

Secret Keeper

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SYNOPSIS

*Change was coming.
Possibly sooner than any of the friends were prepared for.*

Nell and Eden have been best friends forever. But now they are at the end of Year 6 and on the cusp of high school. Nell has been scouted to play in a new netball club the following year, but she doesn't feel like she can tell Eden.

And then there's Birdie. A mysterious girl who has moved onto Nell's street. She is quiet and reserved and doesn't appear to go to school. When Nell meets Birdie, their friendships begins to grow. But what secrets is Birdie hiding? And why doesn't Nell feel she can tell Eden about netball or Birdie?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Di Walker lives in regional Victoria, with her two rescue dogs, three-legged Ruby and Icy, a loud snorer.

She usually writes early in the morning, before the sun rises and before the busyness of the day takes over. When she is not writing, Di likes to garden or listen to podcasts—sometimes both at the same time.

Her prior works include *Unpacking Harper Holt*, released in 2018, and *Every Thing We Keep*, published in 2021 with a revised edition released in 2022. *Secret Keeper* is her fourth novel.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, discuss what you can learn from the cover and title of the novel. Some things that you might like to include in your discussion could be:
 - What can you see happening on the cover of this book?
 - Who do you think is likely to be the main character?
 - What genre do you think this book might be?
 - What can we learn about the main character from the cover of the novel?
 - What is a Secret Keeper?
 - What do you predict is likely to happen in this novel? Why do you think this?
 - Read the back cover of the novel, and then revisit your hypothesis about what might happen in it. Do you want to change your prediction now? Why/why not and in what ways?

- When Nell looks out of her bedroom window she can see across several backyards, and on a clear day in the distance she can see the city. What can you see when you look out of your bedroom window? Sketch the view from your bedroom window from memory. When you get home after school, sketch it again while looking at the view. How similar are the two sketches, and if they differ, in what ways?
 - As a class, discuss whether your memory sketches were true to life, and what you found easy and what you found most challenging about the task.
- Nell walks to school, and then home again with one of her parents and the family dog, while Eden likes to ride her bike because it is faster than walking. How do the students in your class get to school? Survey your class, year group, or school to discover how everyone travels to and from school. Collate your results as a class, and write the raw data in table form on the board.
 - Individually, create a graph to display your collated data.
 - As a class, compare the different graphs created, and discuss which type of graph best depicts this type of data for easy visual comprehension.
- Nell snuck into Birdie's front yard, and tried to see the writing on an envelope stuck between the screen and the front door. Later that evening, she then snuck down the driveway in the dark, and tried to hear what was going on inside and see through the windows. Do you think this was an acceptable or appropriate thing to do? Why/why not? As a class discuss the importance of privacy and how Nell crossed a line when doing this. Think about how you would feel if someone snuck up to your front door, inspected mail that had been left there, and tried to hear what was happening inside your house. Be sure to include this perspective in your discussion.
- When Birdie is talking to Nell about how Nell crept down Birdie's driveway, she voiced the perspective that it's a bit creepy sneaking around other people's homes. Later on in the novel, Nell discovers that not only does Birdie climb the fences between their backyards, and play fetch with Nell's dog each day, but she also peers through the windows of the neighbours' houses in between their properties. How and why do you think that Birdie reconciles this opinion of Nell's behaviour with her own behaviour?
- Over the course of the novel, Nell has to make several decisions between what she knows to be the right course of action, and what might be considered at best to be a morally ambiguous course of action. As a class, discuss the importance of making good choices, and identify some of the poorer choices that Nell makes.
 - In small groups, classify the different decision points within the novel, and choose one to analyse further.
 - Individually, write a piece explaining your analysis of the choice you decided to focus on. Discuss in your writing both why Nell was tempted to make the choice she did, what her options were, what pressures were put upon her by external factors, and what the outcome would most likely have been had she made a different choice.
- Playing netball is a very important part of Nell's life, and she agonises about whether she should change clubs, or stay with the one she has played for ever since she first started playing. What do you think of her reasons for wanting to change clubs, and her reasons for considering staying with the Panthers? What decision would you have made in her position, and why?
- After school Nell often spends time in the backyard trying to shoot netball goals. One of her self-set tasks is to shoot 30 goals in a row without missing. How difficult do you think this is? See how many netball goals in a row each person in your class can shoot, with three attempts each to get a new high score. When you return to class, work out the average number of goals in a row that your class is able to shoot and compare it to Nell's ability to shoot 25 in a row on a regular basis. Divide your class into two groups, those who play netball or basketball and those who don't. Compare the two groups' results in the goal shooting activity. Is there a difference? Why do you think this might be the case?
- Play a game (or two) of netball as a class.
- The novel is written from Nell's perspective, and shares her view of events. Choose one scene and write about the events from the point of view of one of the other characters. Think about what your chosen character does and doesn't know at that point in time, what their personality is like, and how their feelings would be influencing their words and deeds.
- What does it mean when someone says 'cool as a cucumber'? What does 'head him/her/them off at the pass' mean? As a class discuss these sayings, and why someone in Year 6 might not know the meaning of them? What are some

other sayings similar to these that you have heard your older family members use?

- What do you think might be some of the challenges that Eden, Nell, and Birdie will most likely face when they start high school next year?

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE