precision of meaning, and know that words can have different meanings in different contexts.

Y5 Understand how noun groups/phrases and adjective groups/phrases can be expanded in a variety of ways to provide a fuller description of the person, place, thing or idea.

Y5 Understand how noun groups/phrases and adjective groups/phrases can be expanded in a variety of ways to provide a fuller description of the person, place, thing or idea.

Y6 Investigate how complex sentences can be used in a variety of ways to elaborate, extend and explain ideas.

Y6 Investigate how vocabulary choices, including evaluative language can express shades of meaning, feeling and opinion.

Y7 Understand how modality is achieved through discriminating choices in modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives and nouns.

Y8 Investigate how visual and multimodal texts allude to or draw on other texts or images to enhance and layer meaning.

ENGLISH ASSESSMENT

- Write an epilogue from one of these characters' perspectives: Pip, Laura, Pip's mum, Matt or Little Fella. Include information either directly gathered or inferred from the text to inform your writing. Ensure you include descriptions of how the character has changed and how their life is different after the sequence of events in the story.
- Analyse how the author has used language to characterise Matt. Find direct quotes that describe his appearance, actions and behaviours, identify quotes that reveal how Pip feels when he is nearby and refer to Pip's mother's internet searches about how she feels. Write a paragraph to describe how these combined descriptions present Matt as a character.
- Write a new 'flashback' where Mika gives Pip another rock. Include a paragraph that explains what the rock symbolises and where this would fit in the existing narrative and why.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION



Being Healthy, Safe and Active

- Create a definition of 'identity'. Discuss all of the different internal (personal) and external (place, culture, family context) influences that help shape a person's identity. Next, discuss and describe Pip and Mika's identities as represented in the story. How have internal and external factors affected their identities? Compare and contrast these with Laura's identity. What does *Dragon Skin* help us to understand about the ways in which external influences can shape a person's identity?
- Curate a set of suitable wellbeing resources that are available to children in domestic violence situations. Jointly explore these resources with students, discussing how they might help children such as Pip and her mother.
- Both Mika and Pip are very resilient characters. Discuss what it means to be resilient, then find examples from the text to illustrate when Mika and Pip show this quality.
- Identify the strategies Pip develops to try to keep herself safe at home. How successful are her strategies? Could you suggest additional strategies? Roleplay some new strategies and discuss how and why they might be effective.
- Sensitively discuss grief and the emotions associated with it (resources such as the [Kids Helpline website](#) provide information about grief in children). Research some further age-appropriate resources that can be used to support children with grief. What might you recommend to Pip and her friends to help them deal with the death of Mika?

Being Healthy, Safe and Active

Y5 and 6 Examine how identities are influenced by people and places.

Y7 and 8 Investigate the impact of transition and change on identities.

Y5 and 6 Investigate community resources and ways to seek help about health, safety and wellbeing.

Y5 and 6 Plan and practise strategies to promote health, safety and wellbeing.

Y7 and 8 Practise and apply strategies to seek help for themselves or others.

Communicating and interacting for Health and Wellbeing

- Find examples of Pip's emotional responses to living with Matt and her mum. Name the emotions Pip might be feeling during the times when Matt is nearby. How do her feelings about her home affect her ability to interact with other children? Why do you think that Pip forms such a close friendship with Mika, but not some of the other children?

Communicating and interacting for Health and Wellbeing

Y5 and 6 Examine the influence of emotional responses on behaviour and relationships.

- How and why do Pip's friendships with Mika, Laura and Archie positively impact her wellbeing? What changes do we see in Pip?
- Re-read the searches that Pip's mum does on the internet. Sort the search results into categories such as 'personal care', 'appearance', 'cooking', 'abusive relationships' and 'positive goals'. Read through the searches on p. 62, 183 or 253 and then tally how many searches fit into each category on each page. How do the searches at the beginning of the book reveal that Pip's mum feels bad, compared to the searches at the end of the book which indicate that she is feeling stronger and more positive? How do some of these searches help Pip's mum?

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

- Ask students to respond to the following questions to assess their level of understanding about being healthy, safe and active, and communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing:
 - At the beginning of the book, how have Pip's feelings affected her behaviour and her interactions with other people?
 - What emotions does Pip feel in response to Mika's death? How does she process her emotional grief?
 - What does Pip do to keep herself safe at home?
 - Who else could Pip have turned to for help about Matt? Suggest some safe people she could have turned to.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

HASS Inquiry and Skills

- Develop questions to investigate about Mount Isa. Think about questions associated with the place, people, economic activities and challenges.
- Research one key environmental statistic in Mount Isa (e.g. rainfall) and present as a graph, with a written analysis of what it reveals.

HASS Knowledge and Understanding

- Pip mentions hearing distant mine blast sirens and feeling the ground shuddering from mine blasts. Discuss what it might be like to live in a mining town. How might a place influence the way you live there?
- Research large mines in Australia (for example those in Mount Isa or the Pilbara region). Identify the natural resources that are mined from these areas, including other natural resources (such as water and air) that may be affected by these mines. Explore how some mines are attempting to make their extraction processes more environmentally sustainable.

Factors that influence the decisions people make about where to live and their perceptions of the liveability of places.

The influence of accessibility to services and facilities on the liveability of places.

The influence of environmental quality on the liveability of places.

Strategies used to enhance the liveability of places, especially for young people, including examples from Australia and Europe.

Place and Liveability

Mount Isa would be an excellent study for a Year 7 Geography unit on ‘Place and liveability’.

- Research the demographics of Mount Isa. What is the average age, gender and cultural background of Mount Isa’s inhabitants? Compare and contrast this to a metropolitan city in Australia. Why might there be key demographic differences?
- Throughout the story, Pip’s mum clearly needs help, however there is no mention of a women’s shelter or service to support her. Use the internet to explore the health and wellbeing services available in Mount Isa and reflect on some of the challenges that living in this remote location might involve.
- The mining town is ever-present as a setting to the story, often invading and shaping the narrative. Research and discuss how living in this environment might affect aspects of people’s physical and mental health. For example, the [air quality in the region is closely monitored](#) due to significant lead mining.
- Mount Isa’s Council markets the city as a ‘City of Opportunity’ that aims to be “*the most liveable city in Queensland*”. Explore the information provided on Mount Isa City Council’s [website about living in Mount Isa](#). What strategies has the council put in place to try to enhance the liveability of the city? How does the liveability of Mount Isa compare to the liveability of students’ own city?

Landforms and Landscapes

The physical landforms surrounding Mount Isa, including those affected by flood, could be used as a case study for a Year 8 Geography unit on ‘Landforms and landscapes’.

- In *Dragon Skin*, Pip recounts Mika’s disbelief at the flooded river. Research the physical geography of the Mount Isa region and how and why the area might flood.
- Use maps and information online to research landforms in Mount Isa. Which are natural and which have been man-made (such as Lake Moondarra)? How has water shaped the local environment naturally, and how have humans used water to change the natural environment and its landforms?
- Use data to explore the mining boom in Australia and its effect on the migration of people to ‘mining towns’. Read the 2013 article on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website [Towns of the Mining Boom](#), then support students to interpret some of the key graphs, such as population increase, proportion who were male and people buying and renting housing. These graphs reveal some stark contrasts between mining towns and other urban areas in Australia.

Geomorphic processes that produce landforms, including a case study of at least one landform.

Different types of landscapes and their distinctive landform features.

HASS ASSESSMENT

Would you like to live in Mount Isa compared to your home now?

- Research some key geographical statistics that could be used to compare your town and Mount Isa.
- Create at least one two-way graph that illustrates one aspect of living in the two locations (such as temperature, rainfall, population, pollution, access to services etc).
- Write a paragraph to describe what your data tells you, then write a reasoned conclusion about which town you would prefer to live in and why.

THE ARTS



VISUAL ARTS

- Read the descriptions of Little Fella in the book. Sketch some ideas about what he might look like. Choose materials of your choice to create an artwork of Little Fella, such as pencil, paint, mixed media or digital drawing.
- Curate some examples of dragon tattoos from the internet (a search for ‘dragon tattoo’ or ‘dragon skin tattoo’ provides numerous results). Visually, what do many of these have in common? Explore and discuss style, use of line, colour and perspective, as well as positioning on the body. Imagine that, once Pip grows up, she decides to get a dragon skin tattoo. Design and illustrate the tattoo.
- The story describes some stunning landscapes (the creek, waterhole, cave and surrounding landscape) and interesting streetscapes (mining houses, the abandoned drive-in movie theatre). Choose one of these settings and create a landscape painting to represent it. Discuss perspective, horizon line (where land meets sky and its proportions) and the message the painting aims to convey. Finally, explore how paint, charcoal and pastels can be used to create layered effects and mixed with textural elements to enhance the artwork.

Y5 AND 6 Develop and apply techniques and processes when making their artworks.

Y7 and 8 Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes

Y7 and 8 Experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork.

MUSIC

- Re-read the pages where Pip or Laura sing to Little Fella (pp. 36-38, 136, 190-191). Discuss what these songs might sound like, referring to dynamics, expression, rhythm and pitch. Use an app such as Garage Band to create one of the songs that Pip or Laura sing to Little Fella, incorporating the musical elements discussed.
- Imagine that the scene where Pip first finds Little Fella is being turned into a movie. Identify and describe the mood of this scene, then discuss what sound effects and/or musical backgrounds might be included to enhance and communicate this mood. Either develop sound effects using voice and available instruments, or use digital sound effects via available technologies. After performing these effects, explain how they would add meaning to the scene.

Y5 and 6 Develop technical and expressive skills in singing and playing instruments with understanding of rhythm, pitch and form in a range of pieces, including in music from the community.

Y7 and 8 Practise and rehearse a variety of music, including Australian music to develop technical and expressive skills.

DRAMA

- Create a series of [freeze frames](#) between Pip, Laura and Archie related to some key scenes that involve all three characters (such as when they first all sit down with Little Fella, or the final scene in the cave). What expressions will the characters show on their faces? What positions will their bodies be in? How will the characters relate to each other? What mood do you want to convey in this image?
- Pip experiences a dilemma earlier on in the story about whether or not she will help Little Fella. Explore her character’s feelings about this by conducting a [conscience alley](#) to help Pip decide whether or not she should help him.

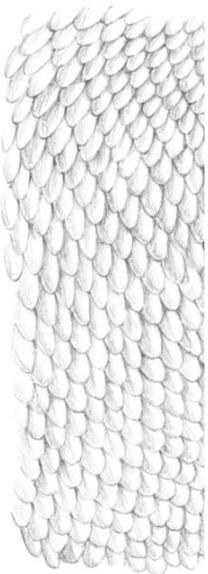
Y5 and 6 Develop skills and techniques of voice and movement to create character, mood and atmosphere and focus dramatic action.

Y7 and 8 Combine the elements of drama in devised and scripted drama to explore and develop issues, ideas and themes.

- Use the [hot seating](#) technique to interview various students, acting in the role of Pip, at key points in the story (the comprehension page references in the English section will provide some suggestions). For the student in the role of Pip, identify what her character might be thinking and feeling at this point, and whether or not her external behaviours and opinions will correlate with her inner thoughts. For the students asking the questions, think about asking questions that might reveal inner thoughts or conflicts.
- Adapt one key scene from the book into a scene from a play. In a small group, rewrite the scene including (where appropriate) a narrator's scene setting, various characters' dialogue and any relevant stage directions. Practise and perform for an audience.

THE ARTS ASSESSMENT

- **VISUAL ARTS:** Develop two images (drawn or digital) that show Little Fella at the beginning of the book and the end. Discuss how these two images contrast with each other and communicate the way he has changed and grown, not just physically but emotionally as a result of his connection with Pip and her friends.
- **MUSIC:** Develop two short pieces of music that could be used as soundtracks to the scenes where 1) Pip wakes up in the morning, thinking that Little Fella has died, and 2) when he flies away from her at the end of the book. Write a short explanation as to how you have used the elements of music to communicate the two different moods at these points in the story.
- **DRAMA:** Develop and perform a dramatic interpretation of the scene in the cave where Little Fella flies away from Pip, Laura and Archie.



ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Sophie Honeybourne is a primary teacher with a passion for children's literature. After studying English Literature at university in the UK, dabbling in a diverse series of jobs and engaging in some globe-trotting, she finally settled upon a career in teaching, completing a Master of Teaching at Sydney University. She has held teaching and leadership positions at schools in various regions of Sydney before moving to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, where she currently holds the position of Coordinator of Talent Development at Matthew Flinders Anglican College.

Sophie has written numerous educational literature units for the Primary English Teaching Association of Australia, as well as producing materials for Educational Services Australia and the *NSW School Magazine*.

In her spare time Sophie loves to spend time with her two children and long-suffering husband, read and drink cocktails with her book club, sail, ocean swim, cook, garden and sleep!

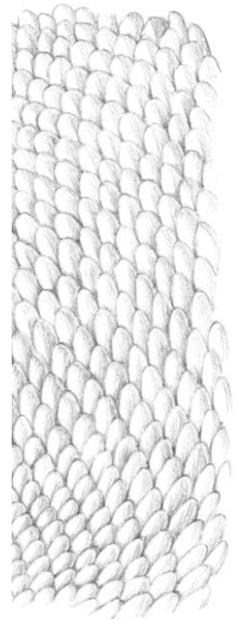
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Foxlee is an Australian author who writes for both kids and young adults. She grew up in the Australia outback mining town Mount Isa and still frequently dreams she is walking barefoot along the dry Leichhardt River.

One of four children, she started telling stories when she was young. She filled countless small exercise books with sweeping sagas of orphaned girls illustrated with pictures cut from the back of *Reader's Digest* magazines.

She has worked as an underground cable mapper, pool kiosk attendant, library assistant and hotel laundry hand and eventually became a registered nurse.

Karen lives in South East Queensland with her daughter and several animals, including two wicked parrots who frequently eat parts of her laptop when she isn't looking. Her passions are her daughter, writing, day-dreaming, baking, running and swimming in the sea.



CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

Dragon Keeper series, Carole Wilkinson

Inheritance Cycle series, Christopher Paolini

Wings of Fire series, Tui T Sutherland

His Dark Materials trilogy, Phillip Pullman

ONLINE RESOURCES

Kids Helpline Australia website (grief and loss): <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/supporting-child-through-grief-and-loss>

Queensland Government Pollution monitoring (Mount Isa):
<https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/pollution/monitoring/air/mount-isa>

Mount Isa Council (living in Mount Isa): <https://www.mountisa.qld.gov.au/living-mount-isa/living-mount-isa-1>

Australian Bureau of Statistics website – Towns of the Mining Boom:
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/4102.0main+features!0April+2013#p1>

Drama Resource website links:

- <https://dramaresource.com/freeze-frames/>
- <https://dramaresource.com/conscience-alley/>
- <https://dramaresource.com/hot-seating/>

WORKSHEET 1

Use the table below and record some relevant direct quotes from *Dragon Skin*. Alongside this, indicate what you infer the quote reveals about the character.

Page reference	Character	Direct Quote	What does this quote reveal about the character?

WORKSHEET 2

Look at these images used for the chapter openers of *Dragon Skin*. What might they mean? Are there any patterns in terms of how they relate to the content or purpose of each chapter?

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