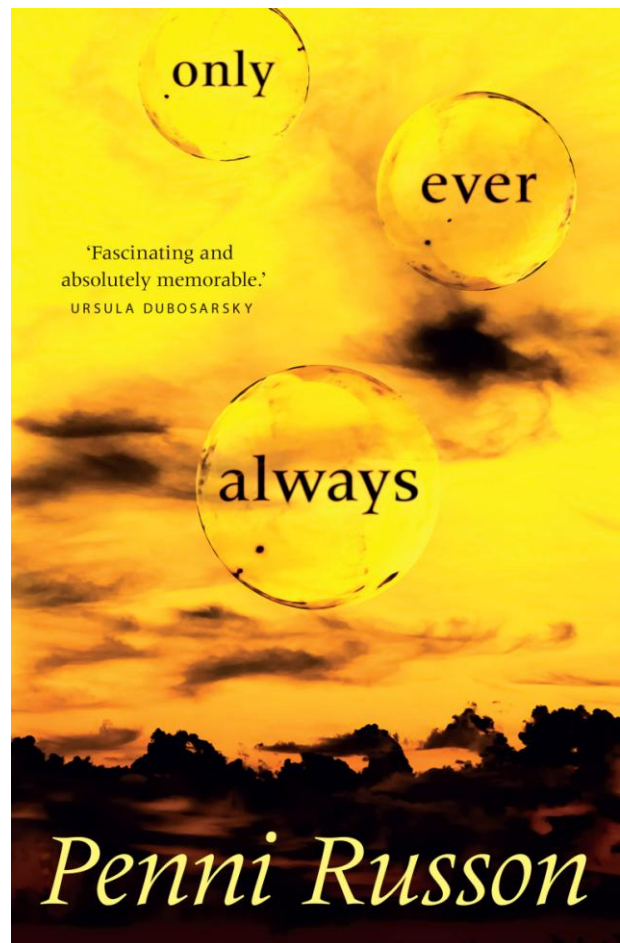


Teachers' Notes
by Judith Way
Only Ever Always
by
Penni Russon

ISBN 9781741750447

Recommended for ages 12-16 yrs

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83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest, Sydney
NSW 2065
Australia

PO Box 8500
St Leonards
NSW 1590
Australia

ph: (61 2) 8425 0100
fax: (61 2) 9906 2218

info@allenandunwin.com
www.allenandunwin.com

Allen & Unwin PTY LTD
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INTRODUCTION

Summary

Only Ever Always is a mysterious and chilling book that delves into the world of dreams and alternate realities. It is sure to spark thoughtful and intelligent discussions and debates in many a classroom.

Claire and her family are broken; they are going through a difficult and tragic time. She finds release and power in dreaming. But her dreams are potent and Claire finds that her dreams not only affect her, but others.

Clara is a brave soul who knows a life totally unlike ours. She is a practical child who lives for today, as her broken world entails. But as Claire and Clara come together through dreams, can each one help the other to become whole again?

Use in the curriculum

- Suitable for use in the English classroom in years 8-10
- SOSE classroom in years 8-10
- Psychology classroom in year 10.
- Australian Curriculum (Draft version 1.1.0) years 8-10
- VELS levels 5 and 6 (Victoria), Stages 4 and 5 (N.S.W.), Standard 4 – stages 9-13, and Standard 5 – stages 14-15 (Tasmania), Years 8-10 (Queensland), Early and Late Adolescence (Western Australia), SACSA Standards 4 and 5 (South Australia), Band 4-5 (Northern Territory) and Early Adolescence (ACT).

Only Ever Always is a demanding read which requires the ability to use abstract thinking and explore complex concepts. It could be used in the following areas:

English

- As a study of the construction of a fantasy/dystopian world
- As a study of the construction of alternate realities
- As a study of the use of language
- As a study of the craft of writing

SOSE

- As a study of what could happen after a huge natural or man-made disaster
- As a study of the composition of societies: hierarchies, anarchy and order

Psychology

- As a study of dreams and their meanings
- As a study of nature vs. nurture
- As a study of the nature of love and grief and their implications for the individual

THEMES

Dreams

- 'If Claire can dream herself back there, and if Andrew can be made to live, then surely, her dream-addled brain tells her, Charlie can also live.' (p. 74) Do you think it is possible to control your dreams? Research superstitions about how to control dreams.
- 'Cause dreams don't matter. Dreams don't last.' (p. 116) Do you agree with Clara's thoughts? Why?

Dystopia

- Clara finds some 'treasure' that turns out to be a book (p. 21). Do you see books as treasure or do we take them for granted?
- Many dogs in Clara's world are lurking and menacing. One is loyal. What might they represent?
- 'He remembers about dancing. He tried to show me once, but he said it weren't no good without music and he couldn't remember no tune...' (p. 29). What role does music play in our lives? Can you imagine what a world would be like without music?
- Clara is a practical girl who cares only for things like food and water. Can you explain why she felt so strongly about something like the music box?
- Why do you think that the 'screws' who guard the market use such violence against thieves? What does it say about the world in which Clara lives?
- 'I aint feared. I just want to go home.' (p. 33) Clara describes the broken, vermin-infested building she lives in as home. What makes this derelict building a home for her?
- What do you think happened to the world to make it 'broke'? What clues does the text give you?
- 'Let me love you...Fear me and I will love you and care for you all your days...' (pp. 107-114) Boedica has unusual ideas about why a person loves another. Why do you think that is?

Grief

- Claire thinks, 'Is loving someone too big a risk? Is it better to seal yourself up, to not let love in or out?' (p. 16) Groom calls Clara 'a stonehearted girl' (p. 33). After the September 11 attacks, Queen Elizabeth II said, 'Grief is the price we pay for love.' Do you think the price is too much for some people to pay?
- 'Hoping is what unstitches you, leaving you open for other things to waft in, like fear. Like hopelessness.' (p. 2) Do you agree with Clara? What is life without hope?

Nature vs. nurture

- Claire and Clara are two version of the one person. Can you explain whether their differences are due to nature or nurture?
- Do you think it is wrong of Clara to steal someone's medication? Why?

Alternate/parallel realities

- The music box appears in both worlds and practical Clara is just as captivated by it as Claire is. How does it bring the worlds together?
- Can you give an explanation for the parallel realities?
- What does Dolores mean when she says, 'You can't go snatching willy-nilly this and that or everything will be topsy-turvey all fall

down.'? (p. 59)

LANGUAGE

- Characterisation**
- What tools does the author employ to align the reader with certain characters?
 - Clara's part of the story is written in the first person, while Claire's is written largely in the second person. In some sections eg. Pp 73-74, the third person is used. Why do you think the author has chosen to do this?
- Words/slang**
- Clara's speech (and that of most people in her world) is quite informal, dropping *gs* at the end of words, using *aint* and other unusual words such as *afore*. What does this use of language tell the reader about the environment in which Clara lives?
- Setting**
- Clara often speaks about how things like people and houses in her world are 'broke'. How do you think they became this way?
 - How does the author show the reader how very different the two worlds are?
 - What devices does she use to do this?
- Structure**
- Most of the text concerns Clara, but it is Claire's experience that we as readers are likely to be more familiar with. The story switches between Claire and Clara. Why do you think the book is structured this way?
- Literature**
- What clues does the poem by Rupert Brooke give the reader as to the nature of the story?

THE CRAFT OF WRITING

- Investigate author Penni Russon's website [<http://pennirusson.com>] and her blog [<http://eglantinescake.blogspot.com>]
- What other books has Penni written?
- What style/genre have these been?
- Have these previous books influenced *Only Ever Always*?
- What are some of Penni's inspirations for writing?
- Read Penni's post 'Why I write' (and watch the accompanying video). What does it say about the life of a writer?

Penni Russon on writing *Only Ever Always*:

Only Ever Always is the culmination of five years of study, thought, writing and rewriting. It is a philosophical enquiry into where stories come from, and much of the narrative dwells at the borders of dreaming, in the space that lies between the real and the imagined. It's also about the line between self and the material world – does the world shape us, or do we shape the world? It interrogates the relationship between the self and the world of objects we live with (or dream into being).

But at its heart is a simple story of a girl without a dog, and a dog who wants to be owned.

I was doing a thesis on melancholy in children's literature, looking at both classic and postmodern fairytales and I noticed some common themes arising that I wanted to explore through fiction. I'd

also touched on alternative universes in *Drift* and wanted to explore some of the themes from a different angle. Also I had this conversation with my daughter Fred after we'd listened to our heartbeats:

Fred: What does it mean?

Me: It means my heart is busy pumping blood all over my body. It means I'm alive and so are you.

Fred: What happens when you get this people again?

Me: Which people?

Fred: This people (she points to herself)

Me: Another person just like you?

Fred: Yes.

Me: That never happens. You are unique. There is only one little girl like you in the whole wide world. Just one Frederique.

Fred: (sadly) Oh, pleeaase?

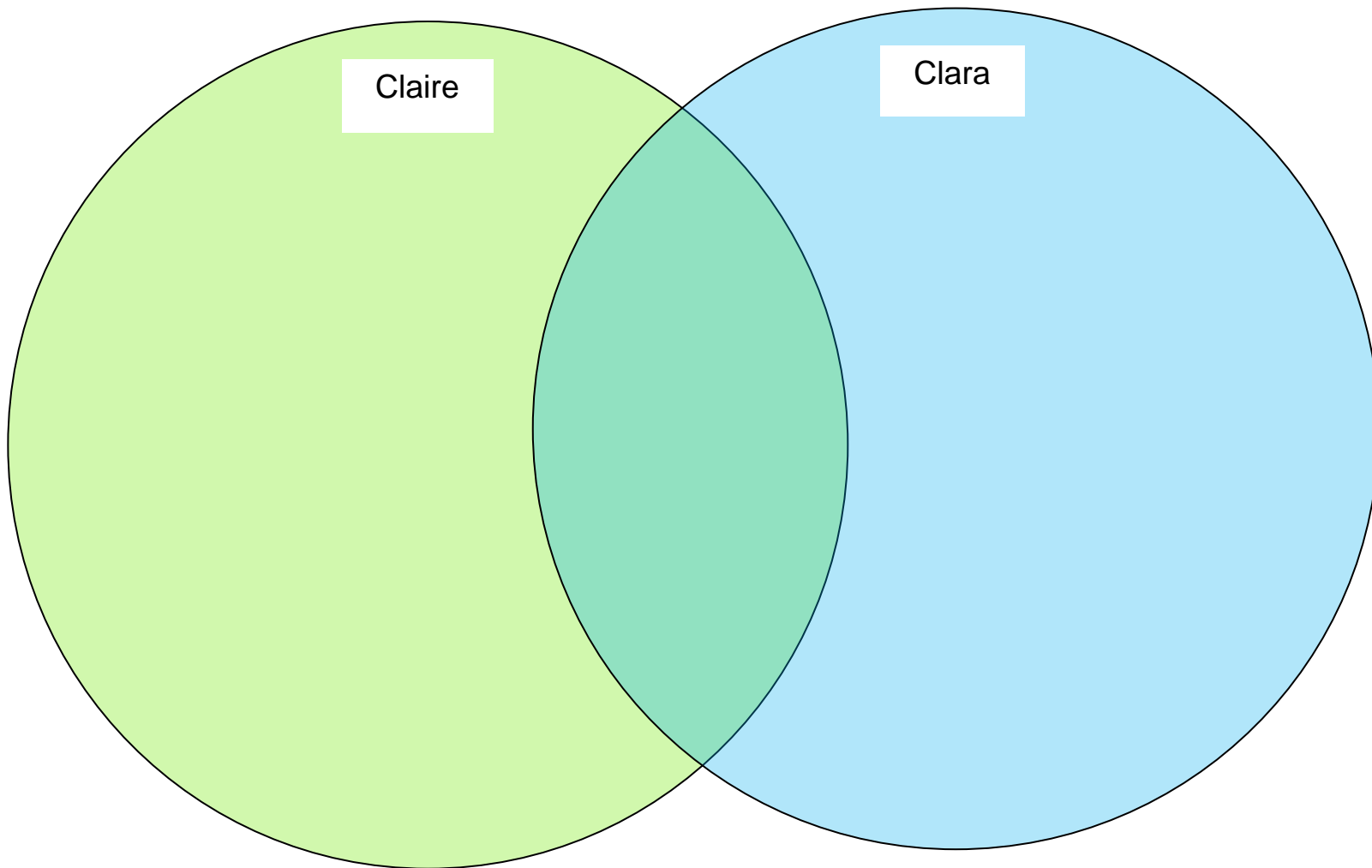
The conversation reminded me of how, as a young girl, I used to lie in bed and think how, if the world was so big that somewhere there would be a girl exactly like me, my twin, living another whole life. In my fantasy our connection would be strong enough one day to pull us together. In other words, one day I would find myself. It's still a compelling idea. I still half believe it to be true.

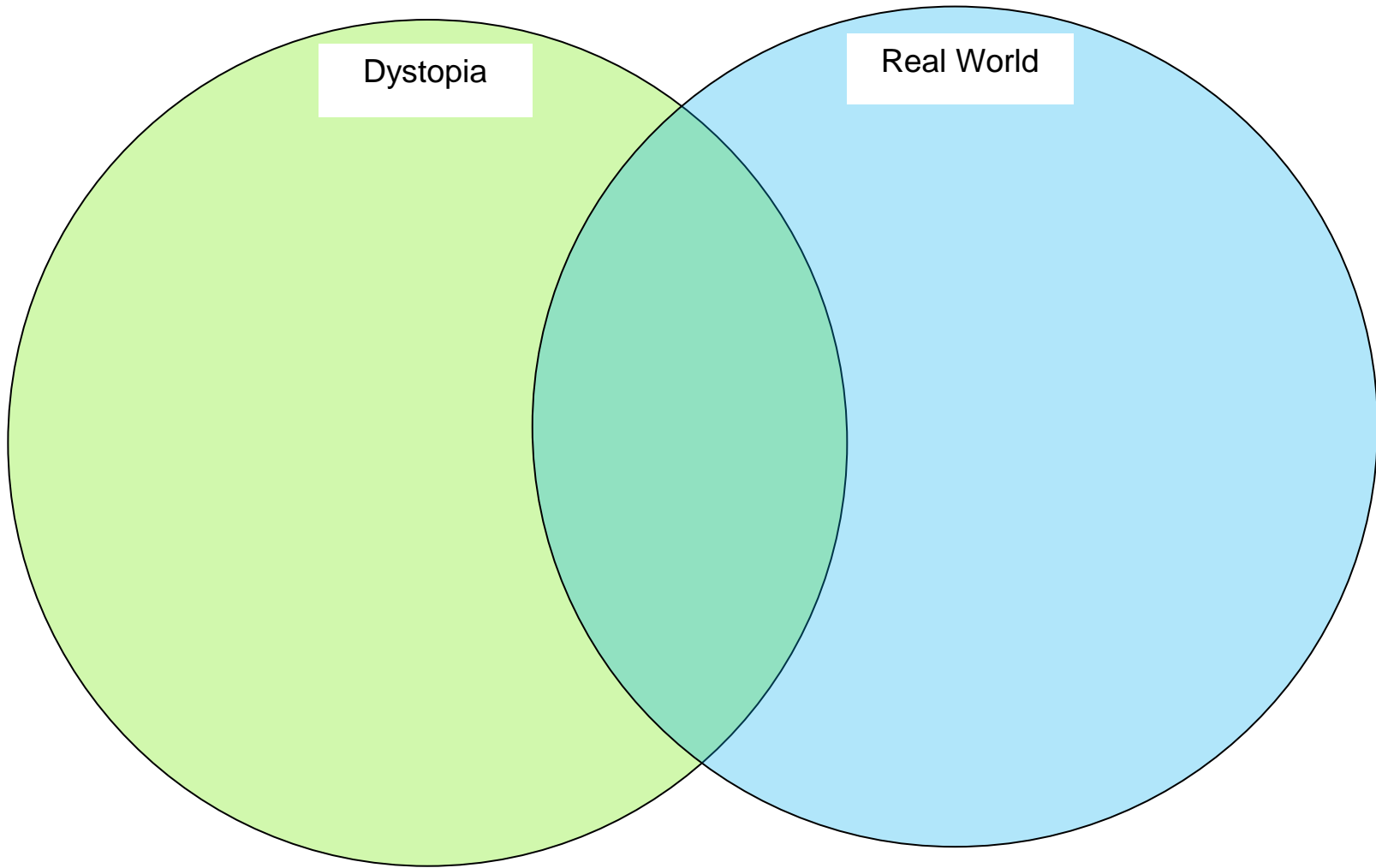
As I wrote the novel I also found that I was exploring some of the more mysterious aspects of both myself and my daughter, looking at the anger we both have and where it comes from and what it's for. I also really wanted to explore the relationship we all (but especially children) have with material objects, like toys, and how the objects we select and surround ourselves with create the environment that helps create us.

