

RESOURCE KIT

The Unquiet

by Carolyn McCurdie

Over the galaxy, a strange, deafening tide is flooding.

The planet Pluto disappears. Creeping in from between star systems is the Unquiet. It stinks like a million burning tyres, and it jabbars and screams as if the sky is in agony. Soon it attacks the earth: swallowing entire countries.

A second, smaller power seeks out Tansy, a young girl in a town at the bottom of the world. She has a gift. The earth urgently needs that gift, and it also needs the knowledge that a boy called Anaru holds. Together Tansy and Anaru - with guides from another realm - travel far into the heart of the earth.

What will they discover there? How can they help to stem the world's great unrest?

Calling on great myths of the world, *The Unquiet* is a spellbinding story that cradles a deep peace at its core.

"There's only one planet that weaves into its spinning the wild thread of imagination. It touches everything we know."



SPECIFICATIONS:

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10-13 years

RESOURCE KIT for use in schools

CONTAINS:

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AUTHOR COMMENTARY:

My first idea was to have some fun. I work in a library, and a book that I noticed often was Terry Pratchett's novel for young adults, *Only You Can Save Mankind*. I noticed this title because it was in huge letters and because it made me laugh. The New Zealand writer Jack Lasenby says that all writers are liars and thieves. This is true. I stole the idea for my novel from Terry Pratchett's title.

Then I had some thinking to do. Save mankind from what? Who has to save mankind? I scribbled every answer that I could think of on paper. Then I chose the ones I liked the best. I usually start a story like this. I write down everything, no matter how stupid. No one sees it but me. Then I keep what seems interesting, and everything else goes in the bin. The thing that the writing process reminds me of the most, is dreaming. Thoughts and images pop into my mind, some make sense, some don't, but I follow the ones that I enjoy and trust that they will make sense in the end. Sometimes this takes a long time. But I love it, and when it works, it works well.

Asking questions, even writing questions down, seems to help, and I found the character of Tansy this way. Who will save mankind? Why this person? Is there something about her, something that she has experienced or that she knows that will help? How does she know? So I thought of someone who is unhappy but has found a way of surviving. Why is she unhappy? What helps her survive?

The idea of the Unquiet came to me early. It just popped into my head. I read a bit of popular science, especially astronomy (not as much as I would like), and probably ideas about matter and anti-matter were the seed of such an idea. But that Iceland and then Lesotho should disappear also just came to me, for no reason that I could see at the time. But again, I trusted this process and followed it.



Reg Graham

Probably the most exciting idea that came to me was the appearance in the story of Maui. I wasn't expecting him. In fact, in the first draft of the novel, there were no Maori elements at all. But my characters are New Zealanders, and I thought they would need help, and the help might come from some ancient source. In New Zealand, this can only be Maori. So I took them underground, they found a skeleton, and they were offered a small object of powerful magic. As soon as I thought of the fish-hook, I was like Anaru in the story, I realised that the skeleton had to be Maui. That changed everything. Maui is a character of such magic, and with such a wild, strong personality, that the whole story had to be rewritten to make room for him. And then I needed Anaru. I needed a major character who knew about Maui, understood him, and could explain him to the other characters.

Research for the story:

Another wonderful thing about writing, is how much you learn. Your research teaches you more about aspects of the story, and it's a lot of fun. When

I write, I like to have a clear image in my mind, so as well as reading and searching the internet, I like to find pictures and spend time absorbing them.

MAUI:

I read as much as I could about the stories of Maui. The thing I was looking for, more than the details of his exploits, was an understanding of his character. I have tried to be as true as I can to the personality that appears in the myths. Because I'm Pakeha, and grew up with only a vague understanding of Maori myth, I sent my story to my brother-in-law who is Maori, Ngati Kahungunu. He read it to check that my portrayal of Maui and other Maori elements were reasonably accurate.

LOKI AND HARE:

I looked on the internet for information about Icelandic and southern African myth. Sites that discuss the trickster figure in different mythologies were also interesting.

ICELAND AND LESOTHO:

I used encyclopaedias as well as the internet. I was looking for good pictures in particular.

ANTARCTIC PENGUINS:

I read several books from the library, especially from the children's section because of the good illustrations.

Carolyn McCurdie

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What makes you angry? What makes you sad? What do you do that's helpful when you feel this way? What do you do that's not helpful to you? Are there useful things you can say or do when someone else is feeling sad or angry?
- Has someone else's anger or sadness ever made you feel the same way? Have you ever been in a group where everyone in the group was affected in the same way? Have you ever been affected in a good way by someone else's calmness or happiness? Tell the class about one of these times.
- Are there particular places or times when you feel a deep quiet? Tell the class about these. Are there particular places or times when you feel something like the Unquiet? Tell the class about these.
- Anaru's grandmother tells him that Maui was a real man, while others say he is a god. What do you think? What evidence is there that supports either theory? How do you think myths come about? Are they stories of the actions of real people, ways of explaining great mysteries, or something else? What purpose do myths serve? Do they still matter to people now?
- In the story the souls of the recent dead take the forms of moths. There are many different beliefs about what happens to people after they die. Do you think that people could take on other forms? Do you believe it is possible for people to help you after they have died? Research different belief systems, and present a comparison of a few different beliefs. You could look at traditional Maori and Pakeha beliefs, and also those of other countries.

- Tansy and Anaru have to work together for the magic of the waka and hooks to work. Why is this? What qualities and knowledge do these two characters have that provide the necessary balance?
- Balance is what has kept the Unquiet in its proper place. What causes the balance to shift? What are some different ways you can think of to keep balance in the world? Do you think this is important?
- The characters in the story use music to fight against the Unquiet. Why is this? What makes music a different kind of noise to that of the Unquiet? If you were going to sing a song to fight off the Unquiet, which song would you choose and why?
- What were all the different actions that people in the story used to ward off the Unquiet? Why did these actions work? Why are they important to people? Do you do any of these, or similar actions? What do they do for you?

WRITING TOPICS:

- Describe the nine planets of our solar system. Get photos or illustrations, if you can, and look at these. Imagine that each planet makes its own kind of music, perhaps sounding like certain instruments. Write about what you imagine.
- Pretend you live in Lesotho and your mother is Mamkhulu. What is your family like? What do you do for work, for fun? Write a letter, with illustrations, to Tansy or Anaru, telling your reader about yourself.
- Pretend you live in Iceland and Halldor is your father. Write a letter (as above).

- You are a scientist, spending the Antarctic winter at Scott base to study penguins. Write the report you will give to your university when you return.

VISUAL MEDIA/ TECHNOLOGY:

How would you depict the Unquiet? Using paints, crayons, pencils, or even collage, make a picture which expresses what you think the Unquiet would look like, or how the Unquiet makes people feel. This could be an expressive and abstract depiction.

Write and perform a short play or video, showing how different people react to the Unquiet. You could use characters from the book or from real life; for example, how would the Prime Minister have reacted? An interviewer from a news station could interview people after the events to find out how they tried to combat the Unquiet.

GROUP PROJECT:

The story in *The Unquiet* tells what the children have to do to raise New Zealand up. But they would not have been successful in defeating the Unquiet unless the women of Lesotho, and the men of Iceland had not been busy playing their part in saving the world.

As a class, or in small groups, think about how Mamkhulu would tell the story as it took place in Lesotho, and how Halldor would tell the story of Iceland. What did the women, and what did the men have to do? Who helped them? Who or what stood in their way? You might get ideas from reading some myths of Lesotho and Iceland. Start by writing as many questions as you can. Then cover a page with answers and it doesn't matter if some of them sound crazy. This is a story about magic. Have fun.