



Finding Darcy

By Sue Lawson

Darcy Abbott does not want to live with her surly grandmother and silent great-grandmother for three months while her mother, Max, studies in Melbourne. She has no choice, though. Darcy's father died when she was three. Her uncle, Boof, is busy on his farm. Her mother will not let her stay with her best friend, Laura.

The atmosphere in the house after Max leaves is tense. Darcy's grandmother, nicknamed 'Misery', limits her freedom with Internet restrictions and curfews. 'Batty', Darcy's great-grandmother, barely talks. The novel sets up beautifully how isolated teenagers can feel. Darcy is alone in the middle of a family to which she feels no connection.

Forced by her SOSE teacher to undertake a living history project, Darcy begins to research her great-grandfather, Darcy Charles Fletcher. She does this in secret because the topic of World War II is banned in her family.

Slowly, Darcy learns about the impact that Charlie's death had on the family. She discovers that she has more in common with her grandmother and great-grandmother than she thought.

The novel explores conflict on many levels. Darcy is bullied by her classmates; she sees her friend, Laura, discriminated against because of race. Darcy gains strength from the developing relationships with her great-grandmother to deal with the range of problems that confront her in the novel.

Darcy's world satisfyingly widens by the end of the novel. She sees the past, present and future in different ways. This text provides a strong basis for class studies of conflict, friendship and family.

READERSHIP

Upper primary to mid secondary students

THEMES

Conflict	Family	Racism	Growth	Body image	Love
Friendship	Bullying	Sexism	Forgiveness	Anger	Death



ENGLISH

Pre reading activities

Before you read *Finding Darcy* study the front and back cover. There are many clues to suggest what might happen in the novel.

- Make a list of every clue that you find.
- Make some guesses about what might happen to Darcy in the book.
- Research the significance of the poppy before you begin reading.

Throughout the novel Darcy experiences some troubles at school and at home.

- Write a journal entry about a time when you have experienced conflict either at home or at school. Make sure to include how the fight made you feel and how you resolved the problem.

Post reading activities

Characters

Complete the chart below on the main characters in *Finding Darcy*.

Character	Plus (Positive Characteristics)	Minus (Negative characteristics)	Interesting (Characteristics that caught your attention)	Similarities (Note experiences or traits that characters share)
Darcy				
Max				
Misery				
Batty				
Charlie				
Laura				
Boof				
Nathan				
The Newt				



At the end of the novel, Darcy receives the letter from her dad, Sean.

- Write Darcy's response to this letter in the form of a diary entry. What would she write that she has learnt during the time she has spent with Batty and Misery?

During the novel we are given glimpses of 'Neanderthal' Nathan Thackery.

- Write a journal entry from Nathan's point-of-view. Explain how he feels about Darcy. Why does he call her 'Amazon'? What is he thinking as he watches her give the final presentation?

Imagine that Batty has been chosen to appear on a television show about the impact of war on families.

- In pairs, write the script of this interview.
- Perform your interview for the class.

Themes

There are many important themes in the novel, *Finding Darcy*.

- As a class, discuss the meaning of the word 'theme'.
- In groups, create a collage from magazines to illustrate the main themes of the novel. Explain your collage to the class.

Choose one theme that you have illustrated.

- Find one scene in the book where this theme is illustrated.
- Write about a time in your life when you have experienced an issue similar to Darcy.

Language

There are many vivid descriptions in *Finding Darcy*. Sue Lawson brings scenes alive by giving the reader information about what Darcy sees, hears, tastes, touches and smells.

- Choose a place that is significant to you.
- Describe it with detail, giving the reader as much information as you can.
- Describe how you feel when you are in this place. Are you sad, happy, lonely, or hungry?



- Add one line of description that symbolises your feelings. For example, on page 160, Sue Lawson describes a conversation between Darcy and Laura on the beach. Darcy is angry. The sun has no warmth. The breeze is harsh. Sue Lawson makes the reader feel as though the weather is as angry and upset as Darcy.
- Read your description to the class and see if you have achieved the aim of putting your reader into the picture.

Similes

- What is a simile?
- In pairs, find examples of two interesting similes in *Finding Darcy*.
- As a class, discuss what makes a successful simile. (It is accurate and original.)
- In pairs, make up your own similes. Be creative. Be original. If you're stuck, start by matching a word from 'Column One' with a fitting description from 'Column Two' to create a simile. For example, 'He had teeth like a broken fence.'

Column One	Column Two
Hair	Tissue
Skin	Clouds
Teeth	Watermelon
Farts	Car exhaust
A morning sky	Broken fence

Extended Writing Activities

Darcy imagines many things about her great-grandfather after finding his photograph.

- Choose a photo and write a story about it. You might make up a story or write the true story behind the photograph.

Complete your own living history project.

- Interview an older relative about their past and write a biographical piece about something you discover!



Discussion Questions

- Discuss the reasons for Misery's attitude to Laura at the beginning of the novel. Why does Misery's attitude change?
- Discuss how women are presented in the media. How do images of models in the media impact on young people's self esteem?
- There are many wars happening in *Finding Darcy*. World War II is only one of them. Discuss.

SOSE/HSIE

Draw a map of the world.

- Include a title, border, northing and scale on your map.
- Label countries, making note of the side they fought on in World War II.
- Mark in any places mentioned by the students in *Finding Darcy*.
- Mark on your map the places that Darcy's great grandfather, Charlie, went to after he left home to train and fight.
- Create a key to show the places where Australians fought during World War II

World War II Timeline

Construct a timeline of the major events of World War II.

Germany

Anne Frank was a teenage girl who lived during World War II.

- In groups, research Anne Frank.
- Create a poster outlining key facts about her life.
- Discuss what you have learnt about Hitler and the Nazis through studying Anne's life.

Conditions in Australia during World War II

In *Finding Darcy* we learn about life in Australia during World War II.

- Make a list of five things that you have learnt from the book about life in Australia during World War II.
- Are any of the things on your list surprising? Why or why not?



In groups, do some more research into Australian life at this time. Make up your own topic or choose one that is listed below. Present your information in poster form.

- Women at home
- Racial tension in Australia
- Entertainment
- Food
- Clothing
- Government restrictions
- Americans soldiers in Australia

Hiroshima, 1945

Read and discuss the story of Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.

- Create a class display to teach people about Sadako's life.

SCIENCE

In *Finding Darcy* we learn that Darcy's great-grandfather fought in New Guinea. As such he would have been at risk from many diseases.

- Research one of these diseases. Present your information to the class.

Darcy experiences feelings of doubt about her body in the novel.

- Design an information booklet that encourages teenagers to see their bodies realistically.
- Include information about healthy foods and exercise.
- Give information about where teenagers can obtain further help and advice.

DRAMA

Choose a key scene from *Finding Darcy* and write it as a script. Perform your scene for the class.



CREATIVE ARTS

Darcy has an interesting way of describing the people on her life. For example, she calls Mrs Menzies 'Prairie Dog'.

- Draw some of the characters in *Finding Darcy*, illustrating how she sees them.

Create a new cover for the book, highlighting some of the key themes of the text.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Lawson

Radio announcer, teacher, MCG attendant, nightclub DJ, shop assistant, swimming teacher, babysitter... just a few of Sue Lawson's jobs before she turned a passion for writing into a career.

Sue grew up on a farm near Hamilton, Victoria, and after moving all around the state, now lives in Western Victoria, with her husband Bruce, daughter, Courtney and Milly the Cavoodle.

Sue continues to teach, write for children and run writing workshops for children and adults.