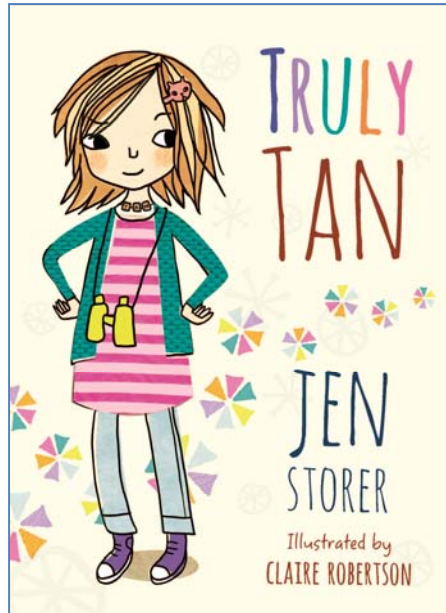


Truly Tan

TEACHERS' NOTES



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Contents

- **Introduction**
- **About the author**
- **Author inspiration**
- **Study notes on themes and curriculum topics:**

a) Themes

b) Curriculum areas and key learning outcomes:

- **SOSE/HSIE**
 - **Literacy and Language**
 - **Visual Arts**
-
- **Questions for reading and discussion**

Bibliography

- **About the author of the notes**

Introduction

'I have the mind of a Great Detective.'(p 1)

Tan Callahan has three older sisters she calls 'the lollipops' – Emerald, Amber, and Rose. Her mother writes about food, her dad is a vet, and they've all just moved to the country with numerous pets. No one's too happy about the move until they meet Ted Murphy and his theatrical sister Jem in their cubby house, the Purple Haunt. Awesome the dog is entranced by Ted. And Amber is crazy about Jem because they both love dancing. Tan (as always) is a little bit sceptical, but also excited by these new prospects. They are accepted into the 'Chosen Few' and even though Tan suffers a hiccup when her new friend Lily suddenly doesn't like her after all, she is then befriended by Gloria ... who just happens to be Ted and Jem's cousin. Tan is delighted, though, when they find themselves with a mystery to solve, for spying is her favourite occupation! So when it appears that the Purple Haunt is being haunted by local ghost Wandering Wanda, Tan begins (with the help of the others) to assemble clues in order to do some serious sleuthing. This is a charming and very amusing series about family life, settling into a new place, making friends, and finding out more about oneself. But most of all it's a story about a feisty, highly imaginative and resourceful girl who is totally original! Truly Tan!

About the author

Jen Storer is a talented and exciting writer for children. Her gothic fantasy novel, *Tensy Farlow and the Home for Mislaid Children*, was shortlisted for a string of awards including the Prime Minister's Literary Awards (Best Children's Fiction) and the Children's Book Council of Australia, Book of the Year. Prior to becoming a full-time writer, Jen worked in the publishing industry as an editor, a project manager and in creative development. Jen has a studio at the Abbotsford Convent in Melbourne.

Author inspiration:

When I wrote the first chapter of *Truly Tan* I was pleased but not thrilled. It was reasonably quirky, occasionally funny, but overall it was a bit flat. I wandered off and had a think. I picked up a pad and pen and doodled for a while. I began to write a diary entry as Tan. In so doing I let go of Jen the author, and became Tan, popular new girl from the city. Suddenly the 'real' voice bubbled up and this quirky little girl with a love of language, a vivid imagination and a strangely idiosyncratic way of speaking took over. Suddenly I *knew* Tan. I quickly went back and rewrote the first chapter. From that point on everything began to fall into place. The action in *Tan* is inspired by my own childhood in the country and my childhood obsession with *The Famous Five*. By the age of ten, my friends and I had formed our own secret spy club complete with code name, EPIC—the Extraordinary Private Investigation Club. We rode about town spying on people (and buildings), taking notes, making up nonsense... and generally believing it. It was great fun and I'll never forget how delicious it was to have Secrets. In the late 1970s

when I left school, I worked as a veterinary nurse in Western Australia and then back in country Victoria. I had always loved the James Herriot books and the television series *All Creatures Great and Small*. I often daydreamed of being married to a country vet (it did not occur to me that perhaps I could become a vet myself!) and of writing books just like Enid Blyton. *Truly Tan* is by and large the result of those daydreams.

Study notes on themes and curriculum topics

a) Themes

- **Family Dynamics**

Families are always interesting, because even though each member of a family has some similarity to another, they are often very different to one another, as well. The Callahan family are more interesting than most, as each of them is very 'idiosyncratic' by nature. *Discussion Point:* Invite students to discuss their own family members and the similarities and differences between them. As in any family, the Callahan girls engage in sibling rivalry from time to time. Discuss what this means and how best to deal with 'issues' with your siblings. The Callahan parents are also very adept at defusing potential family crises. Discuss how your families resolve disputes and disagreements.

- **Friendship**

Discussion Point: Tan is worried about starting at a new school, largely because she misses Molly (her best friend) and fears that she'll find it hard to make another friend. Initially, Lily seems to fit the bill, but proves to be fickle. Then she meets Gloria.

Discussion Point: Why is Lily not such a good friend? Why is Gloria a better friend?

- **Truth and Honesty/Secrets and Lies**

Tan discovers that it is always best to be honest about what one likes or is interested in.

Discussion Point: Is telling an 'untruth' ever justified?

- **Moving House**

Moving to a new place is one of the most traumatic experiences for children.

Discussion Point: Invite students to share their memories of living in another place and then moving. Ask them what they found most difficult about moving house.

Discussion Point: Discuss other books which are focussed on this theme including picture books such as *Clancy and Millie and the Very Fine House* by Libby Gleeson and ill. by Freya Blackwood (Little Hare, 2010); *Neville* by Norton Juster and ill. by G. Brian Karas (Schwartz and Wade, 2011); *Moving House* by Mark Siegel (Roaring Brook Press, 2011). *Alexander, who's not (Do you hear me? I mean it) going to move* by Judith Viorst and ill. by Robin Preiss-Glasser (Greenwillow Books, 2011); *A New Room for William* by Sally Grindley and ill. by Carol Thompson (Bloomsbury, 2001); *Spirit of Hope* by Bob Graham (Lothian, 1993). [See **Bibliography.**]

Key learning outcomes:

- Understanding of family dynamics and relationships.
- Insight into the nature of friendship.
- Appreciation of feelings about moving house.

b) Curriculum Areas and key learning outcomes

SOSE

- **Pets**

The Callahans have a variety of pets – E the cat; Awesome, Tan's dog; Doodad is Amber's Poodle Chihuahua cross, a *poohuahua* (pronounced *poo-wah-wah*, with the emphasis on the poo!); Queen Victoria (QV) a tortoise; and Babbles a nervous bird.

Discussion Point: Ask your students if they have any pet? If they don't have pets, ask them what sort of pet they would like to have?

Activity: Write a story about you and your imaginary or real pet.

- **School**

Attending a new school can be a difficult adjustment for a student, with new teachers and rules, and with the need to make new friends.

Discussion Point: Is your school welcoming to new students? What do you do to make a new student feel at home?

- **Food**

Discussion Point: Food is an important part of life in the Callahan house as Coral, their mum, is a food writer and cook. Foods such as Gorgonzola cheese, field mushrooms, olive mashed potato and Spanish-style crumbed cutlets are often on the evening menu. When they picnic, they eat chicken pieces from a china bowl, potato salad, crusty bread and home-made ginger beer. (p 8) When they go to have a sleepover at the Purple Haunt, Tan brings in her backpack: 'twenty-four sausage rolls, a bottle of tomato sauce, a cinnamon tea cake, a tin of toffee brownies, a

watermelon that has been cut up, a bag of jelly babies' (p 143). What food would you take on a sleepover? Make a list of some of your favourite things to eat!

- **Paranormal Things**

This novel contains references to various forms of magic and the paranormal. eg the magic eight-ball, reading palms, ghosts, vampires and zombies.

Discussion Point: Wandering Wanda is said to be a ghost. Ask your students if they believe in such beings? Why/why not?

- **Cubby Houses**

One of the things Tan likes when she moves to the new place is the tree-house in their garden which she makes into the World Headquarters of her spy network. Then she and her sisters discover Ted and Jem's 'Purple Haunt' a house-size cubbyhouse.

Discussion Point: Have you ever had a cubby house? What would your cubby house look like? Design a unique cubby house.

- **Spying**

Tan loves spying on people and has established her World Headquarters in the treehouse as a base. She has all kinds of things to help her with her spying – things like binoculars, a telescope and her my Spy 'n' Pry magnifying glass.

Discussion Point: What things would be essential if you were to become a spy? *Activity:* Invent something to assist you in your spying activities. Read *The Usborne Spy's Guidebook* for some hints.

Activity: Play some Spy Games. There are lots of websites such as

'Spy Games' <<http://www.wikihow.com/Category:Spy-Games>>

Make a spy costume and have a spy party. Visit websites for ideas eg

'How to Throw a Spy or Mystery Party for Kids'

<<http://kidsparties.about.com/od/birthdayparties/a/SpyParty.htm>>

Activity: Read other books about young spies or sleuths (eg *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh was the first in a series and was later made into a movie).

Key learning outcomes:

- Identification with key ideas in the novel.
- Ability to discuss and argue key concepts.

Literacy and Language

- This series is written in the **first person**, and each chapter ends with an excerpt from a 'diary' written by Tan and signed 'Truly Tan'.
Activity: Invite your students to write a brief diary of what happened to them yesterday.

- Tan loves interesting words. There are **boxed definitions of some of those words** mentioned in the text.
Activity: Have fun with your students testing their recall of the meanings of words listed. Make a list of the words which aren't defined in boxes (eg deluded, remarkable) and find out what they mean. [See also **Worksheets 1-4** below. **Note:** Don't forget to do the quiz at the back of the novel too!]

- Tan writes a **poem** about her teacher Miss Dragone, and another about Ted:

*There once was a boy called Ted
Who should have been locked in a shed
He was rude. He was dumb
And a pain in the bum
That horrible boy called Ted*

Activity: Write your own poem using this rhyme scheme about a friend. (Sometimes this style of poem is called a 'limerick'.)

- **Poems can also be written for special occasions** such as birthdays, marriages and funerals. The children write a poem when they bury Lopsy the Fox (p 205).
Activity: Write a poem to commemorate some special occasion of a person or animal in your life.
- **Tan writes a record called her Secret Spy Files (p 209) in a style which is similar to that of an investigative journalist.**
Activity: Discuss the structure of the story Tan writes. Then choose a mystery topic and write your own 'secret spy file' about it!
- **Tan's mother is a food writer.** At one point she is in her attic office, 'writing an important article for *Dainty Palate*. The article is called *Coming to Terms With Your Scones.*' (p 52).
Activity: Make up a funny name for a food magazine and then a title for an article in it.
- **Mystery is a genre which employs tropes** such as clues, false leads, spies, motives and secrets.
Activity: Make a list of all the mystery elements you identify in reading this novel.

- **Exaggeration is a useful technique when you are trying to write a story, and Tan is very good at it.** For example, when Awesome goes missing she imagines all the things which might have happened to him:

‘What if he’s run away? What if he’s trying to get back to the city? He’ll never, ever make it. It’s too far, even for a dog as clever as Awesome. He’ll end up like one of those hobo dogs you see in American movies. The ones that pad down dusty trails with sore paws and ribs that stick out. The ones that sleep in dumpsters and live off the kindness of strangers. The ones that save the lives of little children but never stop anywhere long enough to find a true home. It’s such a long, lonely, painful life. Poor Awesome!’ (p 107)

Activity: Try to create a piece of prose like this, by imagining an exaggerated situation.

- **Description of landscape can be enhanced by saying what a landscape doesn’t look like, as well as what it does.** For example, Tan is not impressed when she looks out the bus window: ‘I sigh and look out the window. But there are no tall buildings with rude graffiti, no crowded trams, no shifty people in dark glasses. There are only trees and paddocks and sheds and cows.’(pp 118-9)

Activity: Look at the scene outside your school window and describe it in this way.

- **Verity Crisp has the letters VC written on the back of her chair.** The Callahans have fun imagining what the letters might stand for. Eg Vengeful Child or Violent Criminal. (p 138) *Activity:* Make a list of other funny phrases like this.

- **Character is a key aspect of any fiction.** Ted refers to motives, and motivation is at the heart of the incidents in this novel.

Discussion Point: Discuss the motivations of characters in the various episodes in this novel.

Key learning outcomes:

- Understanding of the conventions of writing in first person or diary form.
- Appreciation of other forms of writing such as investigative journalism, food reviewing, poetry, description of landscape, and the genre of mystery writing.
- Investigation of other narrative devices.
- Analysis of character and motivation.

Visual Arts

- **Examine the cover of this book.** *Activity:* Then create a new cover. Think about what the major images or ideas are, to come up with a visual representation of it.
- **Ted says he’s really good at drawing krakens. (p 130)** *Activity:* Research what they look like and then draw your own.

- **Gloria has a hobby making jewellery.** *Activity:* Make a necklace like the one Gloria gives Tan.

Key learning outcomes:

- Understanding of the relationship between design and narrative content.
- Visualisation of the objects and scenes described in the narrative.

Questions for reading and discussion

1. Invite students to name their favourite character, and why? Who is their least favourite character and why?
2. Tan pretends she likes horses because Lily invites her to her place to ride with her. But she is secretly frightened of horses. Should you ever pretend to like something just to become popular with someone?
3. Invite students to describe each of the four Callahan sisters in their own words.
4. Why did Amber call Tan 'Little Miss Saddle Club' (p 117)?
5. Do you think Miss Dragone is a good teacher? Why/why not?
6. The dead fox plays quite a large role in this novel. What is the significance of the fox?
7. How would you have felt going into Wandering Wanda's shack?
8. Does Tan like Ted, or not?
9. What is this book about? Write a really exciting blurb for the cover of this book.
10. What do you think might happen in the next book about Truly Tan? Write a synopsis.



WORKSHEET 1 COMPREHENSION QUIZ

1. What does Tan call her three sisters?
2. What does Babbles the bird do when she is tense?
3. What is Mrs Callahan's Christian name?
4. Where do the instructions tell them to turn the car in order to find their new home?
5. What does Tan take for her first Show and Tell at the new school?
6. What is Jem and Ted's cubby house called?
7. What is the name of the class mouse?
8. What does Tan consult when she wants to predict what is going to happen?
9. Who else sits at the back of the class with Ted and Gloria?
10. What is the code name for the group which Jem, Ted and Gloria allow the Callahan girls to join?

Answers: 1. The lollipops. 2. She makes a noise like a microwave. 3. Coral. 4. At the dead fox. 5. A cat skeleton. 6. The Purple Haunt. 7. Stuart. 8. Her magic eight ball. 9. Angus and Scooter. 10. The Chosen Few.



WORKSHEET 2 WORDS AND CONCEPTS

Write a definition of the words in this list, in the column beside each one.

Unpredictable	
Pessimists	
Hostile	
Hysterical	
Ectoplasmic	
Evicted	
Elusive	
Vengeful	
Bamboozled	
Inappropriate	
Answers:	

WORKSHEET 3 WORD QUIZ

1. Emerald says Jem is ‘miscombobulated,’ (p 55) and later Tan says it’s a made-up word (p 63). Is there a word like this, and what does it mean?
2. Tan wants to have ‘popularness’ (p 69). What is the correct noun for this concept?
3. What does this mean: ‘You looked like stunned mullets.’(p 191)
4. Dad says: ‘round up the troops.’ (p 9) What does he mean?
5. ‘ “Put a sock in it, Jem,” says Ted.’ (p 38) What does he mean?
6. Mum says Awesome is ‘melancholy’. (p 102) What does this mean?
7. What does ‘suspicious’ mean?
8. When they have a mud fight at the dam, Rose is a zombie and Tan is an ...?
9. In her World Headquarters, Tan has ‘my telescope, my binoculars, my Spy ‘n’ Pry magnifying glass ‘ (p 48). What are all these things used for?
10. What is an omen?

Answers: 1. Emerald meant to say ‘discombobulate’ which means ‘to upset or confuse’. 2. Popularity. 3. You look like you’ve had a shock or a fright. 4. Get all the family ready to leave. 5. Be quiet or stop talking. 6. A gloomy state of mind. 7. Liable to cause or arouse suspicion; questionable. 8. Orc. 9. For looking at, or spying on things. 10. A sign or portent of things to come.



WORKSHEET 4 MATCH THESE IMAGES WITH TWO WORD PHRASES

**Box Brownie * Dopey Dog * Pretty Princess *Wandering Wanda *Secret Spy *Choc-Chip
Cookie*Brass Bell* Sea Sponge* Truly Tan**



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About the author of the notes

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and has published widely on children's and YA literature. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, and in 2012 the CBCA (National) Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia.