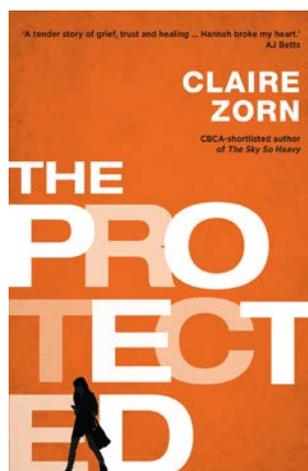


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The Protected

Claire Zorn



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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Staff House Road
St Lucia QLD 4067
Australia

PO Box 6042
St Lucia QLD 4067
Australia

Ph: (+61 7) 3365 7244
Fax: (+61 7) 3365 7579

uqp@uqp.uq.edu.au
www.uqp.com.au

University of Queensland Press
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SYNOPSIS

When Hannah's sister Katie is killed in a car accident, the bullies at school suddenly stop harassing her. Still dealing with the effects of this bullying, Hannah has to come to terms with her own grief along with that of her parents. Imprisoned by feelings of guilt, insecurity and failure, Hannah's journey is a painful one. She is unsure of how – and if – she can ever heal.

The Protected is a powerful and beautifully written novel about overcoming some of the biggest obstacles a person could possibly face.

THEMES**Relationships:**

- Hannah and her sister Katie did not get on particularly well; aspects of their relationship are exposed during the text.
- New student Josh becomes Hannah's friend; he helps her to heal.
- Hannah's relationship with her mother has been damaged by Katie's death; her mother is worried that she has lost both of her daughters.
- Besides Josh, Anne, the school counsellor, seems to be one of the few people with whom Hannah can connect.

Bullying:

- Hannah is bullied at school. While this bullying stops after Katie's death, the wounds are still very raw and will stay with her for a long time to come.
- The nature and reality of this bullying is sickening.

Self-esteem and self-image:

- Hannah's confidence has been utterly rocked by the bullies. Her sister also often treated her with contempt. This affects Hannah's self-esteem greatly. She is also very self-conscious about her body.

Grief:

- Hannah and her family are dealing with the loss of Katie.
- Katie's death is threatening relationships within the family.

Mental health:

- Hannah experiences panic attacks and feelings of guilt and worthlessness, both as a result of Katie's death and from being bullied.
- Anne teaches Hannah strategies to help deal with these feelings.

Courage:

- Hannah has to find the courage to face the world after Katie's death.
- Standing up to bullies takes courage.
- Hannah finds the courage to let Josh be her friend.

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WRITING STYLE

The Protected is written in first person, present tense. Hannah's voice is truly arresting. The narrative is painfully real. Young adult readers will immediately identify with the emotions, doubts and fears Hannah faces. The events and characters are perfectly nuanced.

STUDY NOTES

- The opening scene of *The Protected* places the reader directly into Hannah's world. It is immediately absorbing. Discuss the way in which the author has created such an instant sense of mood, plot and character.
- The scenes in which Hannah visits Katie's room are very powerful. Why are they so effective?
- Claire Zorn's writing evokes a sense of compassion and empathy in the reader. Much of this is because she takes us so close to the rawness of Hannah's experiences and emotions. Discuss the techniques used by the author to create this empathy and why it is so effective.
- Every day when Hannah gets home, her mother asks how she is. What does Hannah mean when she says, 'Maybe one day I will open my mouth and it will all come rushing out ... I'll know how I am' (p6)?
- Why does the author make a point of describing the messy state of Hannah's house and yard? How does this mirror the mess that the family is in, both emotionally and literally?
- Many of the chapters begin with lists about Katie. How do these lists help us get to know her? Create lists like these for Hannah as you get to know her better. What would be on a list about yourself? Consider using such lists when creating your own characters.
- Re-read the scene in which Hannah has a panic attack (p15+). Discuss the language features used to describe this panic attack. Why is this description so effective?
- What role does Anne play in *The Protected*? What is it about Anne that is different from the other counsellors that Hannah has seen?
- How has Claire Zorn made Katie one of the main characters from 'beyond the grave'? Why is this so powerful?
- Subtle but painful reminders of Katie's death are scattered throughout the text, for example, Hannah's grandmother buying groceries for the family and the fact that her dad forgets that it's Katie who didn't like vegemite, not Hannah. Discuss how these realistic but sad details make this text so moving. What other examples can be added to this list?
- Why does Hannah say that 'the quiet is huge' between her and her mother (p29)?
- Hannah recounts an experience from prep when she had to get out of a barrel in PE. How can her current situation be likened to 'getting out of a barrel'?
- Discuss Nanna's role in *The Protected*. How is her role different from that of Granddad's?
- What strategies does Anne teach Hannah to help manage her panic attacks?

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- Write a reflection that shares your reactions to the text. How do you feel about the way Hannah is treated at school? Who are you angry with? Why?
- Josh calls Hannah 'Jane' throughout the text. Why does he do this? In what ways is Hannah like Jane Eyre? Compare *The Protected* with *Jane Eyre*. (Students could view the film version of *Jane Eyre* to make this comparison.)
- Discuss the following statement made by Hannah: 'We are meat-eating pack animals, us humans. The weakest are identified and when food is scarce they are the first to be eaten by their peers.' (p52)
- Claire Zorn uses the 'flashback' method to take the reader into Hannah's past. This includes memories of Katie as well as being bullied. Her first day of high school, for example, is particularly vivid. Re-read pp56-57. Discuss Amy and Tara's behaviour. Why is this unacceptable behaviour? If you were Hannah, how would you have reacted? Why is Hannah so passive in her reactions?
- In what ways was Katie's toughness towards Hannah a reflection of her own vulnerabilities?
- Why doesn't Katie stand up for Hannah more often? Why is Hannah angry about this?
- Hannah comments that she feels like she knows Kurt Cobain quite well. What does she mean?
- Josh has problems, just like most people do. Why is it important for Hannah (and readers) to realise that everybody experiences difficulties?
- The bullying episodes are particularly savage. Claire Zorn has written harrowing episodes that reach right into the reader's conscience. Why are these episodes so effective in evoking the reader's emotions?
- What does the list of Katie's role models at the start of Chapter 17 reveal about her? Who are your role models? What do they reveal about you?
- Mrs Van plays a small but very significant role in helping Hannah's mum come to terms with her depression. She also helps Hannah. How does she do this?
- What is the significance of Mrs Van's story of her sister, Marieke's, death? Discuss how the Nazis during World War II were bullies.
- Hannah's recount of the car accident that killed Katie is particularly chilling. What makes this scene so realistic and vivid?
- Why does Hannah think that Katie's death is her fault?
- Throughout the text, the weather is unbearably hot. Similarly, Hannah's pain and grief is unbearable. Towards the end of the text, rain comes. How does this reflect Hannah's personal journey?
- Why is the novel called *The Protected*?
- Hannah listens to Katie's iPod as the novel progresses. The playlist reveals a lot about Katie. Make a playlist of songs that reflects you. Select some of your songs and explain why you chose them to reflect your journey.
- Why does Hannah jump off the cliff into the water at the end of the novel? What does this symbolise?
- If Hannah could change one thing about her life, what do you think it would be?

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- Create free verse poetry, a piece of artwork or a musical composition that responds to the themes in *The Protected*.
- What are Katie's admirable qualities?
- Hannah often imagines what Katie would think and say after her death. What do we learn about Katie from these parts of the novel?
- Create a graphic organiser that shows the relationships that Hannah has with Katie, her mother, her father, Josh, Anne and the other kids at school.
- Bullying is a major theme in *The Protected*. Why doesn't Charlotte help Hannah? Why is Hannah so angry with Charlotte?
- Many bullies don't see what they do as bullying, particularly when written off as 'just a joke'. Discuss 'what is' and 'what isn't' bullying. Use examples from the text to help with this discussion.
- Invite a counsellor to speak with students about strategies to help deal with bullying. Allow students to share and reflect on their own experiences.
- Highlight the harmful nature of cyberbullying and its consequences.
- Visit the following websites where there are excellent resources to address the issue of bullying:
 - *Bullying. No Way! <http://bullyingnoway.gov.au/>
 - *Say No to Bullying Day! <http://www.973fm.com.au/bullying/>

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The inspiration for *The Protected* came from a few areas. Firstly, the (sometimes) fraught nature of sibling relationships. Just because you share a gene pool doesn't mean you understand each other. It certainly doesn't mean you like each other. As is my habit with writing stories, I took a character and put her to the test: what if she has a sister whom she loves but doesn't like and that sister is killed?

The story also grew from an interest in how high school communities deal with death. The high school I went to had a student die in every year group but my own and multiple students had to cope with family tragedies. The result of this was a school community that time and time again had to deal with pain, grief and guilt. It would be lovely to say that these things built a strong, loving and close student community, but the reality was far more complex than that.

Central to the story is the relationship between Hannah and her sister Katie. I don't have any sisters, so my insights into sisterhood were gleaned from the observation of close friend's sisterly relationships and asking lots of questions. For the first few drafts I majorly underestimated the importance of Katie's character, perhaps because she only existed in flashbacks. The story wasn't working because, while Hannah was well fleshed out, Katie wasn't, so there was no emotional pull. It wasn't until I really understood Katie that the story started to work.

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The other primary theme is grief and the varying ways it manifests. I haven't lost a child or a sibling, but I have dealt with circumstances in my own life which have posed a great threat to my family unit, so I drew a lot on that experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Zorn lives on the south coast of New South Wales with her husband and two small children. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a post graduate diploma in writing. She is a music lover, retro furniture collector and amateur swim-club enthusiast.

clairezorn.wordpress.com