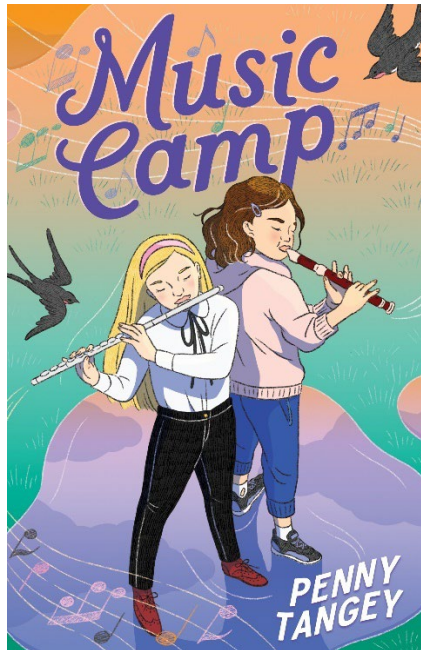


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MUSIC CAMP

Penny Tangey



Teachers' Notes

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with a background in the Australian curriculum (English)

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SYNOPSIS

Miley and her mum have been living in a caravan ever since they lost everything in last year's floods. When she reluctantly accepts her new music teacher's view that recorders are a serious instrument, Miley soon falls in love with the instrument that many cast aside as a joke.

Juliet recently moved from Melbourne to the country after the death of her dad. Passionate about playing her flute, she wants nothing more than to make her mark in the music world, just as her famous father did with his clarinet. If only her mother would stop being so protective and clingy.

When Miley and Juliet meet at a music camp for rural kids, they don't exactly hit it off. Miley is teased for playing the recorder and Juliet is jealous of the attention Miley receives from their music teacher. But neither of them is prepared for the incessant rain and impending floods that threaten to engulf the camp.

In a story about friendship, acceptance, climate action and courage, *Music Camp* is a coming-of-age novel filled with the high and lows of growing up and navigating change.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Resilience
- Jealousy
- Confidence; Courage
- Music
- Climate Change; Floods
- Action
- Loss
- Teamwork

WRITING STYLE

Music Camp is a dual narrative told from the first-person perspectives of Miley and Juliet. Both characters are uniquely portrayed. Miley is humble and gracious but determined and quietly strong. Juliet thinks and speaks like the protagonists from her favourite books, *Little Women* and *Jane Eyre*. Her observations and quips are hilarious and exaggerated, and at times a little dramatic. These two very different girls are thrown into a cabin for five days along with cousins Clara and Renee. Clara is impulsive, while Renee is anxious about change. Together, they must navigate the complexities of friendship, jealousy, competitiveness and resilience. Set against the backdrop of climate-induced flooding, *Music Camp* brings to the fore important themes such as acceptance, teamwork and resilience, cleverly achieved through Miley's campaign to promote the recorder as a serious instrument. Including original and effective figurative language, middle readers will devour this thought-provoking yet humorous text.

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STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, discuss the cover and blurb of *Music Camp*. What do you notice about the two characters on the front cover? How are they similar to and different from one another? Make predictions about the story.
- Miley says that ‘people look down on recorders and treat them like a joke or a toy or a health hazard’ (p. 3). She also realises ‘how deep recorder discrimination runs’ (p. 7). Why is she so determined to change this?
- With reference to the following excerpt, discuss the themes of prejudice and discrimination in *Music Camp*:

Recorders are so cheap that anyone can afford to play and that means some people think they aren’t proper instruments. I hate that sort of thing. Like when people tease kids who have second-hand shoes. (p. 6)

- What do Miley and her mum have in common? How is their relationship different from and similar to the one Juliet shares with her mother?
- When Miley receives a scholarship to pay for Music Camp, she is excited. Why does her mother suggest Miley keeps the news of her scholarship to herself? How does having this scholarship both benefit and disadvantage Miley?
- Juliet has a very distinct ‘voice’. Find examples of how she speaks and thinks. As you read *Music Camp*, add vocabulary and phrases to a *Juliet Word Wall*. Why is it important that characters have strong ‘voices’?
- In the excerpt below, we get a glimpse into Juliet’s world. How does this passage help readers to empathise with her more?

Dad was like a helium balloon, bobbing in the wind, and she held his string so he wouldn’t float away and end up strangling sea turtles. Except that he did float away, and it’s just Mother and me down here now. She’s not holding on to my string, she’s squeezing my whole balloon and I could burst. (p. 13)

- Why does Juliet choose the name Persephone for her flute? Why does she think this is the perfect name for it?
- Explain what Juliet means when she describes the flute as being ‘full of contradictions’ (see p. 14).
- How important is Aunt Claire to the storyline? How does she help Juliet? How would the story be different without her?
- Why is Juliet so reluctant to tell people about the death of her father? What advice would you give to her?
- Why does Juliet think that her mother is unable to ‘fully understand’ her love of music (see p. 16)? Is she correct about this? Discuss.
- How does Juliet handle criticism from her teacher, Charlie (see pp. 16–17)? How has this changed since they first began working together? How do you handle criticism? Why can it be difficult to absorb? Share in a reflection.
- Why, when Juliet’s mother puts pads beside her suitcase, is Juliet so reluctant to take them to camp with her? What does this tell us about Juliet’s maturity at this stage of the text? How does this develop throughout the novel?
- Why, when on the bus heading for Music Camp, does Juliet say, ‘I’m in a warm, safe cocoon’ (p. 26)? How can this be likened to Persephone tucked away in the velvet-lined flute case?

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- In what ways is *Music Camp* an adventure for Juliet? Why is she so keen for adventure? Why does this draw her to a character such as Clara, even though they are so different?
- How does Juliet use bravado to help deal with the death of her dad? Why does she reject her mother's way of dealing with grief? What glimpses do we get of Juliet's worry for her mum?
- Juliet declares, 'I will be myself: Juliet Bartlett, flautist' (p. 27). Is she really being herself? Discuss.
- Clara has a boyfriend, Ollie. What evidence is there in the text that neither Ollie nor Clara is mature enough for such a relationship? How do Juliet and Miley feel about someone their age having a boyfriend?
- When Miley sits next to her on the bus, Juliet says, 'She's clutching a floral backpack like it's a flotation device on a sinking ship. I had a bag like that in Grade Two' (p. 32). How is this snobbery repeated in Juliet's attitude towards Miley's recorder? Why has the author included this in *Music Camp*? What comment is she making about prejudice and material possessions?
- How is Ollie a 'music snob' (p. 33)? Why does he think he's superior because he's a 'muso'? Why is this way of thinking dangerous?
- Why does Miley quickly lose 'patience' with Juliet on the bus (p. 34)? What is it about Juliet that Miley questions?
- Miley's motto is: 'Know better, do better' (p. 35). What's your personal motto? Why do you live by this mantra? Share in a reflection.
- Re-enact the scene in which Miley overhears Clara and Juliet mimicking her and denouncing recorder players (see p. 41). Why does Miley's 'stomach [sink]' upon learning she is sharing a cabin with these girls? What would you like to say to Clara and Juliet at this point in the story?
- What role does Renee play in *Music Camp*? Why is she an important character?
- Miley explains that 'there are stained-glass windows showing angels playing the recorder' (p. 43). Locate some of these stained glass works online. How do these depictions support Miley's argument that the recorder is a respected instrument?
- In the role of Miley, write a letter to one of your friends back at school about your first impressions of *Music Camp*.
- How is climate change integrated into *Music Camp*? How is it used to bring different elements of the storyline together?
- How do Renee and Clara help one another? Why has their unique relationship been included in the text? How does it help readers to better understand their characters?
- How do your impressions of Juliet and Clara change as you get to know them better? Support your ideas using evidence from the text.
- Why does Juliet feel a 'pang of guilt' when she laughs with Clara about Miley (see p. 46)? What other evidence is there that Juliet feels bad about how she and Clara have treated Miley?
- Why does Juliet lie to Clara about her dad (see p. 47)?
- Why does Renee read the orange folder so much? How does this help her?

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- What does Mr Broadbent teach the students about being musicians? What does he mean when saying being a professional is not about getting paid, but rather 'it's an attitude' (p. 53)?
- In the role of Juliet, write a journal entry upon discovering that Charlie and Miss Lin are the same person.
- On p. 68, Miley says, 'You don't always get to choose your battle – sometimes the battle chooses you.' Write a reflection about a time that a battle chose you.
- Why does Juliet feel guilty that she is 'happy on Music Camp when Mother is alone and sad' (p. 72)?
- Juliet wonders 'if appreciating beauty is related to loving music. Perhaps musical people feel things more deeply and better understand the patterns and rhythms in nature' (p. 73). What are your thoughts on this idea?
- Why doesn't Juliet mention SMO to the others (see p. 79)? Why does she pin so many hopes on being invited to SMO?
- Make predictions about how the story may unfold when Miley is given the woodwind solo over Juliet. How does Miley feel about this?
- Why does Miley feel that her first attempt at the solo in 'Ruby Tuesday' 'is the worst thing that's happened to the recorder since the invention of the flute' (p. 93)?
- Why does Juliet describe her day as being like a 'tumble dryer' (see p. 105)?
- When Ollie breaks up with Clara, Juliet suggests they could practise their duet because she believes that 'music can be a wonderful balm in troubled times' (pp. 106–107). How is this true in your life?
- Listen to recording of 'Ruby Tuesday' by The Rolling Stones, as well as the version by Melanie Safka. How does listening to these recordings help you visualise Miley's playing at Music Camp? What other well-known songs include recorders (e.g. 'The Fool on the Hill' by The Beatles)?
- What triggers memories of the flood for Miley? Have you ever been in a natural disaster? What was it like? How did you manage your feelings of anxiety? Share in a reflection.
- Why does Juliet think Miss Lin is caring for Miley 'like a baby bird fallen from the nest' (p. 121)? Why does she say, 'I'm too proud to beg for the crumbs of Miss Lin's attention' (p. 123)? In what ways is such pride dangerous?
- Why does Juliet say that Miley only got her scholarship 'because people feel sorry for her' (p. 124)? Is this true?
- Why is Mr Broadbent reluctant to have the music programs reprinted (p. 124)? Why is he so determined to take this stance?
- How does the Marimba Fellow help support Miley's point about recorders (see pp. 128–129)?
- Vu asks Miley, 'What does being a Vitaside scholar mean to you?' (p. 135). In the role of Miley, respond to this question.
- When she makes a mistake at the end of her solo, Miley says, 'I could kick myself for falling at the last hurdle' (p. 136). Have you ever felt like 'kicking yourself' for making a mistake? What did you learn from this experience. Why are mistakes valuable? How could Miley use positive self-talk to help in such a situation?

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- When Clara writes '*I love recorder. I love Ollie*' on Ollie's window (p. 140), Renee explains that Clara 'loves attention and goes about it the wrong way' (p. 141). Why is Renee so accepting of Clara's faults? What can we learn from characters like Renee?
- What responsibility does Juliet take for Clara's actions towards Miley? How does she try to rectify the situation? How does this show her growth and development as a person?
- Why does Juliet accidentally calling Glider Joe 'Dad' prompt her to be more open about her father (p. 151)? Why does Juliet want to be seen 'as a musician, not as dead-dad girl' (p. 153)? How does this help us to better understand her? How does the realisation that 'I've enjoyed the lightness of Music Camp with my new friends, but perhaps this heaviness is needed too' (p. 153) help her? How does music help her? How does music help you?
- After Juliet shares the truth about her dad, Clara shares her sweets. Juliet says, 'my lolly gets smaller and soon the sherbet will burst from inside, fizzing out. Any moment now' (p. 155). How is this a metaphor for Juliet's happiness?
- How does Miley think differently towards Clara once she apologises for the message on the window (p. 159)?
- Why does Miley say, 'teachers arguing with each other is always fascinating. Like a crocodile wrestling a shark' (p. 164)? Why are Mr Broadbent and Miss Lin arguing?
- Why, after hearing Mr Broadbent talk about Vitaside, does Miley feel like 'someone gave me a beautiful trophy then smashed a puppy in the face with it' (p. 165)?
- In the role of Miley and with reference to the excerpt below, write a letter home to your mum about how you are feeling at this point in the story:
What am I doing? I'm only at Music Camp because a fossil fuel company wanted people to like them and everyone felt sorry for me. What does it matter if I play the recorder or not?
 I give up.
 I can't do it.
 I tried, but I failed.
 It wasn't meant to be.
 I lie on the floor and spread out my arms. It's a relief to accept failure. I close my eyes. The stress and worry melt away and are replaced by dull acceptance. In some ways, this is easier. (p. 167)
- Discuss Juliet's comment when Clara leaves the camp that 'our duet means everything to me: friendship, music, hope' (p. 172).
- Discuss the symbolism of Juliet's paper plane making it to the stage. Why does Miley say that 'technically, this is Juliet's plane and, if it reaches the stage, it will be her success, but it feels like a team effort and I want us to have a win' (p. 190)? How does this show the girls' growth?
- Discuss Miley's response when the concert is cancelled: 'The recorder may not be important compared to the survival of all of humanity, but it was important to me. My chest is numb, and my eyes fill with tears' (p. 193).

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- What is your opinion of Ollie's character? Why has he been included in the text? Why, after waiting for Ollie's praise for the whole camp, does Miley 'just wish my mum was coming to hear me play music with my friends' (p. 195)?
- How important is Miss Lin to *Music Camp*? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Discuss Mr Broadbent's words to the students: 'please remember that humans are innovative, clever and creative. We have survived a lot to get here, and many people are working hard to make sure you have a good world to live in. We will never stop trying [...] And no matter what difficulties you have to deal with, I promise you will always have music' (p. 203). Why is this an important inclusion in the text?
- What can we take from the following comment of Miley's?
I feel my stomach lurch but force myself to think only of the notes, the music. Not the people listening, not the people who are missing, not the mistakes I might make. The rest of the orchestra joins in and the music swells to become one sound from many instruments [...] My recorder is lost in the noise but part of something bigger. (p. 204)
- Discuss Mr Broadbent's comment that 'individual changes can feed into bigger changes' (p. 213). What role can music play in this?
- Write a reflection about the fact that although 'people are complicated' (p. 220), there is immense joy to be found in accepting oneself and being with like-minded people: 'We found each other' (p. 220).
- Discuss Miley's comment about the aftermath of a natural disaster: 'Cleaning up, helping out, crying and arguing. Then getting up and doing it all over again. Kids have to be able to do that these days. That's why they give out awards for resilience at assembly' (p. 228).
- Using the chapter names as a guide, create a story map that tracks the main themes and events of *Music Camp*.
 - Prelude, Movement, Ensemble, Auditions, Rhapsody, Rehearsal, Accompaniment, Waltz, Promotion, Flight of the Orchestra, Performance, Nocturne, Finale, Music Camp Concert 2.0
- What do you notice about the program for the Concert 2.0 (pp. 229–231)? How is this a fitting end for this story?
- Like the children do with the Marimba Fellow, make your own instruments from items you find around you. Time-permitting, read the picture book *Ada's Violin: The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay* (Simon & Schuster) by Susan Hood and Sally Wern Comport as a companion text to *Music Camp*.
- In what ways is *Music Camp* a book about hope?
- Recreate the orange folder that students are given at the camp. Include a map and history of the site, as well as a camp itinerary, menu and set of rules.
- Research an instrument of your choice. Create a brochure or webpage that shares its history, design and special features. Include famous pieces of music that feature your instrument.
- Create a persuasive poster that explains why recorders should be regarded as serious instruments.

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- *Music Camp* is as much a story about friendship as it is about music and climate change. What makes a good friend? Which personality traits from the characters in the book would you like to strengthen in yourself? Which would you like to minimise? Share with a friend.
- Choose a character from *Music Camp* on whom to create a Character Portrait. Include evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Choose one of the characters from the story. In the role of this character, write a series of journal entries covering each day of Music Camp.
- Have you ever been to a school camp or music camp? Share your experiences in a reflection. What were you nervous about? What excited you? Which characters and experiences can you relate to in *Music Camp*?
- Create a board game that reflects your understanding of the main themes, characters, settings and events in *Music Camp*.
- In the role of Juliet, write a pen-pal letter to Miley six months after Concert 2.0.
- Time permitting, view a movie adaptation of *Little Women*. In what ways is Juliet like Jo March?
- The issue of sponsorship becomes increasingly important to the storyline of *Music Camp*. Why has the author included Vitaside in the plot? How does it cause conflict between different characters? Discuss how the author has positioned readers to question sponsorships by examining their source of funds. Discuss sponsorships of sporting teams and major events in your community and in Australia more broadly. How have your ideas about sponsorships changed as a result of reading *Music Camp*?
- Working with a partner, take on the roles of two characters from *Music Camp*. Using 'Music Camp 2.0' as stimulus, as well as the climate change challenges that have affected the region, design a sponsorship model for next year's music camp based on the criteria of community needs, wants and values. Present your model at a community meeting.
- Discuss the contribution of figurative language to *Music Camp* in further engaging readers. Identify the types of figurative language used, and experiment with these in your own writing. Examples include:
 - They hear a class of kids playing Pachelbel's 'Canon' on plastic descant recorders and it sounds like ferrets fighting in a cave (p. 4)
 - The music was complicated and seemed to go in circles. It made me feel like dancing, but also like I couldn't stop watching. (p. 6)
 - It makes a disgusting slimy soup, which I pour onto a nearby bush (p. 7)
 - I lie on my bed, staring at the sloping ceiling above me, an ache in my chest (p. 8)
 - I hear a cacophony of all the music I've ever loved crashing around me (p. 9)
 - Danger is omnipresent (p. 10)
 - Grief swept us away to the countryside (p. 10)
 - I open Persephone's case and see her familiar silver pieces nestled in dark-red velvet (pp. 13–14)
 - It can sound as happy as a bird singing in springtime, then a moment later as sad as a fallen ice cream in the sun (p. 14)

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- My embarrassment changed to joy, and a smile swept across my face (p. 16)
- Those words were a stab to my heart (p. 17)
- When Charlie gives me a compliment my chest feels warm and fizzy, like it's filled with sherbet (p. 18)
- Of course, Mother cries. Not a few dainty tears that can be wiped away before anyone notices. Huge, racking sobs that engulf her whole body and turn her face into a swamp. (p. 25)
- A seed of discomfort sprouts in the back of my mind (p. 26)
- My body shakes, including my tummy, which was already churning with nerves (p. 26)
- The reverberation pulses through my whole body, making me feel even more nervous (p. 36)
- Through the misty rain appears a gleaming white building on top of a hill (p. 39)
- My stomach has dropped so far that it's plopped onto the bottom bunk (p. 41)
- My mouth is hanging open like a flute player who just found out some people play the recorder (p. 44)
- I put up the hood on my puffy jacket, feeling the soft velvet fringe brush against my cheek (p. 50)
- She blows a kiss, which I imagine is knocked down by the sheets of rain into the puddle at the bottom of the steps (p. 50)
- The clouds have scattered, the sun shines, and a rainbow arcs across the sky, symmetrically framing the road ahead (p. 54)
- To the left is the river, a rush of brown water (p. 54)
- A flash of irritation pulses in me (p. 56)
- Juliet's mouth is hanging open like she's just heard flute teachers also like the recorder (p. 61)
- It must be amazing to sing like that – you can be your own radio (p. 66)
- A chink of light shines through the gap in the curtains (p. 71)
- The drumming of rain on the tin roof gets louder (p. 72)
- My brain is encased in fog, my limbs heavy (p. 72)
- Orange and pink clouds cluster together like sky fairy floss (p. 73)
- A glinting sliver appears from behind a distant hilltop; the sun's golden orb is the cause of all this beauty, but also the signal that the dazzling display is over for now (p. 73)
- I push away a vision of her sitting at the kitchen table with tears streaming down her face like a waterfall (p. 75)
- Spinning the pencil around his fingers like an olden-days fidget toy (p. 76)
- Every time I criticise the recorder she appears from nowhere like a mushroom after rain (p. 78)
- The knowledge settles like a rock in my stomach (p. 83)

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- It feels like the egg from my sandwich has reassembled itself, hatched into a chicken and is now running around my stomach (p. 88)
- [The stand] topples, landing like a pile of metal sticks on the floor (p. 91)
- The bread from my sandwich has turned into a field of wheat and is waving in my stomach (p. 91)
- Now it's just recorder and cellos, so the recorder stands out like a dog's tennis ball that's been painted pink so it will be more noticeable in the grass (p. 92)
- My scalp tingles as I try to fathom the wonder of this space (p. 101)
- Relief floods through me (p. 103)
- I have experienced a tsunami of emotions today (p. 105)
- The paddock beside me looks like a rice paddy with blades of green poking up in water (p. 113)
- Despite the little heater, the Chapel is a freezer (p. 114)
- Students keep plonking away, hitting the marimba keys like robots (p. 132)
- The visitors smile like their faces might split apart (p. 133)
- The Chapel is scarily quiet except for the metronome-like drip, drip, dripping of water into the bucket in the corner (p. 136)
- Laughter bounces around the room (p. 136)
- The sound of my recorder is swamped by the other woodwinds (p. 136)
- My insides turn to liquid (p. 140)
- He has a rusty red beard (p. 147)
- I shut my eyes, enjoying the warm cocoon of our cabin in the storm (p. 155)
- Miss Lin directs us towards the door with large arm movements like windscreen wipers on a car (p. 165)
- The teachers are united apex predators again (p. 165)
- Everyone talks louder and louder to be heard in the cacophony (p. 178)
- Wearing her wet weather gear, she sounds like a plastic bag being scrunched into a ball (p. 178)
- Mr Broadbent's greeting lands like an icy stab in my heart (p. 179)
- The river and paddocks have merged into a giant wetness (p. 180)
- Dread starts at my scalp and sweeps down my body (p. 182)
- The tops of a few trees poke out from the water like little shrubs (p. 185)
- I run my hand along the plush material on the empty chairs, each a different shade of blue: duck-egg, sky, electric (p. 192)
- Tingling infuses my whole body from my toes to my neck and then fills my head like fizzing sherbet (p. 204)
- It's just my recorder and the cellos now. We're like old people sitting on a bench, remembering the past and missing the things we've lost (p. 204)
- Around me people are carrying on like felafels (p. 205)

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- I run my hands along the soft backs of the seats, dark grey blobs in the dim lighting (p. 206)
- Miley eats her fruit bar for what feels like an eternity. I can tell she's trying to be quiet, but it sounds like a gang of squirrels raiding a nut factory (p. 210)
- My mind is exploding with worry (p. 210)
- The cold hits me like a slap (p. 220)
- Renee sits on the bench opposite, her poncho spread out like a tent around her (p. 227)

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I've wanted to write a book about music camp for a long time. At school I learned piano, recorder and clarinet, and, although I wasn't a talented musician, getting to rehearse and perform with other kids at music camps was an amazing experience. I have many complicated memories of both loving playing music and being terrified of not performing well enough.

Music Camp features the recorder because I was lucky to grow up in Central Victoria in the 1990s, which was a hotbed of recorder revival. Multiple adults in my life were recorder fans. They showed me that recorder music can be beautiful, and this taught me that instruments don't have to be complicated and expensive to have value. At the same time, I can understand why people find the idea of recorder as a serious instrument funny at first.

The story is set against the backdrop of disasters exacerbated by climate change. I believe that to write realistic contemporary fiction it's necessary to write about the climate crisis. A heating world is the reality kids face today, not a dystopian future. The kids in *Music Camp* are impacted by successive events without time to fully recover in between. This situation is sadly playing out in many places across Australia now.

I became particularly interested in ethical sponsorship after Tim Winton's bold speech at the Perth Festival in 2022, where he called out fossil fuel sponsorship of the arts sector. Fossil fuel companies use sponsorship of the arts, sports and community groups to generate community goodwill. This allows the companies to keep polluting, delays the desperately needed energy transition and fuels the climate crisis. In *Music Camp* I wanted to illustrate how the damage of global heating far outweighs the short-term good achieved by fossil fuel sponsorship. I hope readers consider this issue and begin to imagine how we could do things differently.

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Music Camp does not finish with the promised performance in the glittering Concert Hall. However, the ending expresses my hope in humanity's ability to change, act in our own best interests and continue to make music together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Penny Tangey writes humorous books for young people. Her middle-grade novel *As Fast As I Can* won the Readings Children's Book Prize and Queensland Literary Awards Children's Book Award. She studied arts/science at Melbourne University, majoring in chemistry and Indonesian. Penny has worked as a researcher for television quiz shows *Hard Quiz* and *The Chase*, but she's still terrible at trivia. She is a qualified librarian and wants to drive the mobile library van one day.