

Teachers' Notes

The Four Seasons of Lucy McKenzie

by
Kirsty Murray

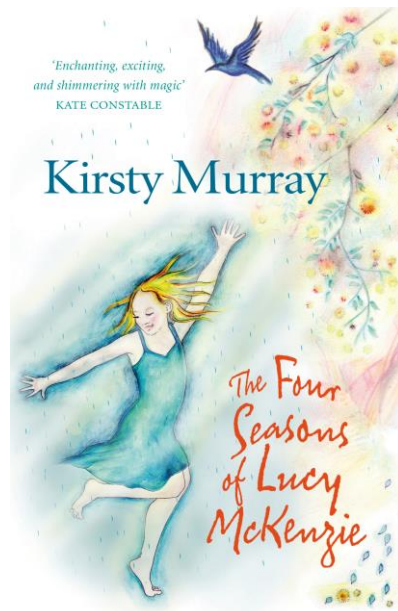
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Recommended for ages 9-13 yrs

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PLOT SUMMARY

After her sister's terrible accident, Lucy is sent to stay with her aunt in an old house in a hidden valley. At first, Lucy is lonely and scared. But one hot, dark night, Lucy hears a voice calling to her from deep inside one of the pictures painted straight on to the wall of the dining room. On the other side, Lucy meets three children who will change her life forever. In the painted world, April, Tom and the wild Jimmy Tiger introduce Lucy to a world of adventure. Racing horses through the bush, swimming in fast flowing rivers, battling bushfires and unearthing long forgotten secrets, Lucy discovers her true strength and a friendship that will last a lifetime.

This charming time-slip novel with a dash of bush adventure has the hallmarks of a classic Australian story. As author Kate Constable wrote: *Enchanting, exciting, and shimmering with magic, this is a gorgeous adventure from a master story-teller. I wanted to follow Lucy right through the wall.*

Kirsty Murray's novels for young people show a consistent interest in Australian history, art, women's and girls' experience and the secrets, disjunctions, providential coincidences and shared experience that make 'family'.

USE IN THE CLASSROOM

Using *The Four Seasons of Lucy McKenzie* as a class text (Years 5-8) can lead to an in-depth study of:

Themes: family, growing up, fate/destiny, time, magic/art/nature, the role of women;

Language: the role of metaphor, symbol, colloquialisms – old and new slang;

Literature: different genres of writing including the time-slip novel, the family secret novel, the young-meets-old novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *"Lucy McKenzie," said Big, her voice soft with laughter. She gently pinched Lucy's cheek, as if she couldn't believe her eyes. 'There's no doubt you and I share a lot of history.'* page 149.

In what ways do Lucy and Big 'share' a history?

2. Explain what you think Claire means when she says, *"You've grown, Lucy-lu," said Claire, smoothing Lucy's hair away from her face. You look so changed. 'Different?' asked Lucy. 'No,' smiled Claire. 'Not different. More yourself. I think you're growing up to be just who you are meant to be.'* page 195.

What incidents in the novel would support Claire's view of her sister?

3. Explain your understanding of metaphor and/or symbolism in relation to the following:
 - a) Lucy and April's hair being braided on page 39
 - b) The river flowing in the valley on page 189
4. The bluebird brooch mentioned on page 191 "I had a different dream. I wanted to paint. It was hard to have both things back then." Page 153. Discuss how opportunities have changed for women today compared to women of Big's generation.

5. "...You mustn't try changing anything else. When I think of what might have happened to you! It's too dangerous. Dangerous magic." page 154. Do you think Lucy should have gone back to save Tom's life?
6. "But all paintings have magic in them. If you look long enough, if you think deeply, you'll see what the painter saw and you'll understand the way they captured light and colour, captured a day, a moment, a tiny piece of time and held it with paint. That's true magic." *Big to Lucy* on page 198.

What do you think Big means by describing paintings as 'true magic'. Choose your favourite painting and describe the 'true magic' found in it.

THE AUTHOR

Kirsty Murray is the author of fourteen books for children and teenagers. Her novels have won and been shortlisted for numerous awards. Kirsty is an accomplished speaker and a superb promoter of books and creative writing at school gigs. She is constantly in demand at writers' festivals, libraries and schools in all sorts of places, from Melbourne to Perth, Ubud to India, and has participated in school events in Hong Kong, Singapore and the UK, as well. Many of her books have remained in print for 10+ years and are still used in classrooms. Her best-selling titles are *Market Blues* and *Bridie's Fire*.

KIRSTY MURRAY ON WRITING *THE FOUR SEASONS OF LUCY MCKENZIE*

Of all my novels, *The Four Seasons of Lucy McKenzie* is closest to my heart. It's deeply connected to my family and childhood. As my tenth novel, I felt I could incorporate many of the things I have learned about how story, place and character impact on a young reader. When I was a child, the majority of books I read were set in European landscapes. Consequently, I often felt a strange disassociation with Australian landscapes as it was so rare for me to see them reflected in the books that I loved. *The Four Seasons of Lucy McKenzie* is my love song to the Australian bush and its magic. Both my grandmothers died when I was very small but I was blessed to have many dynamic aunts and great-aunts. I've long thought aunts and elderly women are shabbily treated in children's fiction. Elderly men are often portrayed as magical, powerful or poignant figures but elderly women are largely invisible, witches or just plain crabby. I love the character of 'Big' and it was a joy to craft the growth of her relationship with Lucy McKenzie.

KIRSTY MURRAY ON WRITING IN THE TIME-SLIP GENRE

Time-slip is a difficult narrative structure to impose on a book. I've studied it intensely as a form and have read countless time-slip novels that failed structurally because the author tried to use the time-slip device to simply show off the past. For a time-slip novel to succeed there has to be two parallel emotional narratives that are deeply interconnected so the threads of each story bind the novel into a single satisfying whole. When I wrote my last time-slip novel *Market Blues*, I swore I'd never write another time travel adventure – it was an exhausting novel to craft. But *The Four Seasons of Lucy McKenzie* was a book that seemed to write itself and each thread from the past was bound firmly to the present day. I like to think the pleasure in the writing was, in part, because this story has a big heart. It's a book about family, friendship, love and grief. It's also about the restorative and healing power of both art and nature.

KIRSTY MURRAY ON THE TONE OF THE NOVEL

In an era when children's and young adult fiction is becoming increasingly dark, I wanted to write a book for younger readers that was full of light. It's actually much harder to write light than dark. The author is always at risk of coming across as saccharine when trying to capture a moment of perfect happiness. But despite the challenges and difficulties that Lucy faces, her story is full of brightness. Even her name means 'light'. The fragment of a broken bluebird brooch that Lucy finds in the beginning of the book was more than a device to link her to the past. It was both a symbol and a promise that even in a dark time, nature, art and friendship can lend us wings and help restore our happiness.

RELATED RESOURCES

TIME-SLIP NOVELS

Murray, Kirsty. *Market Blues*, 2001. A timeslip adventure novel about a boy who goes busking at the market and finds himself transported back to a century ago.

Constable, Kate. *The Cicada Summer*, 2009. Eloise doesn't speak, but can she see into the past? An exciting and atmospheric mystery, poignant and gripping at the same time, exploring themes of family, friendship and grief.

Park, Ruth. *Playing Beattie Bow*, 1980. Australian classic set in The Rocks, Sydney, in the 1870s and 1970s. CBCA Book of the Year 1981.

Uttley, Alison. *A Traveller in Time*, 1939. A child goes back into Derbyshire in the time of Mary, Queen of Scots. Penelope is sent to stay with her great-aunt in an old Derbyshire house where she discovers she can slip in and out of time.

French, Jackie. *Somewhere Around the Corner*, 1994. A girl travels back to 1932, a time when Australia is in the grip of the Depression and finds a true friend and home.

Garner, Alan. *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, 1960. Colin and Susan go back in time in the caves of Alderley Edge in Cheshire – crystal bracelet, and magic great wolf included.

Wynne Jones, Diana. *A Tale of Time City*, 1987. A girl, Vivian Smith, is kidnapped while being evacuated from London during World War II, and is caught up in a struggle to preserve history.

Stead, Rebecca. *When You Reach Me*, 2009. Bits and pieces in Miranda's life in New York City in 1978 mysteriously come together to reveal a surprising whole in which Miranda's favorite book, Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, figures prominently. The book won a Newbery Medal in 2010.

King, Clive. *Stig of the Dump*, 1962. Travel to and from Stone Age England.

Farmer, Penelope. *Charlotte Sometimes*, 1969. Charlotte, a schoolgirl at a boarding school, finds herself travelling back in time, where the students call her by a different name. Charlotte has a mystery to solve, but finds herself becoming increasingly trapped in the past.

<http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/may/22/top-10-time-travel-books-damian-dibben>. In this article in *The Guardian*, Damian Dibben discusses children's time-travel books and lists his top 10.

- *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* by C S Lewis

- *Minority Report* by Philip K Dick
- *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens
- *Jurassic Park* by Michael Crichton
- *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain
- *A Wrinkle In Time* by Madeleine L'Engle
- *Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban* by J K Rowling
- *The Time Machine* by H G Wells
- *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce
- *Percy Jackson And The Last Olympian* by Rick Riordan

Used in a Literature Circle, this selection of books (many of them classics) would provide ample fodder for debates about genre – some of these are also sci-fi or fantasy; some are historical; some bring ancient memes into the modern world. Students could nominate alternative books for their 'Top 10 time-travel books' and the class could vote for 'No. 1' on the Top 10.

YOUNG-MEETS-OLD NOVELS

Nannestad, Katrina. *The Girl Who Brought Mischief*, 2013. In 1911, Inge Maria Jensen visits her grandmother on a remote Danish island. Inge is goodhearted but the conservative folk of Svaneke frown on her 'bad' behaviour. Gradually, Inge learns that Grandmother didn't get her nickname, 'Dizzy', for nothing and a deep bond is established between the two.

Magorian, Michelle. *Goodnight Mister Tom*, 1981. An abused boy from London is evacuated to the country during World War II. In the care of Mister Tom, an elderly recluse, he experiences a new life of love and care. There is also a TV film version, 1998, Carlton Television, on YouTube.

Konigsburg, E.L. *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, 1967. Won the Newberry Medal in 1968. Two film versions have been made, in 1973 and 1975.

Bauer, Michael Gerard. *The Running Man*, 2004. A fourteen-year-old's world is changed when he is asked to draw a portrait of a Vietnam veteran.

FAMILY SECRETS NOVEL

Condon, Bill. *The Simple Things*, 2014.

Constable, Kate. *Crow Country*, 2012. Won the CBCA Book of the Year 2012.

BUSH LIFE NOW AND IN THE PAST

Cox, David. *The Road to Goonong*, 2011, and *The Fair Dinkum War*, 2013, and *Good Enough for a Sheep Station*, 2015.

Aldridge, James. *The True Story of Lilli Stubeck*, 1984. CBCA Book of the Year 1985. and ***The True Story of Spit Macphee*, 1986.**

Morgan, Michelle. *Racing the Moon*, 2014. Thirteen-year-old Joe Riley gets up to all sorts of mischief in this unsentimental portrait of Sydney during the Depression.

The Four Seasons of Lucy McKenzie: Creative Writing Activity Grid

Name: _____

As part of your creative writing unit, you will complete a variety of writing activities.

You must complete:

- 3 of the tasks that appear in bold (these must all be of approximately 300 words)
- 3 other tasks of your choice
- You must complete one task out of each column, as you complete a task please highlight it below so your teacher knows which tasks you are submitting.

	Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyse	Evaluate	Design
<i>Intrapersonal</i>	In what ways are you like one of the characters in the novel? List and explain at least four ways.	Explain which character you admire most in the novel.	If you met any of the characters in the novel, what questions would you ask of them? (Create 10 questions.)	Describe the last really unusual thing to happen to you. (100 words)		Re-write a scene from the novel from the point of view of a character other than Lucy. (approx. 300 words)
<i>Picture / spatial</i>		Design a colour system to classify the characters in the novel.		Draw a map of the valley in which Big lives, including Avendale, the river, Pulpit Rock and other locations/features mentioned.		
<i>Verbal / linguistic</i>	Write a character profile of a character of your choice.	Write a summary of the plot of the novel. (approx 300 words)	Pretend you are one of the characters in the novel – write a transcript of a phone conversation with another character. (approx. 300 words)	What are some turning points in the novel? Choose three and explain their significance. (approx. 350 words)	Take one turning point and give it a different outcome. Explain the impact on the rest of the novel.	Outline the plot of a sequel to the novel OR explain why there is no need for a sequel. (approx. 300 words)
<i>Logical / mathematical</i>	Create a mnemonic to remember major and minor characters in the novel.		Use a Venn Diagram to compare Lucy / Alice / Claire	Write a paragraph analysing Big's motivations in the novel. Why does she behave in the way she does?	Comment on Big's decision to stay at Avendale. Argue whether or not it was the correct decision.	Create a believable alternate conclusion to the novel. You may change any detail you like but it must be credible. (approx. 300 words)
<i>Interpersonal</i>		Write a monologue explaining the feelings of Lucy as her Dad drives them out of Avendale at the end of the novel. (approx.. 300 words)			What opinions would Big have formed of people as a result of her experiences in the novel?	
<i>Naturalist Musical / Rhythmic</i>	Write a descriptive piece of the house and the landscape at Avendale. Emphasise the shapes, colours, sounds and atmosphere. (approx 350 words)	Give animal labels to the main characters of the novel. Explain your choices.	Find a song that deals with one of the events in the novel. Explain the relationship of the song to this event.	Write about the role of sound descriptions in the novel. (approx. 300 words)		Make a soundtrack album of at least eight songs for the novel. Explain each choice.

These tasks will form part of your ongoing assessment throughout the term.

VOCABULARY AND/OR SPELLING LISTS

Chapter 1 The Road to Broken River

Plummet
Min min
Fusty

Chapter 2 Outside-inside

Sepia
Gruff
Estuary
Dollop
Seared
Remote

Chapter 3 Wombat Shuffle

Hygienic
Vixen
Potpourri
Crotchety
Crevice

Chapter 4 Walking Through Walls

Shimmer
Radiated
Abruptly
Smattering

Chapter 5 Another Avendale

Reeled
Canter
Fandangle
Gingerly
Tack
Prance

Chapter 6 April's Empire

Pulpit
Makeshift
Rummage
Empire
Glade
Pledge
Myth
Sacred

Chapter 7 Water Sprites and Wattle

Paddock
Dungarees

Sprites
Doppelganger
Coax
Graze
Dappled
Flecks

Chapter 8 A Broken Wing

Vivid
Astride
Inferno
Piffle
Conjured
Grief
Contraption
Jetty
Craggy
Bush Bashing
Fissures

Chapter 9 Cooee!

Wicker sofa
Evacuate
Unnerving
Figments
Alert
Cooee

Chapter 10 Lady Godivas

Wilted
Scorched
Straggly
Cosmos
Flared
Pang
Bounty
Impenetrable
Banshee
Lures
Ravine
Brumbies
Halo
Tucker

Chapter 11 River Kids

Bonza
Champ
Arty-farty
Synchronicity
Destined

Chapter 12 Black Friday

Tethered
Hessian
Authoritative
Precious
Skiff
Instinct

Chapter 13 The More Things Change

Sodden
Thermos
Easel
Receding

Chapter 14 The Painted World

Frail
Precariously
Flailed
Manoeuvred
Palette
Billy

Chapter 15 Fractured Dreams

Scowling

Chapter 16 Rising Waters

Wafting
Drooping
Squelching
Swollen
Moored

Chapter 17 Flood

Fluke
Eddies
Clarity
Rapids
Capsized
Plunging
Churning
Diagonally

Chapter 18 A Little Night Music

Sludgy
Debris
Banter

Chapter 19 Crossing the River of Time

Reassure
Bedraggled
Ruttled
Pixelated
Devastated

Chapter 20 Breaking Promises

Swathe
Raggedy
Cobber

Chapter 21 A Wing and a Prayer

Tethered
Speckled
Trudging

Chapter 22 Into the Inferno

Inferno
Neutral
Aligned
Embers
Escarpment

Chapter 23 The Best News

Evacuated
Trestle

Chapter 24 The Truth about Tom

Billowed
Acrid
Hover
Corrugated
Charred

Chapter 25 Christmas

Hauled
Grille
Vaulted
Nave
Terraces
Captured