

A CLUE FOR CLARA

LIAN TANNER
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Recommended for 8-12-year-olds



Summary

Clara wants to be a famous detective with her own TV show. She can read claw marks, find missing feathers and knows morse code and semaphore.

There's just one problem. She's a small scruffy chook, and no one takes her seriously. But when she teams up with Olive, the daughter of the local policeman, they might just be able to solve the crimes that have been troubling the town of Little Dismal.

A puzzling and hilarious mystery from bestselling author, Lian Tanner.

Author style

This book is both a new take on chick—or at least chook—lit, and a clever update on the detective novel. *A Clue for Clara* is *The Big Sleep* of the farmyard, complete with ticking clock, sparse first person narrator with dry quips ("That's roosters for you"), a rogue's gallery of characters, and a small town on the skids (Little Dismal).

The book's humour works on at least two levels that will appeal to kids and adults. The dialogue and plot within the story is well-realised, funny and moves along energetically, providing much of the intrigue and diversion of a real detective story. And on the meta level, there is the sheer ridiculousness of a chicken schooled in detective work via the television and taking the role very seriously.

This all adds up to make *A Clue for Clara* a refreshing and original take on the familiar.

Use in the curriculum

In the classroom, *A Clue for Clara* is useful for discussions of genre:

- Graphic storytelling: Use of frames and use of visual tropes
- Humour writing/illustrating: Subversion of some of the tropes of detective fiction
- Detective fiction: Chart the progress of the mystery solving, with set-backs and final resolution. Was it possible to guess the solution?

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Themes

- Mystery • Humour • Friendship • Family • Rural life •



Discussion questions

Chapter One

1. Why does Rufus warn all the chickens about a bus, a motorbike and a passing cow? (page 2)
2. Why does Clara think the policeman's name is Constable Dad? (page 3)
3. Why does Clara think the girl in the back seat of the car is a genius? (page 6)
4. Why does Clara want a detective to come to the farm? (page 9)
5. Why does The Boss 'bless the day' that Ernie Simpson and his daughter came to her town? (page 11)

Chapter Two

1. Clara believes that d...s are mad. (page 13)
2. Why does Clara have to sleep on the bottom perch at night? (page 14)
3. What is the fifth rule and why does everyone think Clara let the team down? (page 14-19)
4. Why does Clara want to become a famous detective? (page 21)
5. What was the first crime that Clara solved? (page 22)

Chapter Three

1. Why does Clara jump into the police car? (page 25)
2. Which part of the day is before Scratch O'Clock and just after Egg O'Clock? (page 26)
3. How did Clara learn to tell human time? (page 27)
4. Clara uses her wings to communicate through s.....re. (page 31) [Extension question: What is usually used when using semaphore?]
5. Why does Clara think humans are talking to themselves when they are on their phones? (page 32)

Humour:

'I know all about stock. It is a type of soup. The Boss makes chicken stock (which is soup for chickens) and beef stock (which is soup for beefs). I have no idea why Constable Dad is so worried about someone stealing soup. When he comes back I will suggest he work on more important matters. (page 69)

1. Why is it funny when Clara makes mistakes such as this?
2. Can you find other funny examples from the story where she misunderstands a word and thinks it means something very different?
3. Can you think of funny examples from the book where she only half understands what an object is for or how it works? [Hint: what does she think mobile phones are for and how does she expect a car to start?]
4. Why do you think the idea of a chicken being a detective is funny?

Dual Narrative:

1. Why do you think the author chose to tell some of the story from Olive's perspective?
2. Why might it be important that Olive is writing to her deceased mother?
3. How might people write differently in diaries than in other places?
4. Why might diary writing be especially important to Olive?
5. How do these entries differ from the rest of the story visually?

Empathy:

"She's not so bad at home," said Digby. 'I've been there a couple of times, and her dad's a bit strange – even jollier than usual, you know? Making jokes and stuff, and whacking you on the back as if you're his best friend. But he hardly takes any notice of Jubilee.'

'You're not making excuses for her, are you?' I asked him.

'No. Well, maybe. A bit.'" (page 217)

Do you think Jubilee's family life is an excuse for her behaviour toward Olive?

'P.S. You know who else I'm beginning to feel a bit sorry for? Tracy...' (page 306)

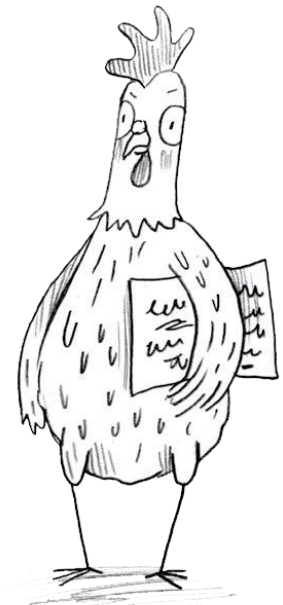
Do you feel sorry for Tracy, at all? Write a short script for the first conversation Tracy and Olive have AFTER Mr Simpson was captured.

Characterisation:

1. Make a list of words or phrases to describe Clara, Olive and Digby. Find scenes from the book that made you think this about them. For instance, you might say that Clara is very smart because she can communicate through typing, morse code and semaphore. Olive could be described as sad because she writes to her deceased mum.
2. Choose your favourite character in the book and explain what you liked about that person or chicken.
3. Who do you think was the meanest character (either person or chicken)? What was it about them that made you feel that way?

Chickens:

Name five things you learned about chickens from reading *A Clue for Clara*. Facts can include naming Clara's daily activities or what you discovered about the hierarchy in chicken coops.



A word from the author

'A few years ago I acquired three chooks, and named them Clara, Floss and Dolly. They were the funniest creatures, and I spent the first week sitting in the garden watching them.

'I didn't realise they were such enthusiastic carnivores until the day I saw Floss snatch a mouse out of my cat Harry's mouth and race off with it, with the other two chooks chasing after her. (Harry just stood there with a puzzled expression, wondering where the mouse had gone.)

'Clara was the smallest of the three, but she was also the smartest and the bravest. She was always the first one to spot a nest of earwigs, or something interesting in the compost heap. And when Harry came too close, she would stare at him until he crept away with his ears flat and his tail twitching.

'I have no idea how she ended up in a detective story.'



- Lian Tanner

About the author

Lian Tanner has worked as a teacher, a tourist bus driver, a freelance journalist, a juggler, an editor and a professional actor. She has been dynamited while scuba diving and arrested while busking. She once spent a week in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, searching for a Japanese soldier left over from the Second World War. It took her a while to realise that all this was preparation for becoming a writer. Nowadays Lian lives by the sea in southern Tasmania with a handsome tomcat called Harry-le-beau, and a bountiful garden.