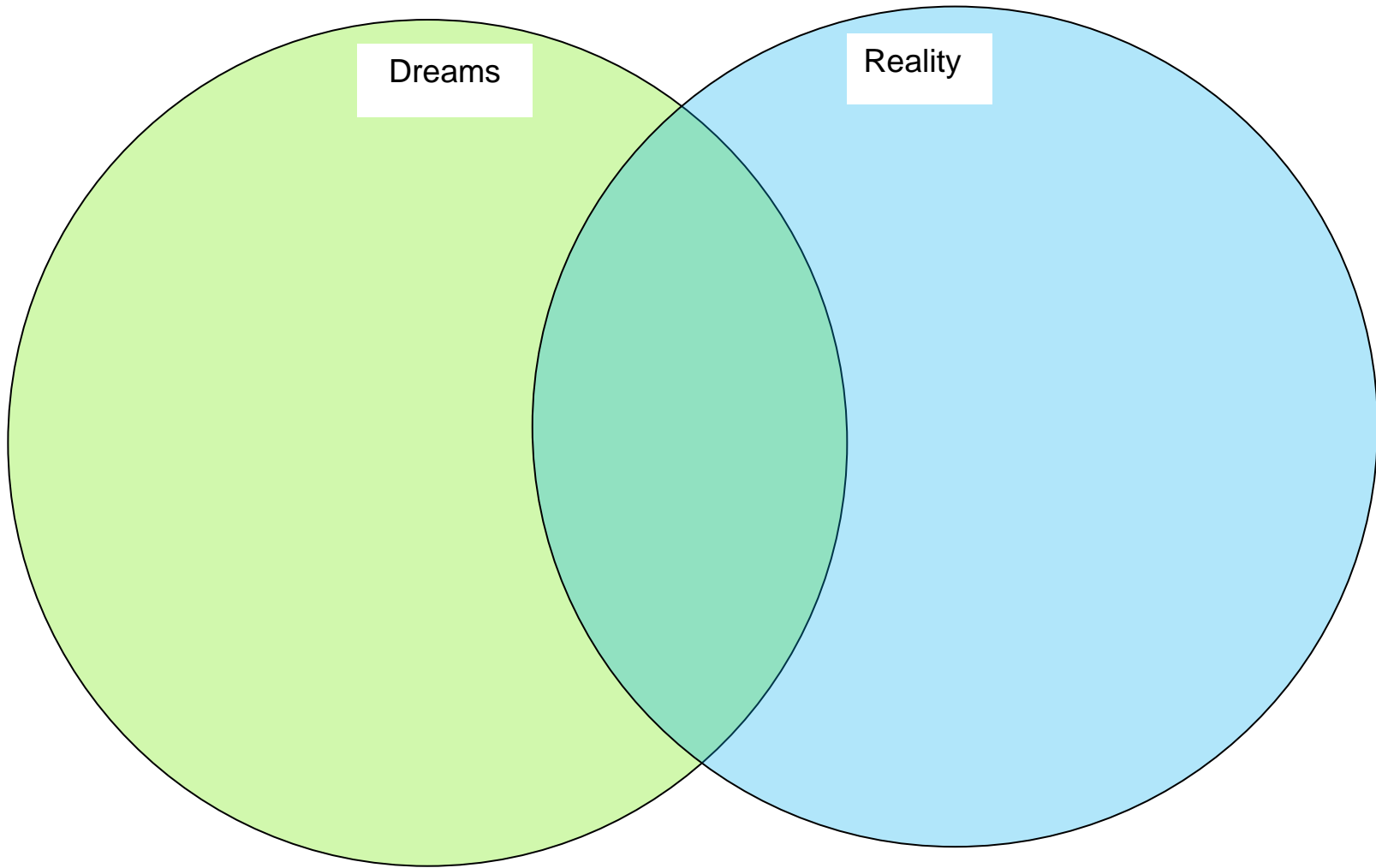
And in the end I gave Clara a special relationship with a dog, because I think dogs are good for girls.

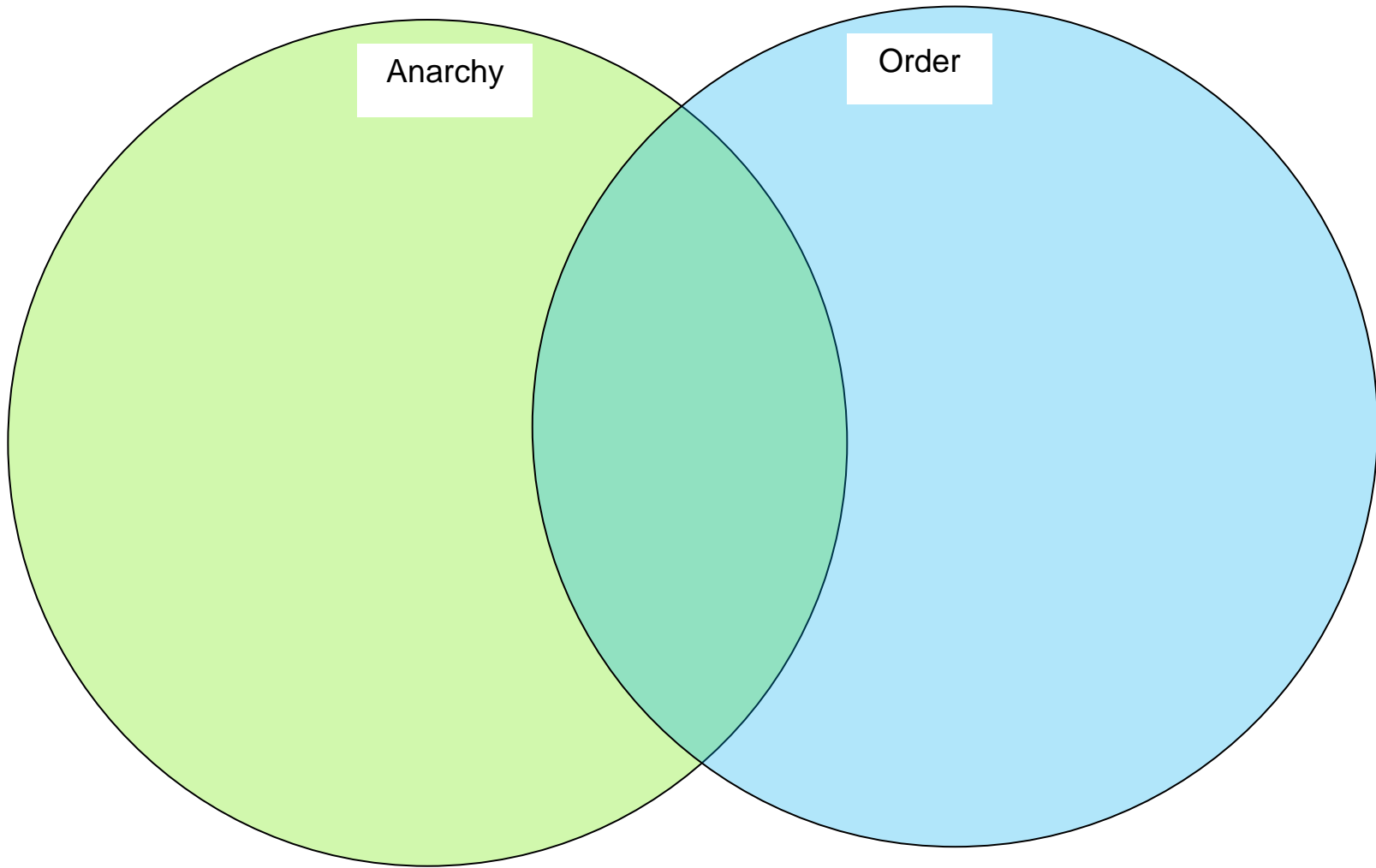
ACTIVITIES

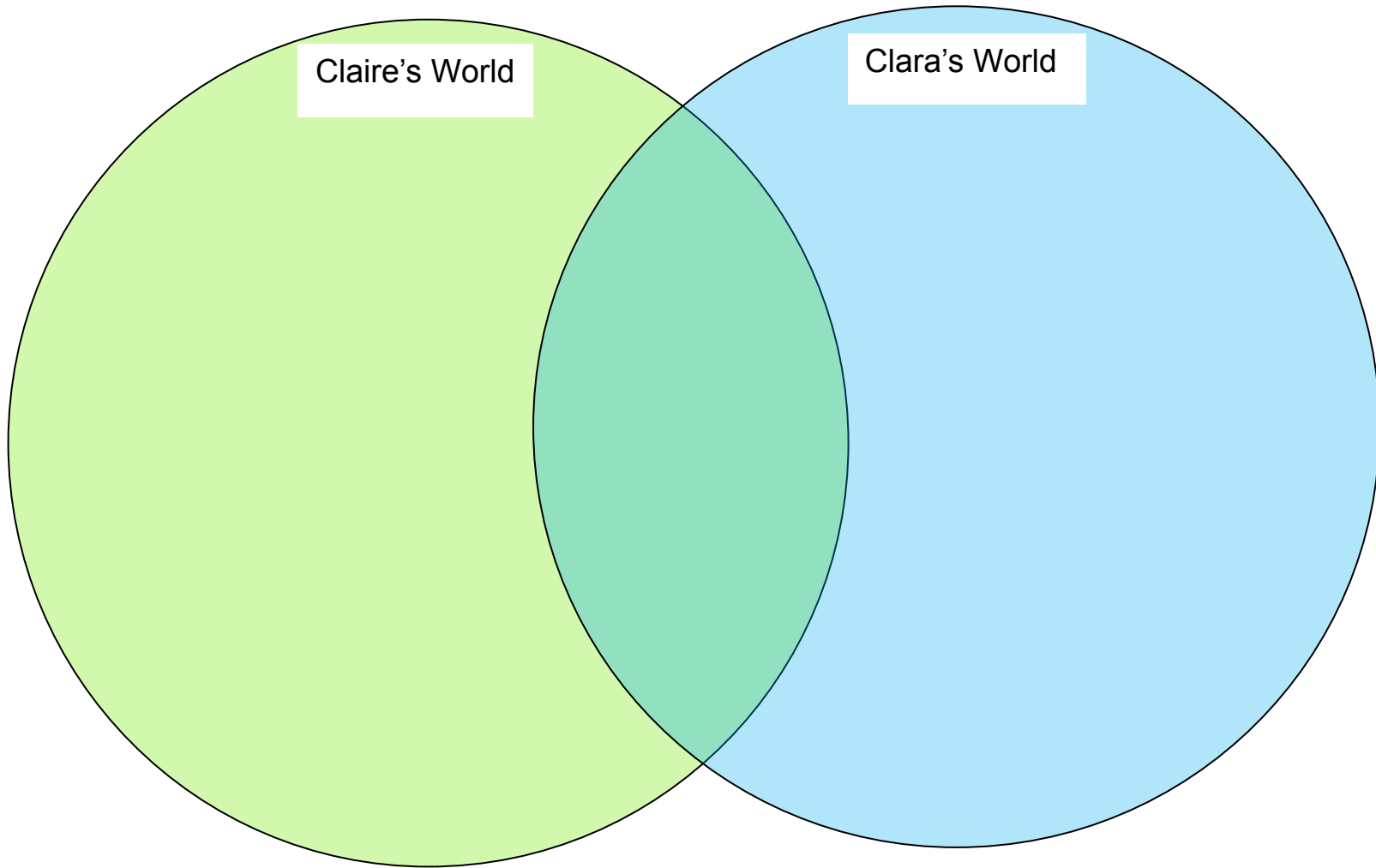
Complete Venn diagrams to compare and contrast the following elements of the text: (see Black Line Masters on following pages)











ONLY EVER ALWAYS – ALTERNATE REALITIES

To help understand the relationship between Claire’s world and Clara’s world, make a list of items, places and people that appear in both worlds:

Page number(s)	Item/person/place	Explanation
pp. 6-8 pp. 27-31 pp. 58-60 p. 70 p. 78	Young Mrs Jarvis and old Mrs Jarvis/Dolores and her mother	The pills are in Mrs Jarvis’s name in both worlds; the old lady follows the horses in both worlds; the pills are stolen and taken from Claire’s world to Clara’s world, etc.

ONLY EVER ALWAYS – ALTERNATE ‘CURRENCY’

Make a list of items that count for currency in Clara’s world. Rank them in order of value, using the text as a guide.

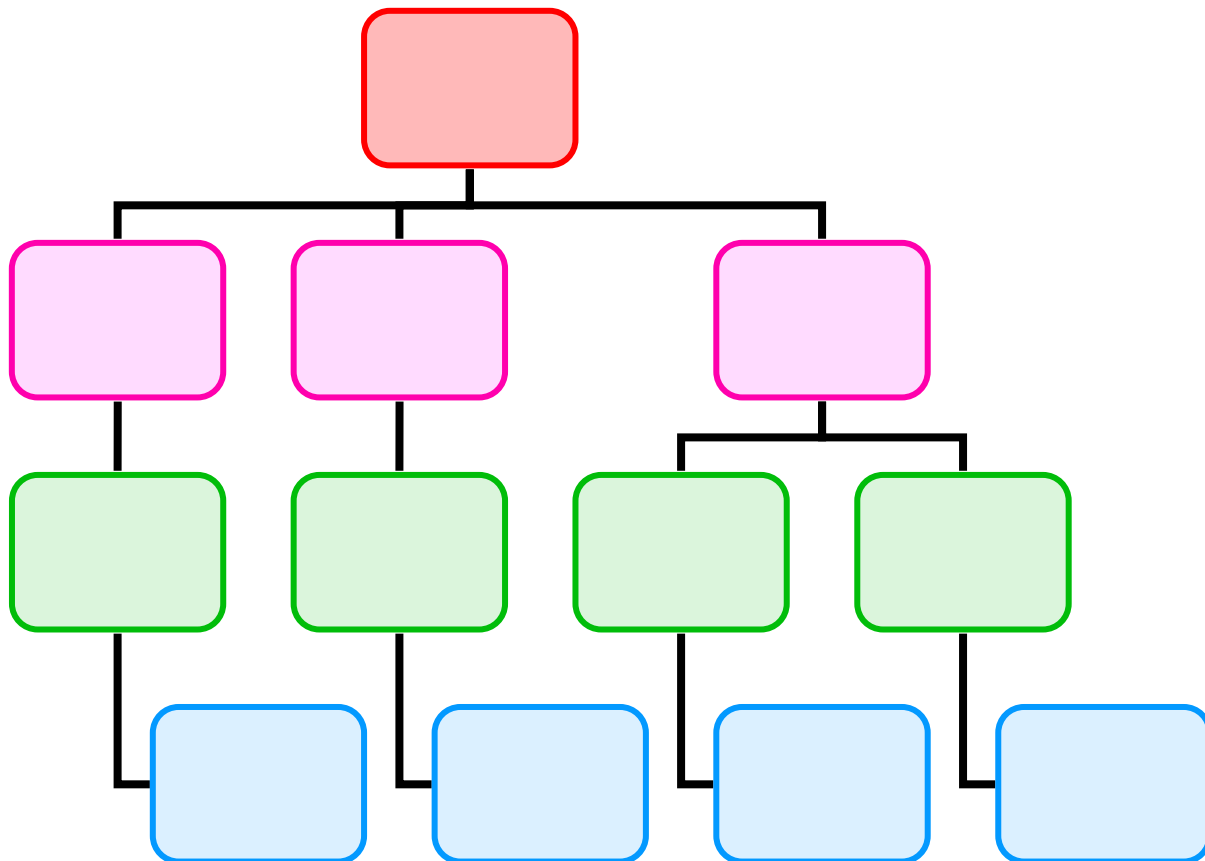
	Item	Page where it appears.
Highest Value ↑ ↓ Lowest Value		

ONLY EVER ALWAYS – “A VISITOR IN SEDGE”

Write a newspaper article about Clara’s world from the viewpoint of someone from Claire’s world. Describe the city and the way life is lived.

ONLY EVER ALWAYS – Social hierarchy of Sedge

Complete a social hierarchy of Clara's world (you may need to add or remove boxes). Why is the society ranked this way? Where is Clara on the ladder?



ONLY EVER ALWAYS – DRAWING MUSIC?

“She has never seen music before, only heard it.” (p. 73). What would music look like to you if you could see it? Draw or make a visual representation what music would look like to you or how it makes you feel.

In groups:

- Find out more about Rupert Brooke and his poetry. Why has the author placed this particular poem at the beginning of the book? Select another one of his poems that might mean something to your group. Why did you select this particular poem?
- Dreams can be a powerful act of the brain. Research some theories about dreams (see authors such as Freud and Jung) and present them to the class. Do you believe/agree with these theories?
- Make a book trailer of the book using the animoto website [<http://animoto.com/education>]. Here you will need to find and select images and music to represent the book. Think carefully about what images you might use to explain the book to other people.
- "Mum thinks it would be nice if you pass on some of the toys you've outgrown. But you are not sure it is possible to outgrow the things that have built you from nothing into something. For who are you before you own anything" (pp. 3-4) Do you agree with this statement? Use the Museum Box [<http://museumbox.e2bn.org>] or Scrapblog [<http://www.scrapblog.com>] websites to put together a collection of items that help make you who you are. Select each item carefully and explain the significance of each one.

ESSAY TOPICS.

1. Dreams can be both liberating and confining. Discuss.
2. When Clara went into Claire's world (pp. 67-76), she had the opportunity to take other things or perhaps to stay. Would you have stayed in Claire's world if you were Clara? Explain your thoughts.
3. 'Try as you might, you cannot make your own dreams.' (p. 140) Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
4. 'Toys, treasure, trinkets. Refuse, rubbish, relics.' (p. 12) What makes possessions one thing or the other?
5. Claire is seen as a hoarder by her mother and hoarding can be a serious psychological condition. Can you explain how and why keeping things for sentimental reasons spills over into hoarding?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Alternate realities

Doctor Who television series (also available on DVD)

Life on Mars television series (also available on DVD)

Ashes to ashes television series (also available on DVD)

Dreams – non-fiction

Freud, Sigmund. *On dreams*

Freud, Sigmund. *The interpretation of dreams*

Jung, C.G. *Dreams*

The science of sleep (DVD)

Dreams – fiction

Clark, Terri. *Sleepless*

Jonsberg, Barry. *Dreamrider*

McMann, Lisa. *Gone*

Shakespeare, William. *A midsummer night's dream*

Dystopia

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games series*

Gattaca (DVD)

Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Never let me go* (fiction book and DVD)

The Island (DVD)

Murray, Kirsty. *Vulture's gate*

Westerfield, Scott. *Uglies* trilogy

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Penni Russon

Penni Russon was born in Hobart, and spent her childhood roaming around on a small mountain. Eventually she had to grow up, and she moved from Tasmania to Melbourne to study classics, archaeology, women's studies and contemporary literature. She writes, edits and teaches creative writing, and lives in outer Melbourne with her husband and three children.

Other books by Penni:

Young Adult

Dear Swoosie (2010) Allen & Unwin

Little Bird (2009) Allen & Unwin

The Indigo Girls (2008) Allen & Unwin

Drift (2007) Random House Australia

Breathe (2005) Random House Australia

Undine (2004) Random House Australia

Junior

Josie and the Michael St Kids (Aussie Chomp) 2007

Find out more about Penni at pennirusson.com, or her blog eglantinescake.blogspot.com

Judith Way

Judith is a teacher librarian with a Graduate Diploma in Children's Literature and a Master of Arts. She was the recipient of the IASL/Softlink International Excellence Award for 2010, the School Library Association of Victoria's Innovators Grant in 2009, and the SLAV John Ward Award for outstanding contribution to teacher librarianship in 2007. She was awarded the Children's Book Council of Australia's Eleanor E. Robertson prize in 2003. She has presented at conferences locally and internationally. Judith blogs at <http://jway.global2.vic.edu.au>