

Teachers' Notes on *The Cloudchasers: The East Wind* by Stephen Hunt and David Richardson

## **SYNOPSIS**

While the adventure of this sequel will keep readers involved, it would be best read after Book One. In the first book we left Alice, Spinner and Thomas heading off into the clouds. In Book Two, Alice, Spinner and the reluctant Thomas continue their adventures and their quest to find the Banker's father, free Bankertown from its oppression and restore the imaginations of its inhabitants.

This concluding installment is more firmly a quest narrative compared to the scene-setting first book, as the three are tested and tried, aided and betrayed, and pursued by the ghastly Catcher and his rat. It is also revealed that the Banker had a dream which acts as a prophecy: 'one day, a child would defeat him. A child who would hold fast to their imagination. And on the day that the last leaf fell from the last tree in Bankertown, he would be defeated'.

As in the first book, the world is richly and evocatively created. But the second book has added character deepening as Thomas finds it hard to hold to his belief in the world of rules and to his allegiance to a despot. In letting go of his former self, he discovers humanity and courage that surprises Alice and will delight readers. It is harder for him than for Alice and Spinner, as he has to choose between the certainty of what he has always known and the unpredictable world of the free imagination, while for them there is no choice. There is also a mystery at the heart of the story to be unravelled by canny readers.

## **THEMES**

- The denial of the creative, artistic and imaginative spirit of people is stultifying and destructive
- The individual has the right to freedom of expression
- Imagination is exciting, dangerous and not easily controlled
- The human spirit is difficult to subdue
- People have the right to change and be respected for it
- Good will triumph over evil
- Power corrupts

## **WRITING STYLE**

- This is a richly descriptive text with wonderful, evocative names for characters and places, which excite the imagination.

- The different sections with their descriptive titles support readers to carry the complexity of the narrative through the story.
- It is a picaresque, episodic tale and readers might enjoy lingering in particular parts of the cloud world.
- The authors' use of dialogue to reveal characters and their motivations keeps the narrative moving and readers involved and thinking.

## **AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

The *Cloudchasers*, as a project, was always meant to be a story told in two parts, across two books. Book One is the set-up and the launching pad of the story and Book Two, *The East Wind*, is where the fun and games and the real meat of the saga is. The authors also intended to definitively conclude the story with Book Two.

Aside from ending the tale, *The East Wind* carries on with — and enhances — the themes and ideas that were established in the first book. Book One dealt mostly with the repression of creativity in the totalitarian world of Bankertown; Alice's escape from Bankertown into the Land of the Imagination; and the setting up of the quest to return the imagination. Book Two investigates how this process is carried out.

What is of foremost importance is that *The East Wind* is a tale of grand adventure: Alice, Thomas and Spinner delve deeply into the mind-boggling worlds inside the Land of the Imagination and meet many dangers and wonders along the way. As with Book One, the key influences are the works of Jules Verne, Roald Dahl and Jonathan Swift, and the spirit of film-maker Hayao Miyazaki, which hovers gleefully over the proceedings.

Like Book One, Book Two is designed to be a ripping yarn, full of outlandish characters and crazy worlds, but there is also a strong thematic element, mostly concerning the character of Thomas. The real story of *The Cloudchasers*, over both books, is the development of Thomas. Alice as a character doesn't change all that much — she begins as a free-spirit who loves to draw and ends the same way, but Thomas goes full-circle. He starts out as an indoctrinated, brainwashed zealot who wants nothing more than to see Alice imprisoned and he ends up as a strong, brave individual, who risks everything to rescue Alice from prison. Even though we begin Book One with Alice as the main character, *The East Wind* sees a somewhat reluctant Thomas eventually (and almost invisibly) stepping up to centre stage. This process was carefully planned out from the beginning and mapped across both books. All of the key ideas and themes in both books — concerning imagination, identity and individuality — are contained within the growth and evolution of Thomas. *The East Wind* is where the riddles are solved and the questions are answered, and is a satisfying conclusion to the wild adventure of *The Cloudchasers*.

## **AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND**

**David Richardson** is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts and has written many full-length screen plays. David has a number of writing projects in development and is finishing his first novel. He lives in Melbourne.

**Steven Hunt** is an award-winning graphic designer and illustrator. He has worked in advertising agencies, as a lecturer and now runs his own design company, Pigs Might Fly. Steve lives in Balnarring Beach, Victoria.

## **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

When ABC Books contracted *The Cloudchasers*, it was always envisaged that there would be a second title in the Cloudchasers saga which would answer the central questions raised in the first book — who was the Banker's father and how could Alice, Thomas and Spinner save Bankertown from a future without colour, dreams and imagination? *The East Wind* answers all of these questions, sometimes unexpectedly. Once again, Steven and David have brought the world of the Cloudchasers to life with wonderful new characters and vivid and cinematic illustrations. The book appeals to a wide audience of children — from seven year olds to twelve year olds — with its mix of adventure and fantasy and the appealing blend of illustration and text.

## **MARKETING AND PROMOTION**

[www.cloudchasers.com.au](http://www.cloudchasers.com.au)

## **STUDY NOTES**

These notes suggest various ways of responding to the text. As it is an exciting, unpredictable adventure with a surprise at its centre, it would be excellent to be read as a serial to the whole class or a small group, so that predictions and discussion can happen during reading.

The light house keeper says, 'Remember danger and treachery lurk where you least expect it'. Using this message, encourage your students to be active readers.

### **The quest**

Elements of the quest novel that readers might like to identify in Book One and Two of the Cloudchasers saga:

- *The call to adventure*: accepting the call means separation from the existing world into the new one.
- *The herald*: summons the hero to cross a threshold — from the real world into mystery.

- *Protective figures, charms or talismans*: without whom or which the hero could not survive the trials of adventure. Consider that this can apply to all three children, not just Alice.
- *Trials*: facing the confusions, terrors, dangers and pains that stand between the hero and achievement of spiritual growth.
- *The hero's return*: comes home with new knowledge to benefit the world he/she left.

This focus might well help readers unravel the secret at the heart of the novel.

### **Ideas**

The book contains many contemporary resonances that readers will enjoy identifying and exploring. It can be read on a number of levels and can be useful to help readers see that stories operate on multiple levels.

#### **Discuss:**

- The Banker calls Alice a 'reactionary and an anarchist'. Can you be both?
- 'Rules are made for everyone's benefit'. Do you agree? Think about rules in our society.
- Why choose the name 'Bankertown' and have the despot as Banker? What is it saying about our materialistic world?
- Have students choose another name for the town and its despot and discuss what the chosen names imply.
- Is the cloud map like a modern GPS?
- 'A true measure of courage is to think for yourself when all around you follow the herd.' Discuss.
- Which historical moments does the book burning recall?
- Why is the child in the prophecy Thomas not Alice?

### **Intertextuality**

Like the first book, *The East Wind* is rich in intertextual connections, especially to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass*. Here are some connections, but readers will enjoy finding their own.

- There is Alice's name, and her being caught in the valley of mirrors (*Alice Through the Looking Glass*).

- The 'forget me' and 'remember me' labels on bottles in Forgetmeknot's house suggest 'drink me' and 'eat me' from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.
- The bookworm evokes the caterpillar from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.
- The Lopper suggests the Queen of Hearts from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* — 'Off with their heads'.
- There is something Dickensian about the world of strange characters and something of *Oliver Twist* in Spinner.
- The 'there and back again taxi' makes a reference to *The Hobbit*.
- The labyrinth of laneways suggests Diagon Alley from *Harry Potter*.

## Art

The visual narrative draws the reader in and is worth exploring closely. For example:

- Discuss the use of perspective/angle/scale to suggest the strangeness of the world. The visuals portray the dream-like, hyper-real world which has its own logic.
- Discuss the importance of colour to set tone and mood — compare the two books.
- Look at the use of falling leaves — are they on every page? Why do they appear where they do?
- Create images of the fascinating things mentioned in the book, for example, the inside-out tearoom, the giant eyeball centre, the waterless aquarium, the thousand foot slippery slide. Draw pictures, create models and create computer images of them.
- Discuss the use of landscape to suggest good and evil. For example, Tebbit's realm is desolate and harsh, so we are inclined not to trust her.